

**Welcome address by Mr. D. H. Pai Panandiker, Chairman, ILSI-India at
the Inaugural Session of
Conference on Current and Innovative Approaches in Microbiological
Food Safety Management on 21, 2008, New Delhi**

It is a pleasure for me to welcome you to this *Conference on Current and Innovative Approaches in Microbiological Food Safety Management*. This Conference is dedicated to the Year of Food Safety and Quality announced by Government of India.

I am particularly indebted to Shri Subodh Kant Sahai, Minister of Food Processing Industries for being with us to inaugurate this Conference. He has effectively nursed the food processing industry which will soon become a leading industry and make India a major food supplier to the rest of the world. I am also grateful to Dr. P.I. Suvarathan, the first Chairman of the newly formed Food Safety and Standards Authority for agreeing to present the keynote address.

This Conference is jointly organized by International Life Sciences Institute-India (ILSI-India) and International Commission on Microbiological Specifications for Food (ICMSF).

ILSI, as most of you are aware, is an international research foundation with headquarters in Washington and 15 regional branches across the globe. ILSI works on issues like nutrition, food safety, biotechnology, risk assessment and environment. It has consultative status with FAO and NGO status with WHO. ILSI- India, a branch of ILSI, works closely with government and research institutions on similar public health issues which are of priority for our country and people.

Food safety is of great concern for the consumer and a challenge to scientists and regulatory authorities. There are more than 250 food borne diseases caused mainly by infections from a variety of bacteria, viruses and parasites. It is no wonder that microbiological aspects of food safety have been studied for quite some time. Viruses are not still well investigated and presently are a major cause of food borne episodes.

Understanding the microbes and development of food safety tools have significantly reduced the incidence of food bourn diseases. Pasteurization of milk, decontamination of water, good agricultural practices, good manufacturing

practices, good hygiene practices, HACCP, have ensured greater food safety. Even so risks are encountered because of mutations in microbes, changes in environment and ecology and elongation of the food chain. Besides, with the advance in science and better laboratory tests it is possible to identify microbes which were undetected before.

Microbiological aspects of food safety engaged the attention of Codex Committee at its 15th Session in the year 2000. It defined food safety objectives for risk management in order to ensure appropriate level of health protection. Food borne diseases and food borne pathogens vary widely within regions. Keeping that in view, each country has to design the food management system to suit the type of food chain, its structure, complexity, logistics and operational features. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India is in the process of reforming that system so as to conform to the best international norms.

Food safety control measures are important for governments to communicate the expected level of food safety and for industry to show that their products conform to the established tolerance levels of risk for the specified hazard. With the globalization of the economies food control measures in every country have to meet the internationally accepted level of health protection.

It is of utmost importance to design a surveillance system that is able to detect food infection anywhere in the production chain. For that reason it is important to have accurate and timely laboratory analysis, with well designed sampling plans. Equally, it is necessary to prevent infection and to achieve that objective to create predictive tools which would enable risk assessors to proactively address imminent problems before they cause harm.

As the title of the Conference suggests, our emphasis is on innovative methods in microbial food safety. Innovation is critical because the microbes themselves are too clever to conform to tradition and, with more stringent norms for safety and developments in technology, analytical methods have to be constantly renovated.

It is on these issues that ILSI and ICMSF have been working to help promote systems which would ensure food safety. The first joint Conference between ILSI-Europe and ICMSF and the second with ILSI-SEA. The present Conference is the third in the series. I am sure the ideas generated in this Conference will help Indian Government and Indian industry to devise effective method to ensure microbiological food safety and reduce, if not eliminate, health hazards.