

Safe Feed/Safe Food Program Instills Confidence in Longtime Participant

In 2004, the American Feed Industry Association formed the Safe Feed/Safe Food (SF/SF) certification program to establish and promote generally accepted animal food safety guidelines that would ensure the feed industry could continuously deliver a safe and wholesome feed supply. AFIA's Paul Davis, Ph.D., the program's technical advisor, sat down with Bobby Brown, manager of Tennessee Farmers Cooperative's (TFC) LaVergne Feed Mill, on his company's participation in the program. Beginning in 2007, TFC is one of the oldest, continuous SF/SF program participants.

What was the driving reason for your facility to pursue the SF/SF certification program?

Brown: For decades, livestock feed manufacturers have been producing safe feed products for consumption by livestock and poultry, whose meat and other food products are later consumed by humans. However, unfounded negative publicity has been slowly, but steadily, changing how the general public views what livestock eat during their production cycles as it relates to the safety of the food on their dinner tables.

We were already taking many precautions in all areas of feed production to ensure a safe product, but the SF/SF certification program presented us with the requirements and guidelines to further enhance our production of safe feed and validate that TFC-fed animals and their food products are safe for human consumption. We anticipated the increase of future government regulations regarding food safety would migrate to the feed industry and compliance with the SF/SF program would be a way for TFC to stay ahead of the curve.

Given you've renewed for 12 years, what has been the biggest benefit to your company?

Brown: Aside from the confidence in knowing we have produced safe products for many years, compliance to the SF/SF program has enhanced our working relationship with the Food and Drug Administration and state regulatory agencies. Having policies and procedures firmly in place was a huge asset toward compliance with the Food Safety Modernization Act when the time came. Our long-term commitment to food safety has been an asset in TFC securing premium business opportunities at all three facilities.

How has this program changed over the years?

Brown: The program is fluid in the sense that as existing federal regulations are amended or new regulations are added, the changes are incorporated into the certification audit language so compliance to SF/SF works hand-in-hand with federal requirements. Full compliance to the SF/SF program will help mitigate the chance of compliance failure issues with federal and state auditors

Do you feel the program has helped your facility come into compliance with new regulations?

Brown: Absolutely. ■



Phil Redfield, TFC feed mill employee, transporting safely produced beef cattle feed.

It takes time and resources to pull together the materials for annual renewal. How do you weigh the cost-benefits?

Brown: Evaluating cost versus benefits is more of a risk analysis exercise. The cost of renewal and certification is microscopic compared to the savings associated with risk reduction of monetary payouts and brand reputation loss that could result from the production of unsafe or contaminated livestock feeds. Certification is verification that TFC employees are adhering to food safety policies and procedures on a continuous basis.

Do your customers understand what it means for your facility to be SF/SF certified?

Brown: Each year, we conduct numerous tours of our feed mills for our members, local ag educators, ag students and other potential new customers. We focus on TFC's commitment to food safety, our SF/SF certification and the procedures we follow – from receipt of raw ingredients to the sale of the finished product. TFC has promoted our SF/SF certification in many publications. Our customers are aware and understand what it means and their response has always been positive.

How do you think the SF/SF program compares to other certification programs?

Brown: I personally believe that the SF/SF program is a more complete program for the feed industry than other food safety certification programs. Some of the other programs contain requirements that are very good, but are not always practical or necessary in the production of livestock feeds.

What would you tell a company considering pursuing SF/SF certification?

Brown: If the company is seriously wanting to enhance their brand reputation as a manufacturer of safe, quality feeds, I would recommend the SF/SF program. It was developed by leaders of our industry that fully understand our business. ■