

## Last Minute Tips for FSMA Compliance

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With stronger industry standards, like the FDA's Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) in place, food manufacturers are beginning to feel more pressure as it relates to their food safety and preventative processes.

The FDA now has seven final rules to achieve preventive and risk-based standards surrounding everything touching the food supply chain, including packing, processing and distribution of foods. The final rule for Preventative Controls for Human Food was published September 2015, and the compliance date for some businesses begins in September 2016. Businesses with less than 500 employees have a September 2017 compliance date. Although these regulations are absolutely vital to ensure the safety of consumers, managing the necessary changes as a manufacturer is challenging. If you find you are one of the many companies struggling to navigate the road to FSMA compliance, the following are tactics to focus on ahead of the final deadline.

### **Assess Your Preventative Processes**

Most process breakdowns that occur within the food manufacturing supply chain are caused by a lack of transparency into operational mechanics and performance.

Initiating a full process audit — analyzing what’s working and what’s not with regards to food preparation, packaging and transportation — can help you gain greater visibility and heighten your awareness of vulnerable areas before they become hazardous.

By identifying the risk areas within your food manufacturing processes, you can work to correct them and realistically establish a plan that’s better suited for prevention and fast action. Everything from testing, training and communication can improve when you have a strategy in place that addresses issues head on.

### **Use Technology to Better Manage Recalls and Prevention**

Beyond prevention, FSMA greatly impacts recall management. Under new regulations the FDA can issue a mandatory recall that overrides a food company’s decision to voluntarily recall its products. By and large, this type of action by the FDA will be reserved for extreme cases, but even so, it’s important to be prepared in the event of a mandatory recall.

Timeliness is certainly of the essence when it comes to recall management — food manufacturers need to have an understanding of how the food safety concern occurred and where it spread. Therefore, implementing technology like an enterprise resource planning (ERP) system with full backward and forward lot trace/recall capabilities, is key. These platforms are built to carry out traceability with speed and accuracy; they automate and support the processes you and your team have put in place.

Although implementing an ERP platform can be a time investment — the industry average for set up is 15 to 18 months with some systems turning around a shorter delivery time — the results make the front-end work well worth it.

### **Certify Your Commitment to Compliance**

In addition to technology, certification through programs like the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) and Safe Quality Food (SQF) can also better prime your organization for initial and ongoing FSMA compliance. These certifications, though not mandated by law, were designed with the same principles as FSMA, making them terrific guideposts for food manufacturers to use as a means of self-policing compliance. SQF certification, for example, asks for the similar type of documentation needed to meet FSMA requirements — meaning, those food manufacturers that are already SQF certified have a much greater advantage when it comes to FSMA compliance than those that have opted not to consider it.

Beyond greater preparedness, food manufacturers that achieved GFSI and SQF certifications are viewed as trusted within the industry and among customers. These recognitions allow businesses to differentiate themselves from competitors and prove to customers their levels of dedication to food safety.

### **Taking Action Today**

It's not too late to take action in order to better prepare for FSMA compliance. Being proactive in full proofing your food manufacturing processes, eliminating inefficiencies and manual risk with technology and certifying your commitment to quality are all tactics you can pursue to manage it.