

Food Safety Is Teamwork



By Salah Hanieh

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ome people think that food safety is only linked to restaurants, supermarkets, and the food industry. In reality, food safety is an important issue that concerns the government, private sector, consumers, and food manufacturers.

The food supply chain starts with the farm because quality is contingent upon the protection of this commodity during the transfer from the farm to the consumer. This must take into consideration the temperature, means of transportation, storage, and presentation as well as the separation of raw from cooked food. All these safety procedures apply not only to factories and restaurants but also to our home kitchen. When these procedures are part of an awareness program, all parties can rely on each other for their correct implementation and monitoring. Also, they can begin to ask questions and initiate discussions regarding controls, standards, and consumer rights, as they engage in efforts to get and stay on the right track.

So, what do we mean by food safety? It means the absence of any kind of threat to food that affects the consumer health. For this purpose, the international community has established an international day for food safety under the slogan “No food security without food safety.” The goal is to ensure the provision of safe and healthy food for every citizen, which includes responsible production and consumption. This issue is also one of the United Nations development goals for 2030.

In terms of control and standards, it does not make a difference whether we deal with small or large food producers because everyone should follow the same processes, which includes using labels that list contents and expiration dates. Also, all parties need to maintain a clean, sanitized, and healthy environment in their factory or kitchen, such as separating raw meat,

poultry, and fish from the rest of the food; keeping food safe at a low temperature; and using clean water.

In Palestine, people are generally concerned about food safety and try to be involved in civil society organizations such as the Palestinian Society for Consumer Protection, Food Processing Alumni Association, and others to raise awareness and lobby for legislation to enhance and control food safety. Because Palestinians do not control their own borders, they are at a disadvantage when it comes to managing the movement of goods that enter the Palestinian market. The lack of border control leads to the presence



customers. During food preparation, serving, and even eating, food contamination can occur for various reasons. It is the duty of restaurateurs to prevent risks that cause food contamination. Food



of products that are not necessarily safe for consumption. Production and packaging are conducted inside Israeli areas, and products are smuggled into the Palestinian markets. To protect the Palestinian consumer, the Palestinian Authority sometimes bans the entry of Israeli products into Palestine, as they did with some Israeli dairy products a few months ago.

Restaurants also play a vital role in food safety and need to ensure the safety and well-being of their

contamination normally occurs due to exposure to high temperatures, lack of hygiene, and unhealthy habits of those who work with the food. Other factors and conditions that contribute to food contamination in restaurants include the inadequacy of the premises itself, the lack of appropriate infrastructure in the restaurant, and of course the lack of hygiene inside the kitchen.

Validity, which is the period of time between the date of production and the expiry date, should be



stamped on any food commodity. It is determined according to criteria based on the product's chemical composition, physical properties, microbial load, water content, sensitivity to spoilage factors, and nature of packaging, as well as the ability to preserve the material contained within it in terms of storage, handling, and transportation. Shelf life varies according to the commodity. Obviously, some products, such as milk and its derivatives, can only be kept for a few days. The validity of other commodities, such as drinks, can extend for months, while the shelf-life of canned, dried, and frozen foods can extend for years.

Consumers play a major role in protecting themselves by checking the expiration date of the commodity, buying from known sources, knowing their rights in being provided safe products, and awareness of their right to complain. In fact, consumer complaints can help the Consumer Protection Society to defend the consumer.

Ensuring food safety no doubt involves teamwork where

consumers, restaurants, the government, and nongovernmental parties such as the Consumer Protection Society work together to put safe products on the Palestinian market. Universities, too, play an important role in developing guidelines and being part of groups that increase awareness of food safety among Palestinian society. Chambers of commerce and specialized industry associations play an essential role in ensuring food safety and increasing awareness among their members,

reminding them of their social responsibility towards their society.

Strict penalties should be imposed on people who manipulate food safety and put the life of Palestinian consumers at risk. Four years ago, the Palestinian government developed a national strategy for food safety, working with the main stakeholders, including the Consumer Protection Society. The strategy took into consideration all obstacles that Palestine faces regarding food safety, proposed ways to overcome these obstacles, and included recommendations to establish a Palestinian food council. To date, the council has not been established.

It is crucial that we know the strengths and weaknesses of our food safety system. We must develop manuals that guide restaurant owners and the people involved in food safety in dealing with all food items and help them provide safe food for Palestinian consumers. There is an urgent need to review the food safety strategy and develop mechanisms and procedures to implement this strategy.

The way we transfer our food from the farm to the consumer is vital for the safety and freshness of food, whether in homes, factories, or restaurants. It is very important to try to reduce the distance over which food is transferred while all necessary measures must be taken in terms of storage and temperature. Thus, we should encourage the consumption of local products.

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