FOOD DEFENCE
Are We Prepared?

While risk factors impacting on supply chain efficiency are considered, supply chains are rarely designed in consideration of the tangible and intangible threats that impact on the integrity of supply itself.

Incidents such as the malicious tampering experienced by the Queensland Strawberry Industry in September 2018 present the stark reality of the need to think outside the box and to expect the unexpected.

No one could have predicted the impact of a single malicious act of food tampering on the very viability of an entire industry sector.

Never before had social media played such a pivotal role in the dissemination of information, initially to fuel the incident and latterly to assist in strategies for recovery.

The lessons learned from the Queensland strawberry incident are many and varied, but the key message is clear – understand the issue, manage the risks, and be prepared.

'**Food Defence**' is most effectively used as an overarching term to describe and encompass all the activities carried out to protect food from threats. In simplest terms food defence can be considered to comprise of three distinct elements.

- Food fraud.
- Food sabotage.
- Food terrorism.

Having understood the elements of food defence, we also need to understand the potential perpetrators who might be motivated to carry out those threats.

They can be internal or external to the business, they can be acting in isolation, in groups and even with the knowledge of a business. We also need to understand their possible motivations.

THREAT - Deliberate act by someone to cause harm or for financial gain (Something that can cause loss or harm which arises from the ill-intent of people).

VULNERABILITY - How exposed the business is to the threat having an impact on the consumer.

FOOD FRAUD - The deliberate adulteration or misrepresentation of food, food ingredients or raw materials for financial gain.

FOOD SABOTAGE - The deliberate destruction, damage or disruption of food products or processes with the intention of causing reputational damage or financial loss.
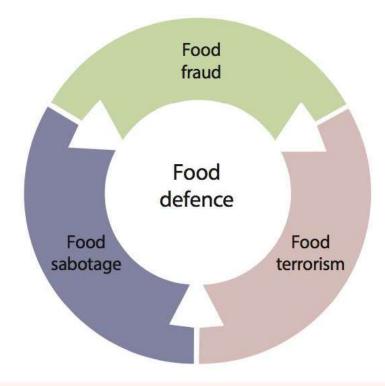
FOOD TERRORISM - "An act or threat of deliberate contamination of food for human consumption with biological, chemical and physical agents or radio nuclear materials for the purpose of causing injury or death to civilian populations and/or disrupting social, economic or political stability" (WHO. Terrorist Threats to Food: Guidance for Establishing and Strengthening Prevention and Response Systems, Food Safety Issues, Revision May 2008).

TYPES OF PERPETRATOR - Workers, suppliers, contractors and outsiders, such as extremists or extortionists.

MOTIVATIONS - Personal grievances, pressure to achieve, financial gain, ideological, welfare causes - including fair work compliance.

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With an understanding of 'what', 'who' and 'why' we can start to focus on actually identifying different types of threats, and assessing their relevance in our business.

IDENTIFICATION OF KNOWN AND PLAUSIBLE THREATS

A focus on known threats, either those that have occurred before, so history tells us that they could occur again; or threats that while not having occurred it is plausible to presume they could happen – e.g. foreign objects contamination, chemical contamination accidental and through known misuse.

IDENTIFICATION OF SUPPLY CHAIN THREATS

The identification of known and plausible threats, and threats from claims require consideration also be given to the entire supply chain to identify where such threats might occur outside the immediate control of the business- e.g. foreign objects contamination.

IDENTIFICATION OF THREATS FROM AT-RISK CLAIMS

The claims that are made about a product give the consumer an expectation about what they are purchasing, if that claim is not met or is disproven, then there is genuine potential for customer upset.

That response can be attributed to the product and to the company that produced it – e.g. provenance, variety, organic.

If a business can identify and define the threats in a consistent and repeatable way, then they are more likely to achieve an objective result in terms of quantifying and managing those threats.

To do this a business needs to consider:

- How the consumer could be impacted by the threat;

- The actual act and the threat itself; and

- The perpetrator and their motivation.

The impact is considered firstly on the 'asset' we are seeking to protect i.e. the consumer, then on the business – that secondary impact driven by the effect on the consumer.

Once the threat and its impact have been assessed, how susceptible the business is to an individual threat having an impact needs to be assessed, considering both motivation and likelihood of detection.

For a business to be vulnerable to a threat there has to be motivation for the perpetrator to cause harm or damage, and also the opportunity for them to actually carry out the act without detection.

Once threats and vulnerabilities are clearly defined, protection measures should be identified for each potential threat. Protection measures can be either controls or monitoring activities, aiming to prevent, detect or reduce the threat to an acceptable level.

Some very simple steps can take us a long way to gaining control, through both improved infrastructure and systems to monitor employee activity.

Physical - packing line CCTV (with clear notices), good site security.

Systems - formal team structure and accountability, team meetings, staff monitoring, independent mechanisms to report issues.

Effective systems can and will act to reduce threats and minimise vulnerabilities and, provide a strong foundation for crisis management.

But, like any defence system, it can't and won't be able to control everything, there will always be that 'unknown – unknown' the crisis you didn't see coming.

Effective crisis management strategies for a business, industry or sector need to be in place before that unknown hits.

The mushroom industry is well advanced in this respect, with initiatives like AMSAFE and the crisis management plans coordinated as a levy-funded project managed through Porter Novelli.

This article is based on the work of Adele Adams and Kassy Marsh (ref. *Assessing Threat Vulnerability for Food Defence: 2nd Edition 2018*)

ASSESSING THREAT VULNERABILITY FOR FOOD DEFENCE

Further information and insight on the topic of Food defence can be found at:

https://adeleadamsassociates.co.uk/food-defence-vaccp-taccp/what-is-food-defence/

Including a useful introductory video:

https://youtu.be/e-iSOeSWGQg