



A Word About The Peanut Problem

As we all watch in horror the recalls of peanut butter based products and read about the individuals who have been sickened or lost their lives over this, it has become evidently clear that our view of food safety in the United States needs to change. We have made assumptions about the vulnerability of various food products based upon each product's perceived ability to fend off hosting *E. coli*, *Salmonella*, *Listeria* and other pathogens that can either sicken or kill people. These assumptions need to be challenged!

The extent of these contaminations is probably not new. But we have dramatically improved the way we collect information about who is getting sick and from what particular strain of the bad guys. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) launched PulseNET (<http://www.cdc.gov/pulsenet/>) back in 1993 for the specific purpose of collecting meaningful information to help us identify patterns of infection or sickness. So with the advent of the internet and worldwide information exchange, along with an organized approach from the CDC, we now can see the extent and scope of food safety incidences. This has proven to be a very effective tool!

Having said that, we are also faced with a microbial population that continues to adapt to the defenses developed against it. So, assuming that our problems of today fully define the scope of what we need to face tomorrow is foolish. There will be new threats and we have to have a system in-place to anticipate these threats to mitigate the human damage.

The food industry has heavily relied on Certificates of Analysis (COA) to determine the quality and characteristics of ingredients and finished products in commerce. The real issue is what good are these COAs if their content is inaccurate, falsified or simply ignored. The time has come to verify the quality of incoming ingredients and finished products. Some astute companies have already begun product safety verification through appropriate sampling programs designed to enhance existing strategies; i.e., HACCP. Have you?

Review your COA program and protect your brands! If you want to explore COA programs in more depth, please call or e-mail one of our food safety experts.

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