Greater Harmonization of GOOD AGRICULTURAL PRACTICE STANDARDS

PAUL HARDMAN

In a previous SAFJ article the International Federation of Produce Standards (IFPS) was described and the role it plays in harmonizing global produce standards, including Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) standards. Since then some movement in the harmonization of GAP standards has been observed which signal the likely direction in which international recognition of GAP standards will progress. Since GAP harmonization is of strategic importance to southern African citrus producers given its combined effect on Market Access and costs of production an update of developments is described here.

A Food Safety Committee has formed under IFPS and chaired by Heather Gale of Canada Horticultural Council. So far two meetings have been held by telephone with participants from South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, Norway, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Canada, United States and Chile. The Committee got right down to work and identified key issues, summarized into an “Issues Register”. Table 1 is a summary of the Issues Register showing Issues, Deliverables, Time frames and lead persons (coordinators) in their priority order.

Getting retailers to accept a common solution (standard) is at the top of the Issues Register, being identified as the greatest challenge to harmonization and that which requires the considerable effort to resolve. The solution most likely to achieve successful buy-in from retailers is that offered by the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) which has a rigorous but transparent procedure for benchmarking standards against each other. Effectively different standards are recognized because they at least meet a base-level of Food Safety requirements. GFSI has got support from many international retailers.

For primary production (e.g. citrus production) the GFSI Guidance Document Version 5 (www.mygfsi.com) is used in benchmarking GAP Standards. GlobalGAP and CanadaGAP are schemes that have been recognized by GFSI as having met the primary production Food Safety requirements.

It is not surprising that the lack of harmonization among retailers regarding Plant Protection Product residue tolerances (i.e. MRLs) is another major issue facing all countries and particularly those exporting to the EU. The Committee is to consider possible strategies to address this issue, which is made particularly difficult by the NGO’s and consumer groups that apply pressure on retailers to deviate from the legal MRLs in favour of lower (or none at all) tolerances.

The third notable issue is the additional burden being placed on suppliers to provide more detailed food.

Table 1: IFPS Food Safety Committee Issues Register 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRIORITY</th>
<th>ISSUE</th>
<th>DELIVERABLE</th>
<th>TIMEFRAME</th>
<th>LEAD/PERSO RESPONSIBLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Recognized food safety schemes are required as minimum entry to market. Retailers continue to add on company-specific requirements to accepted programmes/standards such as GlobalGAP, GFSI recognized schemes, etc.</td>
<td>Retailer acceptance of GFSI recognized food safety schemes</td>
<td>Ongoing &amp; Long-term</td>
<td>All; ongoing efforts being led within countries Collectively, further thought will be given to determining short- and mid-term steps to move this issue forward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>MRLs – requests to lower, even when within legal limits. Increasing pressure from NGOs on retailers, especially in EU and Asia (issue is less pressing in North America). Proliferation of lists of “bad” or banned chemicals</td>
<td>List of harmonized MRLs Liaison with respective governments to encourage increased dialogue among countries (e.g., thru CODEX) Push for GFSI to endorse CODEX MRLs more strongly</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>South Africa (Paul) Norway (Jens) NL (Jacco) UK AU NZ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Retailers increasing requests to supply food safety and quality related information Wide differences in requested content, format, terms, etc. Including GLNs</td>
<td>Standardization of information Standardized format to provide info</td>
<td>Immediate &amp; Ongoing</td>
<td>Jacco Voojs Jens Strand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ensuring consistency across IFPS member country food safety standards Broadening understanding and input into one another’s programmes</td>
<td>Detailed comparison of IFPS member (or affiliated) food safety technical standards to facilitate increased harmonization of approaches, consistency, etc.</td>
<td>2010 [US priority, given timing of consultation on harmonized GAPs and FDA rule]</td>
<td>Each IFPS Food Safety Committee member volunteer/assign to review another (country’s) food safety scheme</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DFIDT gee 250 leerders daagliks kos

Op Vrydag, 3 Junie 2010 het De Rust Futura Akademie, 'n hoërskool, geleë op die Paul Cluver landgoed in die Elgin Vallei, tydens 'n spoggeleentheid hulle veeldoelige kompleks op die skoolgrond amptelik geopen. Die skool het tydens die geleentheid hul innige dank betuig teenoor die instansies wat ruim bygedra het tot die totstandkoming en latere oprigting van die prag-gebou, wat nou deel uitmaak van die skoolkompleks. Die skoolhoof, mnr. W A Theunis het in sy toespraak gemeld dat die grootste finansiële bydrae die Sagtevruigtebedryfson- twikkeloings trust is.

Die behoefte vir so 'n kompleks het ontstaan om die leerders wat bedags 'n bord kos by die skool kry, te akkommodeer. Hierdie leerders moes soms in baie ongunstige weersomstandighede, op die stoepie met hul kos staan. Nu kan meer as 250 leerders rustig by 'n tafel sit en hul etes geniet.

Die kompleks maak ook voorsiening vir gebruik by skoolfunksies waar kos voorberei kan word. Daar word reeds aan die behoefte gewerk om die hele kompleks later uit te brei om leerders op te lei in die restaurantwese. Fondse hiervoor is reeds uit die VK gekry.

Die kompleks het ook ruimte vir die installering van stowes en oonde asook koelkamerfasiliteite. Ouers, onderwysers en die gemeenskap werk hard om hierdie droom te verwesenlik.

Mense wat die geleentheid bygewoon het, het opgemerk dat hierdie gebou 'n sprekende voorbeeld is van wat met min geld vermag kan word. Met hierdie kompleks kan die skool nog beter diens lewer aan sy gemeenskap.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11 safety and quality information in different formats. The recent food safety incidents (e.g. Mexican tomatoes in the US) and new tougher rules about traceability in the US have caused retailers to demand sound and relevant information. Unfortunately it seems each retailer is adopting different IT solutions which require different inputs. The ability for growers, packhouses and exporters to respond to these demands depends largely on what type of IT system they are running, but through CGA’s involvement in the Electron Data Interchange (EDI) project it is hoped standardized data formats can be found. The EDI project is tracking the discussions at IFPS and other produce standard organizations to ensure harmonization.

A fourth Issue highlighted in the Food Safety Committee is for IFPS members to begin comparing and harmonizing standards among ourselves. This project has only just got going but the idea is to find an approach whereby the IFPS members at least are able to recognize opportunities and challenges in food safety harmonization and implement common standards whenever possible. This is a considerable amount of work and may take some time yet.

Fruit SA’s involvement in IFPS has only been recent but clearly if IFPS is able to address any of the issues on the Register this would be valuable for Fruit SA members (CGA, HortGro, Subtrops, SATI and FPEF). The harmonization momentum will be kept up at the next IFPS Spring meeting to be held in London on the 21st June 2010.