

# Safety first

*Food safety was the focus for one of the seminars held during FHV 2007.*

Over the past few months, the mass media has reported on a number of food scares from China. But over in Vietnam, things aren't any better either. For the first seven months of 2007 alone, there were 3,140 serious cases of food poisoning reported, of which 25 resulted in death, Mr Nguyen Thanh Phong, Deputy Director of the Vietnam Food Safety and Hygiene Department was quoted as saying in an August 13, 2007 interview with the *Vietnam Economic Times*.

This represented an increase of 22.4 percent over the corresponding period in the previous year, he said in the report. The Ho Chi Minh (HMC) City administration has therefore announced tighter food safety controls to tackle the worsening situation.

Often, a major cause of food contamination is the improper handling of raw materials by workers who do not have adequate knowledge of basic hygiene during the manufacturing or processing stages, according to Dr Tran Van Ky, Head of the Vietnam Food Safety Association.

He recounted how one worker's negligence led to an outbreak in a manufacturing facility while addressing the audience on the food safety problems faced by the Vietnamese retail and manufacturing industries during the Food Safety Seminar conducted as part of the FHV 2007 Show Conference.

Education is key to prevent food poisoning from happening, Dr Ky said. He added that the emphasis on food safety should start from the management level. Regular and continuous training should be provided to all staff, and they should also be checked for proper hygiene before and during each shift.

But social development in Vietnam has yet to catch up with the country's rapid economic progress. It is therefore not unusual for businesses to cut corners to earn a quick buck. Also, small companies often have neither the resources to obtain certification from standards bodies nor the time to conduct proper training for their staff.

However, Mr Lawrence Low, a consultant and director from food safety advisory firm Gourmet Food Safety Consultancy, is optimistic that Vietnamese industry players will eventually embrace food safety reporting and certification.

During his session on HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point) implementation, which was also part of the seminar programme, he advised companies to leverage on such certification standards as a competitive advantage.

Over and Out

