POISONED: Lessons and Innovations for a Safer Food System

Understanding Fresh Food Safety in Australia's Landscape

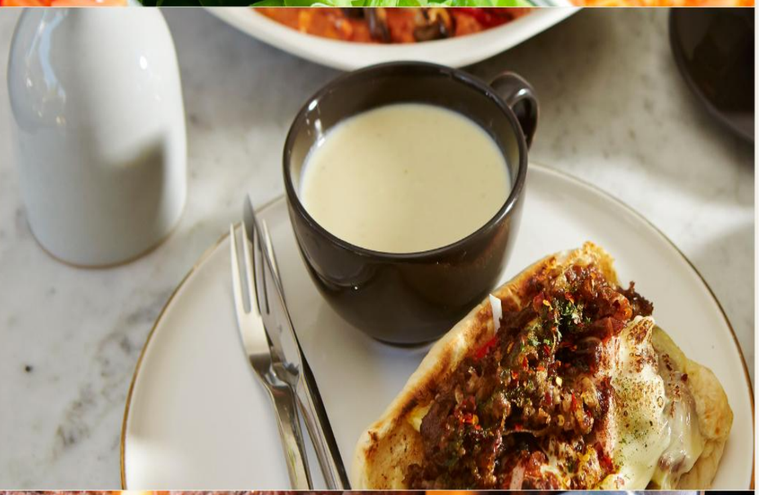
Lata Masih

Integrity Compliance Solutions

FIAQ
Food Industries Association of Queensland Inc.
Connecting Businesses in the Food Industry

20th Annual Queensland Food Safety Conference

ics
integrity compliance solutions



In quick-service restaurants (QSRs), **Food Safety** presents several critical challenges that can directly impact consumer confidence, operational efficiency, and customer satisfaction.

1. Perishability and Shelf Life

- **Short shelf life**: Leafy greens, herbs, tomatoes, berries and meat & poultry spoil quickly.
- **Spoilage risk** increases with improper temperature control or delayed delivery.
- Leads to **frequent wastage**, affecting cost and sustainability.

2. Contamination Risks

Raw materials can be contaminated with:

- *E. coli*, *Salmonella*, or *Listeria* from soil, water, or animal contact.
- Chemical residues (pesticides) or allergens during handling.
- **Cross-contamination** in operations where produce isn’t separated from raw meats or improperly sanitized or stored together.

3. Cold Chain Management

- Raw materials requires **strict temperature control** from farm to store.
- Breaks in the cold chain (e.g. during transport or delivery) can promote microbial growth and quality degradation.
- **Inconsistent refrigeration** at supplier or store level leads to food safety risks.
- First-In, First Out (FIFO) – Stock rotation to minimize waste and ensure freshness.
- Separate raw and cooked zones – prevent cross contamination by using designated storage areas and utensils.

4. Traceability and Supplier Verification

- QSRs often work with multiple regional suppliers.
- Inadequate **traceability systems** make it difficult to identify sources during a recall.
- Limited or **inconsistent supplier audits** can let substandard produce enter the supply chain.

5. Inconsistent Staff Training

- Staff may lack training on:
  - Proper washing and storage of produce.
  - FIFO (First In, First Out) inventory rotation.
  - Identifying spoilage signs.
  - Staff personal hygiene
- In fast-paced environments, **shortcuts** can lead to safety lapses.

6. Seasonality and Supply Volatility

- Availability of produce can fluctuate with **weather, droughts, or floods**.
- QSRs struggle to maintain **menu consistency** or quality standards when substituting ingredients.
- Unstable supply impacts pricing and forecasting.

7. Cooking & Temperature Control

- Cooking to safe internal temperatures.
- Use calibrated thermometers to check internal temperatures
- Hold Times – Monitoring how long cooked meat can be safety held before service (e.g. <2 hours at >60°C.

8. Seasonality and Supply Volatility

- Availability of produce can fluctuate with **weather, droughts, or floods**.
- QSRs struggle to maintain **menu consistency** or quality standards when substituting ingredients.
- Unstable supply impacts pricing and forecasting.

9. Mislabelling and Allergen Management

- If not correctly labelled or separated, fresh produce mixed with allergenic items (like nuts or dairy sauces) can lead to serious **allergen exposure**.
- Some pre-packaged salads or fruit cups may lack full **ingredient disclosure**.

10. Preparation & Portion Control

- Standardise recipes and portion – to ensure adequate cooking and consistency
- Thawing – Ensuring it is safe and validated method.

Current QSR Practices in Australia

Understanding the challenges in QSRs for fresh food safety

- These incidents highlight the critical need for QSRs to maintain rigorous **food safety protocols**, including regular staff training, strict hygiene practices, and comprehensive supplier audits. Ensuring compliance with food safety standards is essential to protect public health and maintain consumer trust.

- The QSR Standards has adopted the industries best practices and Codex HACCP/GMP requirements.

