

Editorial - Diversity and conformity

As we publish this first issue of the *Quality Assurance and Safety of Crops & Foods* in 2014 we are once again reminded of the diversity of our chosen field of scientific study. This issue highlights both the diversity of crops and raw materials that humankind has available for food, and the diversity of products that we make from those raw materials. The range of raw materials discussed in this issue also illustrates the ingenuity of humankind in developing new food products using not only the so-called 'staple' raw materials, but also in showing the potential for less well-known materials. Increasingly the world of food production is looking to 'add value' to the products reaching consumers. That added value may be to deliver very specific nutritionally related benefits which may be lacking from some diets, or it may be to deliver very specific health-related benefits which are associated with the special characteristics of some less well-known raw materials.

Identifying new opportunities for less well-known raw materials takes us only part way along the food chain. Research and analysis can readily identify the 'special' nature of many raw materials but food technology has to be able to convert those special characters into products which consumers will buy and enjoy eating. The translation from research study to food product asks many new questions of our chosen raw materials. Such questions include, how will their special properties survive food processing environments such as heating and baking, and are there raw material interactions that will enhance or reduce the identified special properties? These are vital questions not often considered at the research level but if we are to get best value from our research efforts, food technologists charged with converting raw material to food need as much information as possible. For this reason those of us involved with basic research should always be mindful that for our research to have the greatest value it needs to move towards applications. When writing their research papers for publication in our journal we hope that all authors will bear this in mind.

In the background to new product development there are many issues which have to be considered, including the availability and sustainability of our chosen raw materials. These have become increasingly important issues against the back-drop of climate change and our ability to feed the increasingly large number of people who inhabit our planet. Increasing the demand for what has previously been a 'local' product can have unintended consequences for production and lead to scarcity of the very raw material of interest. While this may be good for the local economy in terms of export, it may put pressure on the local environment through the increased requirement for land for cultivation, sometimes at the expense of the 'natural' environment. These can be weighty matters to debate and deal with and not usually within the scope of a research study. Nevertheless debate them we must to increase food security (availability) for all while limiting the impact of agricultural practices on our environment.

In a global market-place the needs for food safety are paramount, not least because raw materials and even prepared foods travel greater distances than before. The need to meet international standards for food safety and quality is critical for successful production and trading. Increasingly the responsibility for 'safe' food is being pushed back to the primary producers who sometimes for the first time, find themselves having to conform to a set of international standards. Fortunately there are many sets of standards which identify the procedures which should be followed. However, it is not always the case that the 'risks' are clearly identified and understood, and so continued investigation and vigilance are called for; in this context QAS has an important role to play in highlighting food safety issues.

Finally, we on the editorial team would like to thank the many contributors to QAS over the past years. Through your research efforts and publications, QAS continues to develop into a respected international journal and our impact factor continues to rise. We welcome your continuing support and look forward to reading the results of your future studies.

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