

# Opinion

## Food safety management systems

• What does it mean for the Ghanaian economy

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**I**N the wake of globalisation and international trade, quality requirements on food products are becoming stricter to protect the health of the consumer. Just as foods are a source of nutrition for human beings, they also provide conditions for contamination by disease-causing or spoilage micro-organisms. When these micro-organisms get into food and multiply, major social and economic consequences occur.

One most important fact about food spoilage is that, changes in the food product as a result of contamination are evident. Food spoilage by bacteria is characterised by the development of off-odours, slimy, sticky materials on food surfaces or soft rotting when firm foods are changed to soft foods. Food spoilage by yeast is characterised by bulging and sometimes exploding

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food containers or sediments/cloudy appearance of foods. Food spoilage by fungi is characterised by powdery food surfaces or visible mould colonies on food surfaces.

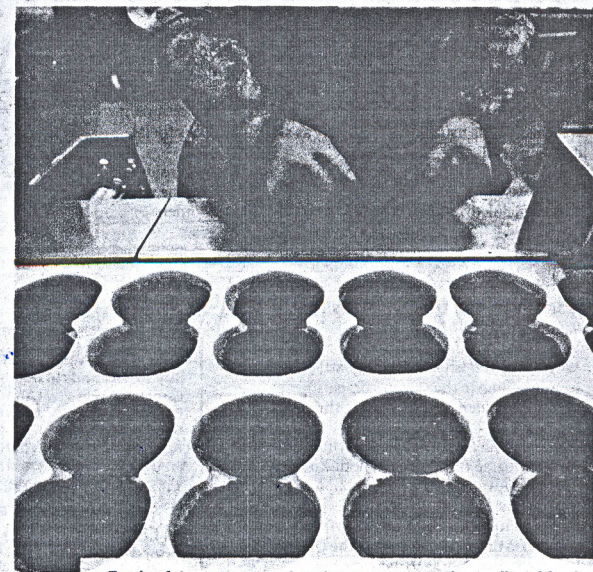
**Contamination by pathogens**  
However, contamination of foods by pathogens which cause diseases and

### Fact Sheet

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even death sometimes, cannot be perceived easily because they cause no evident changes to the food product. When foodborne illnesses occur, economic costs are huge and diverse. Firstly, the victims have to spend money on treatment and use his/her productive time to recuperate. Also, money is spent to investigate and document the outbreak. In addition, a food business can collapse due to the loss of trust in the safety of its products and legal costs. Furthermore, lives can be lost, causing much grief to loved ones.

One way to assure the quality and safety of foods is the implementation of the Food Safety Management Systems (FSMSs) during food processing. Simply put, a food safety management system is a system put in place by a food company to establish and manage processes that are required for the assurance of food safety and quality. This means that the food company does whatever is important to make sure that the final food which is being produced is safe for consumers. Advantages of FSMSs include improved staff and management commitment to food safety and increased consumer



• Food safety management systems guarantee the quality of foods.

confidence in the safety of the food. In fact, consumers have a right to expect that each food product offered for sale or as gifts will be safe for consumption.

### Need for hazard analysis and critical control points

One way to have such a system in a food processing company is to implement Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points. This is a systematic, logical and preventive means of food control. In identifying where the hazards are likely to occur during food processing, a food company

has the opportunity to put in place adequate measures required to prevent those hazards from affecting the consumer. This reduces the traditional dependence on end-product inspection and testing.

In Europe for instance, it is a requirement that all food imports come from food companies which have established and operate food safety programmes and procedures based on the HACCP principles. This is because the European Union seeks a high level of protection of human life and health.

Despite the benefits of the FSMSs, research has found that most Ghanaian companies, especially the Small and Medium Scale Enterprises which produce foods just for the Ghanaian domestic market think it is unnecessary to comply with stringent international requirements for food safety and quality. This means that these food processors care very little about the safety of the foods they are providing for the Ghanaian consumer.

Currently, there are international food business operators in Ghana which have strict quality requirements for foods. These food business operators

have operational food safety management systems and also require their suppliers to have in place such systems which guarantee the quality of their products. Because most Ghanaian food companies do not have these systems, these food business operators actually source their goods from other companies outside Ghana which have these systems. For instance, even bread is imported and served to not only international but also Ghanaian consumers at some restaurants eventhough there are many bakeries scattered all over Ghana. What does this really mean for Ghana's economy? Well, it means that because food companies in Ghana do not want to implement the FSMSs, they can only sell their products to the unsuspecting Ghanaian consumer who may fall sick due to unsafe food and use their finances to get medical help and their productive hours to recuperate. It also means that the Ghanaian currency will have to be converted into the currency of the country from which we import our foods, putting further pressure on our foreign currency reserves. And it also means that our local businesses cannot produce foods for export to gain more foreign currency.

For these reasons, it is about time more highlights are thrown on FSMSs and their implementation in food companies.

Food processing companies should be encouraged to seek expert assistance for the implementation of the FSMSs in their companies. And gradually, it should get to a time that food companies will be required to have such systems in place before they are allowed to offer foods to the consumer. This will, in the long run, improve the economic situation in Ghana.

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