

FIFTH CONSECUTIVE SAFE FOOD CONFERENCE TO FOCUS ON AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Karachi, Feb, 2006: The Fifth annual Safe Food Conference organised by English Biscuit Manufacturers and URS was held in the city on March 15, 2006. The event aimed to highlight the importance of food safety and create awareness amongst consumers and manufacturers regarding global food safety issues. This year's theme for the conference was 'Safe Food Conference 2006 – International Perspective'

Food safety has gained imperative importance in recent years with the outbreak of viral diseases that have spread across international borders and have caused widespread death and destruction. Factors such as use of contaminated water and use of sub-standard raw materials including food colours, flavours, fats and oils have also become issues of concern. According to official reports, lack of a national policy on food safety has led Pakistan into troubled waters where we are facing possible trade sanctions from many countries on export of food products under the sanitary and phyto-sanitary (SPS) agreement.

So far Japan has banned mangoes; Turkey, Iran and most of the Middle Eastern states have restricted the import of meat; the EU has banned the import of fish and Sri Lanka has restricted the import of onion from Pakistan, as these items do not meet the required safety standards for these countries. Despite the fact that plant and animal quarantine laws had been reviewed in 2000, scant attention is being paid to this vital issue that can cause huge losses in foreign exchange for Pakistan.

The fifth Safe Food Conference was a unique opportunity for manufacturers, officials and consumers to come forward and devise ways to implement the relevant laws and put Pakistan back on the trade map.

"With the advent of WTO, it has become imperative for the Pakistani food industry to gear up and address the challenges of food safety to remain successful in the marketplace and be able to compete internationally," Mubashir Ansari, GM Marketing and Sales, EBM said, "EBM is fully committed to deliver healthy and wholesome products to consumers, by having a strong quality assurance system from the stage of raw material selection to the final distribution of products to retail outlets. To fulfil

this commitment, EBM upgraded their food safety systems and achieved HACCP certification in 2002 in addition to the ISO 9000 certification already held. Thus EBM is the first biscuits manufacturer to achieve this significant milestone," he added.

Some two hundred and fifty people participated in the Conference, including prominent researchers and academia, corporate heads, manufacturers and other stakeholders. Recommendations of the Conference will be widely circulated to create widespread awareness of the Conference proceedings.