

Comment

Food security – Cultivating a responsible tomorrow

As the New Year approaches, we leave 2008 with lingering tensions and concern about an uncertain future. A global financial crisis is having a grim impact on the level of economic activity. In parallel, global warming induced by human activities poses a continual threat to food and water security. Currently, the relative rarefaction of raw materials and the volatility of their prices, especially of food products, are having an aggravated impact on the poorest populations and least developed countries. Already there are over 862 million undernourished people in the world. If we do not act now, climate change could push this number even higher.

Thus we start 2009 with great expectations that this state of affairs may be addressed. In this context, ISO can be a source of progress and hope for the future, by providing stakeholders with tools to meet these challenges through International Standards that respectively address safety, quality and sustainability issues.

In the food sector, the implementation of ISO's numerous standards and guides aimed at ensuring the safety and quality of food products can increase consumer confidence and facilitate international trade, providing a much needed boost to the global economy in troubled times. ISO standards can help maximize and optimize food production, which can in turn reduce losses throughout the chain, leading to an increased availability of food, and a decrease in costs.

ISO has developed a number of standards which can contribute to sustainable food production, e.g. by helping to quantify and mitigate climate change. Such standards can limit the environmental impact of food production activities by promoting improved management (e.g. in areas such as aquaculture), and by opti-

mizing production techniques using the latest state-of-the-art technology (e.g. mechanics and electronics).

The need to address the above-mentioned issues and how ISO can contribute, were some of the challenges discussed at the last plenary of ISO/TC 34, *Food products*, which took place in October 2008 in Paris, France. As the main ISO technical committee developing standards for food products in areas as varied as traceability and sensory analysis, ISO/TC 34 has an important role to play.

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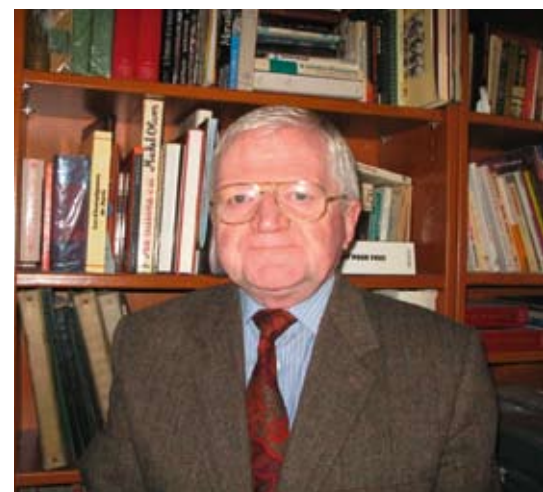
Already, ISO/TC 34 has produced hundreds of standards on food issues. However, in today's rapidly changing world, the committee must continuously adapt to meet the challenges of new business environments, as well as to involve new stakeholders and emerging players in the food chain. The 2008 plenary provided new steps in this direction: revising the scope of the committee, as well as its business plan.

ISO/TC 34 is encouraging the involvement of players outside ISO with a view to fostering cooperation and ensuring a harmonized approach. With that objective, ISO/TC 34 invited representatives from the Codex Alimentarius Commission and the Global Food Safety Initiative to present their activities at the 2008 plenary.

Of course, these are just a few examples and much remains to be done, which presents an exciting prospect for 2009 and the years to follow. We thus leave 2008 not immersed in the chaos and gloom of what the future forecasts,

but looking ahead aware that much has been accomplished and that the seeds of cooperation have been planted.

Today's challenges constitute an opportunity for building a stronger tomorrow. A new future awaits: one where resources will not be wasted, food issues will not be neglected and sustainable development with its three pillars – environmental, societal and economic – is everyone's goal. ISO/TC 34 is proud of the contribution that ISO can make here.



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