

A helping hand when it comes to hygiene in the meat industry

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Healthy hand care habits are a valuable line of defence against the spread of infections in meat production settings and a crucial part of any HACCP system.

However, in order to encourage compliance, formulations and dispensing systems need to be both effective and pleasant to use.

It seems that not a week goes by without some food-related news story or debate hitting the headlines. Food is undoubtedly one of the hottest topics around, being so inextricably linked with our health and well being.

The recent furore surrounding the discovery of horse meat in certain processed foods shows that no part of the food industry is immune from the glare of negative publicity.

The way our food is produced, from the sourcing of ingredients to the manufacture and packaging, is a subject that continuously attracts close scrutiny.

Each individual link in the food production chain shares equal responsibility for the safety and hygiene of the respective end results. Just one weak link and the chain can snap, causing untold damage in terms of future business and brand loyalty.

Good hand hygiene

Getting hygiene right is of paramount importance, and one of the key elements is a relatively simple premise – that of good hand hygiene.

Good hand hygiene systems are not merely nice to have ‘extras’ for food processing companies – they are essential to the smooth running of their entire business. If just one employee does not follow proper hand hygiene procedures that one person could put the entire workforce – and company – at risk.

Cross contamination of food products is not the only issue to be considered. Absenteeism through illness can seriously damage the profitability of a company, because when employees are ill, they can



not work. This reduces productivity, affects the level of service provided, and erodes customer confidence and satisfaction – while at the same time putting additional pressure on employees who have to pick up the work of absent colleagues.

Stringent HACCP processes

Every company involved in food production should have stringent HACCP processes in place, identifying the ‘critical points’ in a process where food safety problems (or ‘hazards’) could arise, and putting steps in place to prevent things going wrong.

There are many opportunities for cross contamination to take place in a food processing plant and this has the potential to cause untold damage including:

- Plant shut down due to contaminated product.
- Products made unsuitable for sale.
- Loss of reputation and damage to brand image.
- Loss of customer loyalty.

By ensuring that effective, easy-to-use hand hygiene products are readily available to use at all the ‘critical points’, food processing companies can guard against these

risks, with the added benefit of supporting their employees by demonstrating their commitment to safeguarding their personal health and well being.

The right products and systems can play an invaluable role in the promotion of healthy hand hygiene behaviour, but in order to be truly successful, they need to combine good aesthetics, accessibility and ease of use, whilst being equipped with pleasant and effective hygienically advanced formulations. To put it simply, products and systems that people actually want to use.

Formulation and functionality

Giving food production workers access to products and systems that they enjoy using can only help towards achieving a greater success rate of reducing infections and cross contamination through compliance – and this plays just as important a role as product efficacy. The high frequency with which many food production workers have to clean their hands means that, unless they can do so without damaging them, compliance will suffer.

Efficacy is, of course, an important issue,

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so only those companies who can prove the effectiveness of their soaps or hand rubs against germs through independent scientific testing should be considered.

Similarly, formulations that have been tested and passed in accordance with international food taint testing standard EN 4120:2007, provide assurance that they are safe for use in food processing establishments.

However, the best products will successfully combine this with soothing, moisturising ingredients that are gentle on the skin, meaning that employees can use the products again and again, knowing that their hands will be kept in good condition.

Aesthetics play a valuable role in encouraging people to develop healthy hand hygiene habits.

Dispensers that look good and are easy to use, which are sited at both key and convenient locations, are bound to be more popular. The use of innovative technology also helps, and that is why touch-free dispensers are proving so popular.

These intuitively sense the presence of hands and dispense just the right amount of product every time.

The fact that they are 'touch-free' also increases their hygiene rating, doing away with another surface to touch.

GOJO helped to pioneer the use of touch-free dispensers and is now on its 'third gen-



Part of GOJO's range of touch-free LTX dispensers.

eration' of designs, using client feedback to continually develop the range.

The right refills

How you refill your dispensers is another important area to consider, as this can have an effect on hygiene and the time it takes to clean and maintain your dispensers.

Open reservoir dispensers and refillable hand soap can contribute to cross contamination problems and compromise a company's HACCP programme, because they are open to the environment.

It is not always practical for maintenance operatives to thoroughly clean and sanitise dispensers each time they need to be refilled, so this increases the risk of bacteria growing inside and being spread to unsuspecting users.

A study conducted by microbiologists at the University of Arizona found that 25% of bulk soap dispensers contain soap with unsafe levels of bacteria.

If a refill is sanitary sealed it means that the product inside is protected from contamination because it is factory sealed and includes a fresh valve with each refill.

Its hygiene and health benefits are therefore obvious – but they also make time savings for hard-pressed maintenance staff because they are so much simpler and quicker to replace.

Invest in the best solutions

The importance of encouraging and maintaining good hand hygiene has the same implications for all companies operating in the meat sector.

By investing in the best hand hygiene solutions, you protect your business and demonstrate your commitment to improving the well being of your employees, providing peace of mind to your clients and safeguarding the end consumer. ■