

HQTS Interviews Ron McNaughton about Food Fraud and Food Safety and How Food Companies Can Stay Compliant

Food is amongst the most globally traded commodity with an increasing trend as the world's population grows. The global food supply chain will only continue to increase in scale and complexity; therefore, the production and distribution of food and food safety compliance has never been more crucial.

The following interview with 'Ron McNaughton' from the '[Scottish Food Crime and Incidents Unit](#)' discusses the subject of food safety in detail to help explain and overview the current picture and what to watch out for in the industry.

HQTS: What are the most common counterfeit Foods and how to identify them?

Ron: Firstly, we should look at how foods can be counterfeit by reducing the quality of products or wrong substitutions. It could be a misinterpretation of expiry dates, theft, or an unlawful process.

So, therefore, in the UK, we always try to sell high-quality products and ensure they are never counterfeit. But when dealing with global supply chains, you need to ensure safety to ensure they do not lack certain ingredients or other products that have replaced them. The most common counterfeit foods are; olive oil, cod liver oil, fish, high processed foods, honey, saffron, sage, and other herbs and alcohol. All are at the highest risk of being copied.

In 2021, twenty-six people have died from counterfeit alcohol products that have contained methanal and unfortunately these people care about making money and not about the safety of people. We have also seen apple juice, orange juice, and tea being copied as they are easy to counterfeit due to financial gain.

Identifying counterfeit food items can be very difficult. Still, consumers can read the labels carefully and consider the value for money factor and if something doesn't seem right, they should report it to the authorities.

HQTS: Does the pandemic situation increase more shady food business practices due to food supply chain disruptions? Do you think these issues will be reflected in new regulations or policies?

Ron: The pandemic has impacted fraud and criminality due to financial uncertainty and pressures on businesses now. Also, regulations and [inspections](#) have become more relaxed due to security personnel being too busy with the pandemic checks. We are still unsure when the pandemic will end and this is increasing food delivery companies which is causing more vulnerability to substitutes or counterfeit foods.

It will be hard to access the full scale of the situation until the pandemic ends. Still, new guidelines are coming out regularly for restaurants and food businesses, but it will take a while for the full, accurate data to pull through.

HQTS: Which party should be responsible for maintaining food safety standards and procedures? How can companies ensure their suppliers are not committing food fraud?

Ron: In my opinion, the businesses are responsible for food safety – consumers need to trust what they are eating. Therefore, companies need to have trust in their supply chain, but we all have a part to play, including; regulators, industries, and consumers – we all need to work together to build awareness against food fraud and work with enforcement agencies if we are suspicious about certain food products.

[Food safety](#) and food authenticity are vital, and they should be passed through the whole supply chain in a correct, safe, and efficient manner. And each step should be recorded, and all the correct steps should be taken in the right order. We all need to do what we can to prevent food fraud and counterfeit food items, understanding acceptable and unacceptable.

HQTS: Blockchain is an emerging technology that helps to track the transparency of the food value chain. Do you think this technology will be a key trend in the following few years, considering challenges related to "collect right data" and "which platform to use"? Are manufacturers ready to adopt this technology?

Ron: A blockchain is a key tool in ensuring the food value chain's transparency and can help prevent food fraud. Using old systems can make companies vulnerable to cyber-attacks or security threats; anything of value can be tracked and found online. The more accurate the blockchain method, the better – it helps provide transparency of the [food value chain](#), but this could be an issue for some businesses as they may not be able to afford this technology, and consumers may worry about their data being protected.

I think manufacturers should approach this process and ensure it is safe and solid, but there is still a long way to go to ensure Blockchain is completely secure and accurate, but it could recolonize the way we do transactions – but it's already started, and we are moving fast. But for me, we need more information before I can say.

HQTS: What is the role of Quality Control or Quality Assurance in preventing food fraud and food supply chain sustainability?

Ron: Regulators and law enforcement can ensure food fraud is being curbed, but we should also focus on prevention, food safety, and product recall – this helps to maintain compliance and quality control and quality assurance roles help to make this more secure and accurate, and they can help to provide the right information and the right time, to the right people and it helps to make sure there are less damaging product recalls. This helps to prevent, secure quality control, and they are both equally important to ensure we help the food fraud industry.

About HQTS

HQTS is a third party inspection company that can provide a range of audits including food hygiene, cold chain management, hazard analysis critical control point and manufacturing process supervision. With over 25 years of experience in quality assurance, HQTS is ready to help your online business build a robust quality assurance process. Our many service locations are prepared to be your one-stop-shop for your food inspection needs, including, production monitoring, pre-shipment and sorting inspections and everything in between.