

Technology Frontier

News Bite on PolyU's Innovation

Food Hygiene Standard (FHS) Certification System The “OK” that boosts diners’ confidence in terms of food safety

There is so much information about how good or how bad a restaurant is on the internet these days and we read user reviews before visiting one. But there isn’t a system that tell diners how safely the food is processed and handled. International food safety standards are not practicable for small- to medium-scale restaurants in Hong Kong. Researchers from the Department of Applied Biology and Chemical Technology thus developed the Food Hygiene Standard (FHS) Certification System, tailor-made for local eateries. With its logo based on an OK hand gesture, FHS lets everyone know straight away which restaurants are OK to dine in.



Dr Ka-hing Wong (left) and Dr Ka-sing Leung



The logo of FHS is based on the OK hand gesture.

In the age of user-generated content, we habitually read restaurant reviews to find out others’ dining experience before booking a table. There are also foodie guidebooks that cover any food establishments from the most luxurious to the most affordable. Yet, most reviews focus on the taste, ambience, service and even the wine selection. Diners don’t have access to much information regarding one of the most important criteria in picking a restaurant – food safety. There are international standards in food safety but they either incur too much administrative cost or are deemed impracticable in Hong Kong’s context. With the support from Hong Kong Council for Testing and Certification, Dr Ka-hing Wong, Associate Professor, and Dr Ka-sing Leung, Adjunct Associate Professor,

Department of Applied Biology and Chemical Technology, led a research team to develop “FHS 001: 2013 Food Hygiene Systems – Requirements for Catering Establishments” and its certification system. Being the first food safety certification standard tailor-made for small- to medium-sized restaurants in Hong Kong, the standard is expected to reduce foodborne risks and food poisoning, while enabling the local food industry to thrive. Based on an OK hand gesture, the FHS logo is the mark of approval that all food lovers can count on.

Lack of practicable food safety certification

Hong Kong is globally known as a gourmet paradise and food safety is of utmost importance to any food outlet. However, there isn’t a



FHS is tailor-made for local eateries.

practicable certification system for typical small- to medium-scale restaurants in Hong Kong right now. "ISO 22000 is an international standard for food safety management. However, among the 14,000 restaurants in Hong Kong, only 200 of them have acquired ISO 22000 certification. Most small and medium-sized restaurants, such as Cha Chaan Teng, the Hong Kong-style diner, hesitate to apply for ISO 22000 because of the complicated documentation required and the administrative expenses therein," said Dr Wong.

The other international standard known as Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP in short) doesn't completely apply to local eateries either. Dr Leung explained, "HACCP takes a product-based or process-based approach. To apply the HACCP system, each food item or each variation of a dish has to follow specific standardized procedures. In Hong Kong, each chef makes a dish slightly differently and most Chinese dishes lack standardized methods. A typical Cha Chaan Teng serves over 100 items on the menu. Each item may spin off a few variations customized to diners' order. Sometimes customers may also order off-the-menu items. When there are countless variations for every dish and each involves several processes, it's not practicable to apply HACCP."

"OK" to rest assured of food safety

As a result, the team developed FHS Certification System based on the principles of HACCP while simplifying the administrative procedures and making adjustments according to the characteristics of the local food and beverage industry. FHS lays down guidelines for handling food in restaurants every step of the way, including procuring, receiving, storage, processing and even serving food to customers. It covers a wide range of food categories that are commonly served in local diners, including hot, cold and raw food. It also includes standard procedures in keeping record, documenting every procedure, maintaining environmental and personal hygiene.

SGS Hong Kong, a global inspection, verification, testing and certification body, is the first certifier for FHS Certification System. SGS conducts documentation review and on-site audit assessments before granting certification to qualified restaurants.

In future, diners only need to look for the FHS sticker on a restaurant's door and rest assured that the shop adheres to the strictest standards in food safety. The FHS logo is a stylized OK hand gesture, giving diners the "OK" to enjoy the food with the ultimate peace of mind. Restauranters, food safety organizations, and testing and certification industry are welcomed to implement the system.