

Editorial

Food regulation as an instrument of public health: future directions

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The relationship between people and their food has changed greatly since the beginnings of food law which sought to prevent *adulteration and deception* of a limited range of products. Now there is a greater dependency on food prepared by others, and it is produced and processed much further afield. Such food is now chosen without the benefit of the knowledge of an extended family, village or town; it is stored and prepared in new ways – science and technology are changing food at source, with processing and with preparation; and, whilst biodiversity decreases, food cultural boundaries are being crossed with new demands on food selection.

For these many reasons, *information and guidance in food choice* has become a major requirement of food regulation. In addition, *food safety* has taken on new genetic, microbiological, and toxicological dimensions. Yet to come are new aspects of *food security* where previously they were ones principally of food availability at times of natural disaster like drought or flood, pestilence, war or conflict or an account of poverty or political mismanagement. Eco-regulation of food will emerge.

These observations indicate that *food regulation will become* increasingly complex and sophisticated, whilst needing to be inclusive of the community, genuinely useful and empowering to consumers, affordable, profitable from

“paddock to plate”, internationally compatible and competitive, and environmentally sustainable.

Each sector of the *food industry*, will need to reckon with these issues of changing health patterns, needs and expectations, cultural diversification and globalisation, food security and eco-nutrition, and food safety with new risks and new opportunities.

How will all of this be achieved? Firstly, there will need to be a thorough political understanding of the issues and commitment to the regulatory framework as an enduring responsibility of government, at a time when many other activities are privatised. Secondly, *regulatory authorities* will need to be highly *multidisciplinary* with developed generalist and specialist skills. Thirdly, the *primary focus* will need to be on health and safety, taking into account trade and environmental matters. Fourthly, the *infrastructure* will include management of food pattern data bases, linked to health trends (ie nutritional epidemiology); and information systems which will allow food to be tracked, through food establishments and handlers. Fifthly, food regulation will need to be surrounded by *an educative and information system* to allow and enable safe and healthful food choice (in the home and community, by the way of the education system, at the point of purchase, whether through labelling or other approach, and by way of food and nutrition informatics and Internet services).