- Some of the global QSR chains have their internal Food Safety Standards
  - ✓ *McDonalds*
  - ✓ *YUM*
  - ✓ *Dominos*
  - ✓ *Pizza Hut*
  - ✓ *Taco Bell*
  - ✓ *Guzman y Gomez*
  - ✓ *Starbucks*
  - ✓ *Coffee Club*
  - ✓ *Subway*

Can Onion Kill You!!!

2024 E coli 0157:H7 in onions on McDonalds burger: 90 illnesses, 27 hospitalizations & 1 death in 13 U.S. states.

2023 Salmonella in diced onions: 80 illnesses in 23 US states.

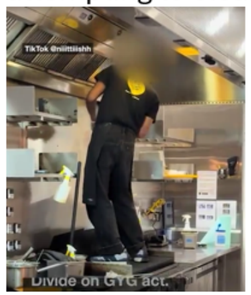
2021 Salmonella in whole onions from Mexico: 1040 illnesses in 41 US states.

2020 Salmonella in USA red onions: 1127 illnesses in 48 US states.

2016 Listeria in processed onions: 8 illnesses in 3 US states. 2 deaths.

2015 E.coli 0157: H7 in diced onion: 19 illnesses in 7 US states.

Case Studies: Past Failings

Case Study 1: May 25 Dodees Donut, Boronia, Victoria		
Incident	**Findings**	**Penalty**
Dodees Donut faced legal action after pleading guilty to 20 food safety violations. Herald Sun heraldsun Filthy Boronia doughnut shop exposed for food safety breaches	Inspections revealed unhygienic conditions, including dirty kitchen equipment, cream-filled doughnuts stored above safe temperatures, and staff lacking basic food safety knowledge.	The business was fined $6,000 with a conviction, and the owner received a $5,000 fine without conviction.
Case Study 2: Guzman y Gomez (GYG)		
A video surfaced in April 2025 showing a GYG staff member standing on a hot plate used for cooking, attempting to clean overhead vents.  https://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/food/eat/aussie-restaurant-chain-responds-to-workers-disappointing-act/news-story/	This act raised significant public concern regarding hygiene practices and staff training within the chain.	As the clip gained momentum online, GYG has issued a statement on the incident, stressing it was commitment to food safety.

Case Studies: Past Failings

Case Study 3: McDonald's West Lake, Adelaide		
An anonymous employee reported severe hygiene issues at the McDonald's West Lakes branch.  https://www.bing.com/search?q=McDonald%27s+West+Lakes%2C+Adelaide	The report highlighted mould in ice cream machines, rats in the ceiling, and inadequate personal protective equipment (PPE) for staff. These allegations prompted an investigation by the SDA union in 2024.	No update
Case Study 4: Fridays, Brisbane		
In late 2022, Fridays on Eagle Street was temporarily closed. 	After inspectors found live and dead cockroaches in the kitchen. The venue was fined for multiple breaches of the Food Standard Code, including food storage and cleaniliness issues.	$25,000

Case Studies: Past Failings

Case Study 5: McDonalds Onion Outbreak - US		
In late 2024, a significant E. coli O157:H7 outbreak in McDonalds in the United States.  People.com McDonald's Cleared by CDC After Investigation into Lethal E. Coli Outbreak 181 days ago	It was linked to slivered yellow onions supplied by Taylor Farms and served on McDonald's Quarter Pounder burgers. The outbreak affected 104 people across 14 states, resulting in 34 hospitalizations and one death.	The outbreak led to multiple lawsuits against both McDonald's and Taylor Farms, highlighting the critical importance of stringent food safety practices in the supply chain.

Streamlining Food Safety is the “NEW NORMAL "for the QSRS

Food safety, in particular, is a top priority for QSRs. In fact, according to a report by NSF, food safety has become a major global concern post-pandemic. In a survey of 680 employees conducted by the firm, seven out of 10 respondents said they had difficulties with unreliable food equipment that affected menu items' availability due to insufficient cleaning and maintenance.

This is a clear signal that QSRs need to improve their food safety standards. Gone are the days when customers would simply accept long lines and bad service. In today's world, they expect quick service without compromising on quality or safety, whether that's at the drive-thru or in the restaurant itself.

The good news is that QSRs are hopeful about the promise of new technology and processes for improving food safety, operations and training, and lowering expenses.

The Squizify system is designed to help QSRs streamline their food safety processes, and improve efficiency across the board. Paper-based processes are replaced with digital ones, and tasks that used to be manual are now automated.

For example, temperature sensors can be used to automatically record food temperatures at different stages of the cooking process. This data is then stored in the system, and can be used to create reports or spot trends in a store and even across multiple locations.

Allergens can also be managed more effectively with Squizify. When a new dish is added to the menu, the system will automatically check for any allergens that need to be listed. This ensures that customers with allergies can make informed choices about what they eat.

"Nothing will destroy a brand quicker than a poor food safety event linked to your brand so unitising technology is one of the most important things a brand can do to lower risk and gain the visibility to see trends across either a single store or a network for hundreds of stores," said McDouall.

[A brand's promise: Delivering efficient food safety processes for QSRs]

Data-driven decision making

Thank You!

and

Eat Safe....

integrity compliance solutions