

Rationale and Recommended Response for Meeting Consumer Requirements: quality, safety and emerging concerns

Full responsibility for meeting safety and quality standards lies with each food chain stakeholder, irrespective of its size.

In recent years, the difficulties of complying with food safety standards have increased perceptively. Greater consumer demand for food attributes that far exceed existing legal standards is now having a significant influence on the buying decision. And private quality standards (i.e. those applied by agro-processors, importers and retailers) are, in turn, becoming more stringent and differentiated.

These more demanding consumer requirements are not limited to the international food market. Quality considerations now have a significant influence on consumer choice in the domestic market of most developing countries. This is having a significant impact on the ability of small and medium-sized agro-industries and agribusinesses in developing countries to compete.

It is, therefore, no longer sufficient that food producers and processors focus on meeting only legal food safety standards. Meeting these "minimum" requirements guarantees neither market access nor competitiveness.

Focus of the Debate

Can the small and medium-scale food producer be expected to meet, in a cost-effective manner, the exacting food quality and safety standards of consumers and of the international market? Are there examples of success and, if so, how was this achieved and what lessons can be learned? What partnerships were in place?