Identifying potential barriers to food and drink manufacturing and processing businesses in Wales obtaining food-safety scheme accreditation

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Introduction

Food safety schemes are essential to the food and drink industry, they provide the framework for compliance to assist food and drink manufacturing and processing businesses in the production of safe and legal food, and facilitate entry to the market place.

Over recent years, UK manufacturers have moved away from generic ISO certified food safety schemes towards bespoke 3rd party accredited schemes, specifically developed to closely match the requirements of the industry and rationalise retailer-specific schemes1. Compliance with a privately operated scheme is often a prerequisite to supply2.

The Welsh Government has identified that to enable growth of the food and drink sector in Wales there is a need to support manufacturers to obtain and maintain food safety scheme accreditation.

Research has determined that accreditation to schemes such as British Retail Consortium (BRC) or Safe and Local Supplier Approval (SALSA) are lacking among Welsh micro and Small to Medium Enterprise (SME) manufacturers3.

Consequently, there is a need to obtain an in-depth understanding of the potential barriers that exist to manufacturers in Wales from selecting, implementing, obtaining and maintaining food safety scheme accreditation.

Purpose

The aim of the study was to identify the potential barriers that exist for Micro and SME food and drink manufacturing businesses in Wales to select, implement, obtain and maintain food safety scheme accreditation.

Methods

A series of focus groups were conducted with:
- Stakeholders (Government, Non-Governmental organisations (NGOs), procurement services, food inspectors, environmental health officers and scheme owners) (n=19).
- Food safety schemes auditors/mentors (n=9).
- Welsh micro/SME manufacturers with FSSC/TA (n=20).
- Welsh micro/SME manufacturers without FSSC/TA (n=17).

In-depth telephone interviews were conducted with representatives of major UK retailers (n=3).

Audio files from focus groups and interviews were transcribed and analysed with NVivo using a content analysis approach.

Acknowledgements

The research team wish to acknowledge the funding received from the Welsh Government Food Division to enable completion of the study.

Results

Identified barriers to manufacturers obtaining and maintaining food safety scheme accreditation

Focus group and interview participants perceived differences between the barriers faced by manufacturers to achieve food safety scheme accreditation and the barriers faced to maintain accreditation as indicated in Figure 2.

Figure 1 Quote from participant 44 – Owner of a business without accreditation.

Figure 2 Word cloud indicating word frequency when discussing barriers to obtaining and maintaining food safety scheme accreditation

a) Time, cost and resources as barriers

Numerous manufacturers indicated problems in recruiting skilled and experienced staff. Potential candidates often lack the knowledge and skills required to operate effectively in the sector, leading to increased costs in training/education. A shortage of technical graduates and how the image of the food industry should be more desirable for school leavers was a major discussion point (see Figure 4).

“...there aren’t many technical managers and so to get BRC, we would need a technical manager, unless we could find an alternative way to do it.”

(Owner 01, Retail representative)

“We don’t have a technical manager. So to get BRC, we would need a technical manager, unless we could find an alternative way to get it. It’s a separate thing.”

(Owner 02, Food Manufacturer)

Figure 3 Participant quotes relating to knowledge and skill barriers

b) Knowledge and skills as barriers

Participants believed there to be too many schemes available and manufacturers find it difficult to select and work towards suitable schemes due to the lack of information and visibility from scheme owners.

Customers often require manufacturers to meet multiple schemes, which complicate obligations to compliance as scheme standards can vary and require different documentation to evidence the same activity or action.

Consequently, to enable food safety management systems to satisfy multiple scheme requirements consolidation of schemes was desirable (see Figure 5).

Some believed that in smaller production sites, the relevance of some standards had not been considered by scheme owners.

There’s many different accreditations, that you don’t know how they relate to each other. There’s a lot of conflicting information, you need to spend a lot of money to get things right.

(Participant 01, Food Manufacturer)

“...make sure you are aware of all the schemes and what they are asking you to do.”

(Participant 03, Owner of a Business)

Figure 5 Participant quotes relating to communication and access to information barriers

Significance of study

- Completion of the research has identified the potential barriers that exist for manufacturers in Wales to obtain and maintain food safety accreditation relating to a) the time, cost and resources required to develop FSMS, b) the limited availability of skilled staff that are knowledgeable and technically experienced, and c) the lack of visibility and information available from FSS owners.

- Consequently, there is a need for further research to utilise the findings of this research to explore and inform the development of support mechanisms to increase food safety scheme uptake and accelerate food sector growth in line with Welsh Government aspirations.

References

