

The lack of harmonised regulation on food safety and security



JUNE ARNOLD
Head of Policy
The Grain and Feed Trade Association
(GAFTA)

The agricultural commodity trade plays a crucial role in providing people all around the world with safe and reliable sources of affordable, high-quality food. Although international food trade has existed for thousands of years, the amount of food traded internationally has grown exponentially over the last decade. This has resulted in a complex global food system with commodities coming from many sources and travelling great distances. Trade is critical to food security and the ability to trade food is central to the livelihoods of many of the world's poor, so food safety is paramount. Trading companies are ready to confront the challenge of feeding a world with 9 billion people by 2050, and will continue to provide high quality, safe food all the time and everywhere. In addition to processing and transporting tens of millions of tonnes every year, commodity companies are helping people make oilseeds and grains part of a healthy diet, bringing these foods from farm to table. They connect farmers to the global marketplace and supply end customers, from nations to small livestock producers, with high-quality commodity products derived from a variety of crops. It is crucial that policies focus on sustainable agricultural practices, improving market access and productivity for farmers, and supporting childhood

nutrition and education around the world. Companies have invested heavily in systems applying broad, comprehensive, science- and risk-based approaches to food and feed safety to ensure the safety and integrity of products worldwide. However, the industry must do more to raise awareness on the impact of inconsistent regulation and the lack of coordination across governments, NGOs, policy-makers and consumers. Social and environmental goals need to be taken seriously, but food and feed safety challenges are at the forefront given their impact on food security. Issues around the lack of import tolerances for pesticides, lack of data submissions on active substances or residues, and slow renewals of active substances cause uncertainty and increasingly disrupt trade. Trading houses apply international food safety standards and Codex principles in international trade to food and agricultural products. These standards act as a global reference point for consumers, food producers and processors on the protection of public health and fair practices in the food trade. Codex standards are based on sound scientific analysis by experts, providing a common set of standards. Gafta engages with governments and promotes wider global acceptance of these standards. The aim is for the Codex Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs) to facilitate international trade, and to avoid having importing countries impose zero tolerances on contaminants or pesticide residues which have a negative impact on food security and food price inflation. Of concern is the application of the 'precautionary principle' to regulation (under which the burden of proof is to establish that something is not harmful). Coupled with increasingly non-scientific arguments in the regula-

**INCREASINGLY
NON-SCIENTIFIC
ARGUMENTS IN
REGULATORY
DECISIONS CREATE
COMPLIANCE
DIFFICULTIES.**

tory decision-making process, it creates compliance difficulties for the industry and misconceptions of actual food safety risk for consumers. Similarly, the lack of harmonised approvals of GMO crops globally means trading between markets becomes increasingly difficult with diverse sets of rules for approval worldwide and a time lag between different jurisdictions. Again, this is not a safety issue, but one of compliance for a period of time until all government safety authorities have tackled the approval process in their relevant jurisdiction. A low level presence solution (LLP) is needed on a global level to provide the industry with a commercially feasible level of certainty. We are also seeing a lack of harmonisation globally in how to deal with new plant breeding innovations, as well as techniques which hamper innovation and investment. A recent example is the proposed EU rules on comitology to approve GMOs or MRLs, which are expected to impact trade and create further delays in adoption. These rules must be based on sound science. Trading companies hold themselves accountable to fully implement global food safety approaches and continuously seek ways to improve the food safety system, implementing food safety and quality policies and procedures to guarantee access to a growing population and to control food safety. The industry needs to focus strongly on increasing its involvement in certification processes which will have a positive effect on consumer confidence. Awareness at the heart of the international community is needed on the market access constraints for agricultural commodities, along with the challenges of slow and cumbersome regulatory systems that discourage the adoption of innovation and new technologies. ■