



Factory workers producing fresh fruit drinks at Blue Skies, in Nsawan District, Ghana on October 13, 2015. Photo Credit: Dominic Chavez/World Bank

FES Champions Business-Driven Approach to Food System Development

Food Enterprise Solutions (FES) aims to tackle food safety issues in emerging economies, to the benefit of growing food businesses, consumers, and food systems as a whole.

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The U.S. Government's Global Hunger & Food Security Initiative



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

By Abigail R. Stevenson, with foreword by GAP Report team

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The World Health Organization estimates 1 in 10 people globally fall ill every year from eating contaminated food and 420,000 die as a result.

Tackling food safety issues requires a holistic and collaborative approach across the food value chain, [including considering a broad range of processes](#), from on-farm production, to processing, distribution, storage, selection, preparation, and consumption.

Food Enterprise Solutions (FES) aims to improve food safety by providing targeted investment, access to capacity building, and training services on adopting safer food measures across these processes to growing food businesses in emerging economies.

Investing in and supporting small and medium-scale enterprises in the food value chain is critical for efforts to increase the sustainability and safety of food produced and sold in these vibrant and growing parts of the food value chain.

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Food Enterprise Solutions (FES) is bringing more attention to the role that business plays in the food supply chain with its Business Drivers for Food Safety (BD4FS) program, launched in collaboration with USAID's Feed the Future program in June 2019.

"FES believes that solutions to the challenges of malnutrition, food loss, foodborne illness are inherent in the vital role of businesses that connect producers to consumers in emerging economies," said Founder and President of FES, Russ Webster.

The BD4FS concept was developed as a joint effort between Webster, Director of Programs Roberta Lauretti Bernhard and Director of Research and Learning Dr. Thoric Nils Cederstrom. Based on their collective experience with food system businesses, the FES team identified several critical gaps that needed to be addressed. **The most glaring gaps were those surrounding access to capacity building and training services, access to affordable financing and a supportive policy environment.**



The BD4FS approach aims to engage with small-to-medium sized growing food businesses to jointly identify feasible actions to make food safer. **By strengthening the capacities of these food businesses, the goal is for them to become agents for change for the improvement of food safety, reduction of malnutrition, hunger, food loss and lessen the incidence of foodborne pathogens and foodborne disease.**

“Business Drivers for Food Safety, it’s not about the government. It’s not about humanitarian response, it’s about market-based solutions to safer food,” Cederstrom said.

It is estimated that 80% of food consumed in Africa is purchased via private businesses, with about 64% of that total sourced from small-to-medium sized enterprises, according to AGRA’s [Africa Agriculture Status Report](#) released in September, 2019. The report also found that consumers have transformed how they consume food, as only about 20% of the food consumed on the continent stems from conventional farming for subsistence. The remaining sum of food is managed by small-to-medium sized businesses that purchase food from smallholder farmers who then process, transport and sell it to consumers.

BD4FS was co-created by FES and USAID to help these innovative and growing food businesses adopt safer food measures. This includes all of the elements involved such as food handling, processing, distribution and storage practices. Ultimately, the approach spans far beyond just food safety and institutes a food system that is inclusive of consumers and key stakeholders as well.

However, adopting better food handling doesn’t have to come at the expense of the company’s bottom line or the consumers.

“We are working with food businesses to operationalize and incentivize food safety in a way that improves their profits while delivering better food choices to the local market,” Webster said.

In 2018, the [World Bank](#) estimated that the cost of treating foodborne illnesses was approximately \$15 billion, and the total productivity loss associated with foodborne related diseases cost about \$95.2 billion per year in low and middle income countries.

In March, FES started the first country-based BD4FS program in Senegal, which began with a Food Safety Situational Analysis (FSSA) that was conducted for four months to carefully determine the current food systems in place and key issues to be addressed. Additionally, the FSSA included interviews with members of the private business sector in order to understand what challenges businesses face when it comes to food safety practices.

The next step is to identify groups of businesses in order to learn about challenges faced and co-develop and co-design approaches to improve the adoption of food safety.


“We trust in our working relationship with businesses or consumers or farmers. We try hard to listen so that they are shaping the work that we do just as much as we are,” Webster said. In addition to Senegal, the program is currently underway in Nepal with plans to expand into both Ethiopia and Rwanda.

An ideal culture of food safety includes commitment from producers, processors and distributors to delivering food that is safe, which includes an adoption of technologies, practices and standards that will support this ideal, Cederstrom said. This also underpins an understanding that the implementation of these systems is good for business.

“You’re de-risking your business by building in your own safety net, and with food safety ... you’re de-risking your business plan by building it in, and you’re potentially increasing your profit by it,” Bernhard said.

Leveraging the existing knowledge of how to work with local businesses and supply chains, FES also plans to team up with emerging global food companies interested in expanding their markets and supply chains. This will allow the companies to enter countries that FES is familiar with to help them establish a presence, create employment and produce nutritious foods.

FES also has interest in recruiting private investors to bring attention to local food enterprises and businesses to assist with financing and invest in their growth.

One way to accomplish this, according to Webster, is with a blended financial approach that includes both a food safety accelerator and a fund management partner. The accelerator would identify the businesses that seem poised for growth and provide the technical training, business plan development and consultations to prepare them fo 

injection of capital from the fund management partner.

In this blended approach, both the food safety accelerator and the fund would collaborate to assist the businesses grow and improve their operations, as well as food safety practices. FES would use its on-the-ground knowledge to provide technical assistance within the accelerator.

Ultimately, this blended approach to food systems could transform how growing some businesses operate in emerging economies. And in the end, food systems impact everyone's health, sustainable development, agriculture systems, food security and more – and that makes food safety the business of everyone.

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