

Taylor recommends making food safety culture ‘deeply personal’

By Joan Murphy

Published: October 12, 2016 07:13 PM

Companies looking to embrace food safety culture should take a look at the California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement’s (LGMA) partnership with a group representing foodborne illness victims, said Mike Taylor, FDA’s former food safety chief, during an Oct. 11 webinar.

FDA started spreading the word years ago that inspections under the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) would take into account a company’s food safety culture. And a Justice Department **official** said recently a lack of food safety culture comes into play when investigating a company for criminal violations.

Taylor, now a senior fellow at Freeman Consulting, was among the speakers at a FoodSafetyTech -sponsored webinar, *Food Safety Culture: We Know Why, Let’s Talk About How*.

Food companies have made progress in embracing a food safety culture, he said, and that is likely to continue as consumers look for sustainability and other values when it comes to their food, while the advent of whole genome sequencing makes it easier to trace food contamination.

Taylor spoke about the need for industry leaders to make food safety “a very personal issue.”

An example of the way food companies can work differently, Taylor said, is a joint effort by LGMA and STOP Foodborne Illness to develop a training video LGMA wanted to use for employees to instill the need to prevent illnesses.

LGMA invited [Rylee Gustafson](#) and [Lauren Bush](#), two young people affected by the 2006 spinach outbreak, out to the field and videotaped their stories about the impact the illness had on their lives.

“It’s remembering the ‘why’ that I think will lead the way in which we continue to drive improvement of food safety and meet the expectations of consumers, and create a culture that really does understand food safety as a deeply personal issue, not just for consumers but for the people who produce the food,” Taylor said.

The Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) will not achieve its prevention focus if companies don’t have a food safety culture, he added.

Frank Yiannas, vice president of food safety at Walmart, said he’s never seen a successful food safety culture created from the bottom up. Leaders have to embrace it and everyone needs to do their part, and food scientists should study behavioral science and organizational culture to be successful.

It’s critical front-line supervisors buy into the food safety culture because they are viewed as influential by plant employees, said Deirdre Schlunegger, CEO of STOP Foodborne Illness.

Taylor said he’s hoping companies can share their best practices when it comes to changing the food safety culture, especially in cases where the top leaders “have not gotten there yet.”