



## UNVEILING HIDDEN HAZARDS: ADDRESSING FOOD ALLERGENS IN THE FOOD INDUSTRY

*In the bustling world of food production and consumption, there exists a silent danger that affects millions: food allergens. While for many, a meal is a delight but for those having food allergies, it can be an unsafe journey lurking with danger. Lately, awareness on food allergies have surged, triggering authorities and industry stakeholders to initiate action.*

### Food allergens and symptoms

Foods which cause an allergic reaction in the body are known as food allergens. These allergens trigger an immune response whereby the immune system mistakenly identifies the protein in food as a threat leading to the production of antibodies which release histamine and other chemicals causing allergic symptoms.

Food allergy symptoms can vary widely in their severity. They may include skin reactions, gastrointestinal symptoms, respiratory problems as well as anaphylaxis, a severe life-threatening allergic reaction.

### The challenges of allergen management

For food industries, ensuring the safety of allergic consumers while safeguarding product safety and quality presents a comprehensive challenge. Even trace amounts of allergens can trigger reactions in sensitive individuals, requiring stringent actions to prevent contamination.

Furthermore, the diversity of allergenic ingredients used in food industry intensifies the challenge. While any food can potentially generate an allergic response, some particular foods are more commonly concerned than others.

These include cereals containing gluten, crustaceans, eggs, fish, peanuts, soybeans, milk, tree nuts, celery, mustard, sesame seed, lupin, molluscs and sulphur dioxide and sulphites at a concentration of more than 10 ppm.

### Regulatory landscape

Acknowledging the significance of allergen management, regulatory agencies globally have implemented standards and labelling requirements to protect allergic consumers.

In the United States, the Food Allergen Labelling and Consumer Protection Act mandates clear labelling of major food allergens on packaged foods sold in the country.

Likewise, the European Union's Food Information for Consumers Regulation stipulates that food labels must highlight allergenic ingredients.

Moreover, in Mauritius the food industry is flourishing, and the businesses are emphasizing on allergen management so as to be in accordance with regulatory requirements and to ensure consumer safety.

The Ministry of Health and Wellness of Mauritius, as well as other stakeholders like FAREI and MSB, are working to raise awareness of food allergies and the importance of proper allergen management in the food industry through public awareness campaigns and educational initiatives.

### Innovative solutions

In response to these challenges, the food sector is applying novel strategies to manage allergens effectively and efficiently. The approaches include allergen risk management, allergen free facilities, ingredient substitution, advance labelling technologies, employee training and education and consumer engagement.

### Some tips for staying safe from food allergies:

- Know the common allergens
- Read labels diligently
- Look for allergen information
- Beware of hidden allergens
- Communicate with food businesses
- Avoid cross contamination

- Carry medication
- Be cautious with packaged and processed foods
- Educate friends and family
- Stay informed

### Navigating food allergens in food industry

Navigating food allergens in the food industry is a complex endeavour. By embracing rigorous allergen management practices, adhering to regulatory requirements and embracing innovation, food manufacturer can meet the needs of allergic individuals while delivering safety, high quality products to the market. As awareness of food allergies continues to grow, so too will the imperative for proactive measures to address this critical issue in the food industry.



*Food allergens by Jayshikha Jaygobin Comaren*

### Services offered by Change ACT Ltd

Change ACT provides customized training and consulting services to companies aiming for continual improvement. Training on allergen management is available for staff members at all levels in the hierarchy. The forte of Change ACT is that it adapts its training to the context and nature of the business undertaken by the organizations.

Change ACT provides short courses ranging from a 2-hour course to a full-day training on allergen management.

*Training is not an expense, but an investment in human capital.*

*- Roy H. Williams*