

Improving South Africa's food security

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South Africa ranked 69 out of 113 countries in the recently released 2020 Global Food Security Index (GFSI) report after being ranked two places higher last year. The country's top score was 72.4% for food quality and safety, followed by affordability at 63.1%, availability at 49.5% and the lowest score at 49% for natural resources and resilience.



Kate HoltAusAID via [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Positively, South Africa ranked number one out of the sub-Saharan countries when it came to the quality and safety of food. This is incredibly important to McCain with its food being harvested locally at its peak and then snap-frozen within hours to maintain freshness and lock in nutrients.

Although freezing is a safe way of preventing bacterial growth and enzyme activity, there are still challenges that need to be addressed in the industry to ensure the utmost food safety and quality. One hurdle is temperature abuse, which happens when there are breaks in the cold chain resulting in the product undergoing cycles of defrosting and refreezing, leading to quality deterioration and in extreme abuse, mouldy products.

To produce safe food products, robust food safety programmes that ensure compliance with physical, chemical and microbiological factors are vital. Along with this, it is essential to establish temperature abuse projects to understand, detect and mitigate the risks related to this. Optical sorting and defect detection equipment can also identify foreign material and remove it from the product.

Stakeholder food safety responsibility

The Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) defines a food safety culture as "shared values, beliefs and norms that affect mindset and behaviour towards food safety in, across and throughout an organisation". As such, it is important to emphasise that all stakeholders are responsible for food safety; this must underpin the culture of any food company.

Therefore, staff should be regularly trained and all parties in the supply chain need to ensure compliance. This is why McCain, for example, conducts unannounced independent third-party inspections of facilities as well as audits of food safety and quality management systems.

When it comes to affordability and availability, we know that the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated hunger and malnutrition in the country. With this in mind, it is crucial for the public and private sector to work together to minimise the plight of those suffering. One way to do this is by minimising food waste and establishing projects to deliver nutritious food to those that need it.

None of this would be possible without our thriving agricultural industry in South Africa. It is important to note, however, that planet-friendly farming practices are key to ensure that our biodiversity is protected and we can continue to grow and produce food for the country.

Improving sustainability practices

It is, therefore, alarming that the index score South Africa below 50% for natural resources and resilience. At McCain, for example, we procure our products from over 100 farmers who plant over 4,500 hectares of potatoes annually. As such, we have made it our mission to improve our sustainability practices; clear goals have been set, which need to be achieved by 2025.

However, like food safety, protecting our environment is everyone's responsibility. This is why we work with our growers to implement sustainable regenerative agriculture practices as well as transferring technologies such as integrated pest management, decision support systems for disease management, soil management, seed cutters and storage practices.

If we are to improve our ranking in next year's GFSI report, it is key for our industry to band together and further improve food safety and quality compliance, establish ways to end hunger in our country and commit to sustainable agriculture practices to ensure that we can provide for future generations.

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