

The Beef Industry Food Safety Council (BIFSCo)



BEEF SAFETY
HANDBOOK

The History of BIFSCo

Following a major *E. coli* O157:H7 outbreak in ground beef in 1993, the beef industry responded by founding the first-ever Blue Ribbon Task Force to focus on improving beef safety. The task force was charged with developing a “blueprint” for the industry and published its plan for controlling the pathogen in 1995.

In 1997, the Beef Industry Food Safety Council (BIFSCo) was formed to foster collaboration among all sectors of the beef industry, including farmers and ranchers, packers, processors, restaurants and retailers. BIFSCo was founded on the principle that food safety is a noncompetitive issue, and the organization encourages open, frank discussion among companies who have the common goal of advancing beef safety.

Since its inception, BIFSCo has developed best practices documents that serve as a definitive guide for enhancing the safety of beef at each stage of the beef production process. These documents are continually updated to keep up with the latest scientific developments in food safety. There are specialized best practices documents available free of charge for farmers and ranchers, slaughter operations, beef processing operations, restaurants and retailers.

Additionally, BIFSCo has hosted the annual Beef Industry Safety Summit since 2003 to facilitate discussion among the entire beef supply chain to chart a course for future beef safety efforts, refine industry-wide best practices and share the latest research findings.

“ The beef industry’s noncompetitive approach to food safety is truly unique; I’ve never seen a comparable model in any other food industry. What we’ve been able to accomplish in the beef sector is to break down the veil of secrecy between companies and share information on how we all can produce the safest product possible. ”

- Tim Biela, VP of Food Safety & Quality Assurance, American Food Service and BIFSCo member

BIFSCo’s Role in Beef Safety

Through BIFSCo, beef producers and others in the production chain collaborate and develop new ways of ensuring the safest beef supply possible. BIFSCo supports the industry’s commitment to safety by:

- Providing a forum for the beef industry to assess, discuss and identify solutions to beef safety challenges;
- Authoring, updating and distributing beef safety education and training materials customized for each sector of the beef industry;
- Monitoring emerging beef safety threats;
- Keeping the industry up-to-date on the latest beef safety research developments; and
- Identifying knowledge gaps to be addressed by future research.

Research and experience has shown that the best way to combat foodborne pathogens is with the consistent application of validated safety programs. BIFSCo is committed to the ongoing validation and optimization of the intervention technologies already in place to ensure their maximum effectiveness in combating foodborne pathogens.

An additional area of focus is to facilitate the development and application of new safety intervention technologies. For example, one of the most rapidly developing areas of safety science is in identifying steps that can be taken on the farm, including vaccines and feed additives that reduce or eliminate *E. coli* O157:H7 bacteria in cattle. Such solutions hold great potential to enhance the effectiveness of the multiple safeguards already in place at processing plants. BIFSCo will be working to identify how these new interventions can be implemented in the beef production process as they become available.

BIFSCo At Work

One of the ways the beef industry identifies potential food contamination is through the testing of raw materials for the presence of pathogens like *E. coli* O157:H7 and *Salmonella*. Therefore, it’s beneficial for the industry to use a standardized, validated method to collect samples for testing, which is known as “N=60 sampling.” In 2008, BIFSCo authored an instructional video that provided clear visual guidelines on how to properly use the N=60 sampling method. The video, distributed to 675 federally-inspected beef processing operations in the country, has become the standard for both industry food safety professionals and government inspectors.



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