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## Dairy food safety is 'industry must,' starts with execs

By [Hal Conick+](#), 26-Jan-2016

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**Food safety must be carried equally across every dairy organization, but a recent forum of dairy executives said it needs to start at the executive level.**

The session, titled Fostering a Culture of Food Safety: Lessons from the C-Suite, took place at the 2016 IDFA Dairy Forum in Phoenix, Arizona. Executives discussed the challenges and opportunities that food safety can bring.

### Big changes and evolution

Thomas Hedge, senior vice president of enterprise quality and food safety at Schreiber Foods, moderated the forum, and said food safety has become critical to every dairy company, creating a new aspect of thought and preparation. He asked panelists how food safety was evolving.

Rich Draper, CEO of the Ice Cream Club, Inc., said dairy companies are all finding support from others in the industry. By allowing other companies to lead the charge, it allows for a greater understanding of how to account for and respond to safety concerns.

Terry Brockman, President and COO of Saputo Cheese Division USA, said he believes food safety is now at the top of each food company's mind.

*"One thing I really see with culture of food safety is that it's not one person's job within organizations, it's the organization from CEO all the way to the janitor,"* he said. *"Everyone has to have input and buy in because it's so important."*

There has been far more focus on food safety within the industry from both associations and companies over the past three to five years, Brockman said. Everyone now realizes that food safety *"is not a competitive advantage, it's an industry must."*

An increased focus on food safety has meant an increased focus on training, said Carmine Catalana, president of Cumberland Dairy Inc. "Clean," for example, may mean something different to each new employee, so there must be some continuity across organizations.

Millennials have pressured businesses to up their food safety game, according to Mike Wells, president and CEO of Wells Enterprises, Inc. He said he's loved what it's done for his organization, as now everyone has taken ownership of food safety. Even in the C-Suite level, he said executives at his company need to be concerned about what the board of directors thinks, so everyone must be on top of their game regarding food safety.

*"Due to circumstances in our industry we understand what's at stake,"* Wells said, adding that negative food safety events show just how much of a negative shadow a poor event can have on the dairy industry.

### Keeping up with changing standards

The dairy industry has many organizations that may be 100 years (or more) old, Brockman said. As much as companies would love state-of-the-art facilities, it may not be possible. However, he said, each dairy organization needs to make sure that capital resources are allocated so these facilities can be managed safely.

To that end, Catalana said the food safety issue in the dairy industry is aching for more talent to be brought into the industry, as well as new technology.

Draper noted how important it is to be transparent with consumers, especially in the age of digital media. At his company, they invite consumers to the plant to look at processes and try to engage them.

Dairy organizations can't be all things to all people, he said, so it's important to be as clear as possible with what the company offers, what their food safety procedures are, and allow consumers to make their own educated choices.

Keeping up may be good for the bottom line as well, as Wells noted that every company deals with costs and necessity. While it's easier to see money in spending on sales and marketing, spending to comply with new regulations or adhere to new standards customers demand is *"another line item"* necessary for success.

*"Food safety is no longer a luxury, it's a necessity," Wells said. "Being intentional about food safety in everything we do... has become an integral part of our culture. It's not a casual event anymore; it's just not."*

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