


Top 5 food safety factors


The Food Act 2014 introduces a risk-based approach to managing food safety and suitability. A key change in approach is that instead of an inspector coming and telling a business what to do, a verifier will be asking lots of 'show me, tell me' questions and looking for all owners/operators and staff in a food business to demonstrate a good food safety and suitability culture. This means looking for evidence that everyone in the food business knows how their actions and decisions impact on food safety and suitability, and that they make good food safety and suitability choices. This is a big


change, and it will take time for everyone to adapt. So we decided that it was a good idea to give everyone a few key things to focus on as we make this change together.

A group of food safety experts were asked to identify the top 5 things that would make the most difference to food safety and suitability for a food business. These are the things that we have developed legislative requirements for first, and should be the main things that verifiers check as businesses transition to the Food Act 2014.

Top Five Food Safety and Suitability Factors for Sectors Transitioning in Year 1 (in ranked order)

	Manufacturers of food for vulnerable populations (Custom FCP)	Manufacturers of RTE Salads (Custom FCP)	Manufacturers of non-shelf stable sauces, spreads, dips, soups etc (Custom FCP)	Food Service (Template FCP)	Food Service - Early Childhood Education (NP2)	Processors of nuts and seeds (NP2)
1	Staff competencies/training The number one priority for everyone in a food business is to make sure the food is safe and the right processes are followed. To make this happen everyone (whether Manager or food worker) should be trained in food safety so they know what to do, why they do it and how their decisions and actions impact on food safety and suitability.  Did you know that training doesn't have to include getting a formal qualification? Many in-house training programmes do a great job of creating an awesome food safety culture.					

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2	Temperature control Holding or storing food correctly can stop micro-organisms (bugs, germs, pathogens) from growing to dangerous levels (that could cause illness if eaten.) Proper cooking and reheating is important for many foods to ensure dangerous micro-organisms are killed or reduced to levels that won't cause illness if eaten.					Physical hazards Debris from the environment can sometimes get into foods during harvest or processing steps. Some debris can cause injury or harm if eaten – whether this is glass, stones, plastic or metal. Steps need to be taken to spot harmful foreign matter and remove it from the food supply.
3	Listeria control Listeria monocytogenes is a micro-organism that is very common in the environment and pretty harmless to the majority of the population. But it can be extremely harmful to vulnerable populations (the very young, the frail elderly, pregnant women and people that are immunocompromised). People manufacturing food specifically for these vulnerable people need to take extra steps to control Listeria monocytogenes in the manufacturing environment and in the food.	Washing Many salad ingredients are grown outdoors, or in the ground. Animals run through the paddocks (or fly overhead) and soil is dirty(!). These things as well as use of agricultural compounds (fertilisers, insecticides etc) mean that many salad ingredients can be expected to have pathogens and maybe some chemical residues on them. Thorough washing can reduce either, or both, bugs and chemicals to safe levels.	Cleaning/sanitising Dangerous micro-organisms can be found everywhere – even on surfaces that look clean. They can be found on people, wiping cloths, utensils, benches, cutting boards – everywhere – and every time food touches one of these things they can pick up the bugs. Regular cleaning (and in some cases sanitising) can help keep the levels of bugs low enough to minimise the risk of illness. <div>  <p>Did you know that it takes millions of bugs to make a glass of water look cloudy but sometimes only 10-20 bugs to make someone sick?</p> </div>			

4	Separation Raw food, especially meat, poultry and seafood, can contain pathogens that could transfer on to ready to eat foods during food preparation and storage. Not only through direct contact but using the same equipment or utensils for ready to eat food that was used with raw food, without cleaning in between, can cause contamination of the ready to eat food. Separation is also important when making foods containing allergenic ingredients and making foods that don't.		Other controls (e.g. pH) Bugs grow best under certain conditions (they generally like warmth, moisture, food and a neutral pH). Ensuring a food is inhospitable to bugs makes it a safer food, with a longer shelf-life. This can be achieved by combining 'hurdles' to microbiological growth – like adding salt or sugar (lowers available moisture), lowering pH, using preservatives, storing food at low	Separation Raw food, especially meat, poultry and seafood, can contain pathogens that could transfer on to ready to eat foods during food preparation and storage. Not only through direct contact but using the same equipment or utensils for ready to eat food that was used with raw food, without cleaning in between, can cause contamination of the ready to eat food. Separation is also important when making foods containing allergenic ingredients and making foods that don't.		Storage Incorrect storage of food can cause spoilage and food poisoning. Growth of harmful micro-organisms is limited when temperature and humidity are well controlled and products are stored in a way that minimises contamination from the wider environment.
	Personal hygiene People transport micro-organisms from one place to another, whether directly or on clothes etc. So it's important to consider factors such as hand-washing, use of protective clothing and not coming to work when sick to prevent transferring harmful micro-organisms from people to food.	Sourcing/receiving ingredients As the old saying goes; "garbage in, garbage out". Your end product is only as good as the quality of the product(s) going in. Once a food or ingredient becomes highly contaminated or damaged, it may be difficult or impossible to make it safe & suitable again. So it is important to take steps to assure yourself that the person or organisation before you in the food chain has kept the ingredients or food safe.		Hand hygiene Hands frequently transport micro-organisms from one place to another, so hand-washing is very important. But lots of people don't do a great job of washing their hands. Food workers need to know how to wash their hands properly, and when they need to wash their hands. They also should put this knowledge into action all the time – but especially when at work!  Did you know that wearing gloves is not a good substitute for great hand washing (and in some cases can be worse for food safety)?		Sourcing/receiving ingredients As the old saying goes; "garbage in, garbage out". Your end product is only as good as the quality of the product(s) going in. Once a food or ingredient becomes highly contaminated or damaged, it may be difficult or impossible to make it safe & suitable again. So it is important to take steps to assure yourself that the person or organisation before you in the food chain has kept the ingredients or food safe.
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