

Food Safety and Quality Assurance

The FDA Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA), signed into law in 2011, was the most sweeping reform of U.S. food safety laws in more than 70 years. It aims to ensure the food supply is safe by shifting the focus from reaction to pro-action. This mandated new paradigm shift to prevention — establishing an advanced system of food safety protection by preventing issues vs. responding to them which will be implemented over a period of years — provides a framework for quality assurance for the food industry and the customers it serves.

The hospitality industry is at the forefront of benefiting from the FSMA regulations as they drive enhanced quality assurance of food and beverage supplies, whether they are sourced from here or abroad, providing increased security for the organization and its customers.

But, as food is one of the biggest costs for lodging facilities, it is also incumbent on those facilities to understand the ramifications of the regulations and work collaboratively with suppliers and procurement partners to adopt a Food Safety Plan that outlines quality assurance expectations, intake processes, training requirements, preventive controls and monitoring.

What is Quality Assurance?

Quality assurance involves consistent delivery of products and guest services that meet or exceed expected standards. Delivering quality services is an essential condition for success in the increasingly competitive hospitality market. And to meet or exceed customer expectations, organizations must fully understand all service attributes which contribute to customer value and lead to satisfaction and loyalty.

Quality assurance is closely linked to the concept of continuous improvement in that it is an activity that takes work to evolve, is implemented within a reference framework, uses measurement tools and methods, and involves repetition.

Delivering that quality assurance across all products and services the organization offers to its guests, requires managers to identify and prioritize a quality improvement process for their property that covers every area that impacts a guest's stay – from comfort, friendly staff and tasty food right down to linens, parking amenities and landscaping.

Quality Assurance and the Food Safety Modernization Act

As food quality and safety is one of the broadest categories impacting properties of all sizes, it's one of the most important areas where managers and staff need to understand the implications of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) and how to implement a program that not only meets regulatory requirements, but also provides assurance of safety for staff and guests.

Key criteria of the FSMA include:

Prevention:

- Mandatory preventive controls for food facilities that include preventive control plans, monitoring and maintaining records.
- Mandatory produce safety standards that set a bar for the safe production and harvesting of fruits and vegetables.
- Authority to prevent intentional contamination with regulations to protect against adulteration of food and to protect the supply chain.

Inspection and Compliance

- Mandated inspection with frequency that's based on risk for both domestic and international deliveries.
- Access to documentation of safety plans.
- Testing by accredited laboratories to ensure quality standards are met.

Seeking the Ultimate Procurement Partner

Most properties—no matter their size—use one or more suppliers of high risk products like beef and poultry, seafood, dairy and produce. It is imperative, then, that these suppliers are in compliance with the FSMA and deliver exactly what the property has ordered and in the expected condition. Cold food should be cold; frozen food should be frozen; produce should be fresh; and seafood should be exactly what was ordered and not substituted with a lower quality product.

The complexity of this effort demands a procurement partner who can help the customer control all food products that are being delivered and that has put in place strict quality management practices to monitor and audit food supplies, from initial introduction into the supply chain to delivery at the hotel's loading dock. Ideally this partner would help be responsible not only for the delivery truck, but also for every product inside the truck – from fruits and vegetables to cereals, meat, seafood and dairy, alleviating hotel management the task of monitoring each and every item.

Audits and Monitoring Ensure Quality and Safety

According to a report from PwC entitled "Food Trust: From Compliance to Competitive Advantage," analyst's report that "leading companies adopt an approach that includes stringent analysis of not only supply chain constraints and risks, but also areas where food trust issues could arise, creating greater integrity, quality, traceability and transparency through the supply chain, giving customers the greatest confidence in their food."

Transparency in the supply chain is essential. An ideal procurement partner would provide services as comprehensive as monitoring fields in California and following produce, for example, throughout the entire supply chain to make sure it's chilled properly, that bruised or damaged product is culled from the crates and that the produce has been subjected to the proper QA testing. Surprise on-site audits at the delivery point also help to make sure products are delivered in the right condition before they are transferred to the property's coolers.

Traceability is also a critical part of the transparency paradigm. This means the product can be traced to its initial point of supply whether global or domestic. For example, there have been recent problems of seafood being misrepresented. A supplier should have proof the tilapia that's received is really tilapia. One emerging best practice is to conduct dual DNA lab testing on a random selection of seafood to confirm that it is what it should be.

With produce, for example, the supplier should be able to trace the product not only to the farm, but also to the specific field in which the produce was grown. With this process, if there is a quality issue, produce can be immediately isolated and held for corrective action.

Random audits should be conducted annually for new high risk suppliers until the supplier proves its compliance. Following the initial audit, third party auditors coordinated by the procurement partner can be required on a specified basis. These audits should be fed into the supplier database. A risk assessment for each supplier can then determine the frequency of audits. For example, if the supplier scores high on its assessment, it may be audited every two or three years instead of annually.

Incidents and Customers Complaints

Nothing's perfect. The supplier and procurement partner should have a firm policy in place to manage service issues that arise. However, a critical part of the relationship is providing education for those on the property's receiving end. Receiving education may include personal training, guidebooks, posters and other collateral which help loading dock representatives understand the specifics of how to manage the acceptance of various products, i.e. dairy, seafood, meats, produce and vegetables, each of which have their own requirements for refrigeration and storage. Once a property accepts a delivery, it's a confirmation of acceptance so education on the receiving end is a priority.

Check and Re-Check to Ensure the Safety of your Guest's Experience

Your guests embrace the experience – food, comfort and ambiance. But there are innumerable details that make those expectations a positive experience. It may seem simple from the outside, but complicated from a management perspective. Partnering with a professional procurement provider who can deliver a comprehensive solution that meets exceedingly complex regulatory compliance – and the high-expectations of excellent customer service – is essential to maintaining brand excellence, customer loyalty and a competitive edge.

About AVENDRA

Avendra is North America's leading hospitality procurement services provider. Our supply chain management solutions are tailored to our clients' business strategies and deliver benefits beyond great savings. We combine years of hospitality expertise, purchasing power, services and software to help customers impact the bottom line, improve operational performance, and better serve guests. More than 8,000 customers rely on Avendra as a trusted partner. Avendra is headquartered in Rockville, Maryland and has regional offices throughout North America.