

Food Safety Certification, Food Fraud & the Need to Certify Authenticity

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We have all seen the food certification information that appears on virtually every type of packaged food. They (certifications) are numerous, imposing and informative. Does anybody question what goes into the various certifications we see on food labels, especially those that signify that food is safe? How do companies earn or qualify to be able to put certifications on their labels? In most cases, we have no idea. We trust the certification bodies to ensure that the companies they certify are deserving of the certification. But once a certification body is accredited, how rigorous is the accreditation body in its oversight of the certification body?

Our experience has shown that accreditation bodies have minimally invasive re-qualification criteria. They typically require a payment and a cursory review, but nothing more. In truth, the entire certification process is rather formulaic. Passionless auditors travel to food production facilities around the world to check off boxes in “one size fits all” audit questionnaires. Rarely are the auditors asked the deeper, more relevant questions that would point to the “real goods” on food safety, and

even more rarely are they qualified to look beyond the questionnaire to observe what is truly going on. Food safety certifications have sadly become somewhat diluted by large audit and certification firms, which in my opinion represent a segment of the food industry that is more concerned with volume than it is with safety.

It’s interesting to note that in a field which is heavily overpopulated, there has been one large gap in food certification and that lies in the area of authenticity. How do we know if a food product is authentic and not a counterfeit good that represents an enormous abuse of the consumer’s trust? What if it is not authentic? What if the product is entirely counterfeit, or what if authentic ingredients have been replaced with lower quality and lower cost ingredients over which there are no food safety controls? As an experienced investigator of the origin and quality of countless kinds of food from around the world, I’ve found that the manufacture, distribution and sale of inauthentic or counterfeit items is not only frequent, but it happens with staggering regularity. What health risks are posed by the sale of inauthentic food? The answer is that

we do not know.

In response to what I view as an outrageous and unchecked effort to scam the unsuspecting public, my company, INSCATECH, has established GenuCert, a B-to-B certification program that was designed to help the food industry deal exclusively in authentic ingredients. The GenuCert certification program was designed for businesses. It is a way for buyers to identify legitimate sellers. It also helps honest and ethical sellers highlight the quality of their products to potential buyers. Through a combination of regular undercover food fraud investigations conducted by INSCATECH, and established scientific testing conducted by expert food testing laboratories, products that bear a certification from the GenuCert family of certifications are proven to be authentic. GenuCert certifications include: GenuHoney, GenuMilk, GenuBeef, GenuOliveOil, GenuSpice, GenuMaple, GenuJuice, GenuCoffee and GenuVanilla. They signify to businesses worldwide that the ingredients bearing these certifications are authentic. GenuCert is intended to become the benchmark certification for those in sales and procurement to work together trade only in the highest quality, safest and authentic ingredients.

Many consumers assume that the food they purchase is safe for consumption, and sometimes it is. But those of us who are passionate about quality and safety in the marketplace know that there is much work that still needs to be done in order to ensure that the global food supply chain is safe, and built on the kind of integrity that supports the health of humankind. I invite anyone who feels similarly motivated to ask more questions and commit to making the kind of changes that will move us forward, one step at a time.

