

A Buyer's Perspective on FSMA at the Food Safety Summit

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Regulatory compliance and business practices can meld under the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) in the practice of food safety quality assurance, a vice president for [US Foods](#) [1] said Tuesday at the Food Safety Summit.

Jorge Hernandez, senior vice president for food safety & quality assurance at US Foods, spoke in a workshop called "Doing the Right Thing — Meeting Consumer and FSMA Food Safety Expectations" at the Baltimore Convention Center.

"Regulation works well with buyers' systems as it adds another level of food safety and verification, but it's a hand-in-glove approach, not either or," Hernandez said.

A crucial FSMA compliance point is the [Foreign Supplier Verification Program](#) [2] (FSVP). Hernandez said food safety quality assurance (FSQA) must be instituted both domestically and internationally. The practice marries a regulatory approach regarding food quality with a business approach regarding quality assurance.

"Food safety quality and compliance is not a geographical issue. Regardless of whether it's Chicago or China, India or Indianapolis, the product has to be meeting the same standards," Hernandez said.

Processors must develop, document and distribute the expectations they have of their suppliers in the form of a verification program, Hernandez said. He recommended food manufacturers place controls as early as possible in the process and identify the FSQA systems that need to be in place at each level, including producers, processors, distributors and customers.

A supplier verification program must apply globally to all suppliers, regardless of size, Hernandez said. Such a program must also check against the latest food safety risks, as regulations aren't always up to speed with science. Manufacturers must employ internal data to ensure suppliers are conforming to the program. Documentation must be stringent and conflicts of interest must be minimized, he said. Importantly, on-site systems verifications must be performed by competent staff with expertise in the area they're investigating.

Hernandez said that the United States' influence will raise the bar on food safety systems globally.

"Food safety plans are going to start maturing and you're going to see a lot wider use of those plans all over the world," he said.

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