

Research Article

Research on Food Companies' Social Responsibilities from the Perspective of the Food Safety

Tianhua Zheng

Social Work Assistant, Chongqing City Management College, Chongqing 401331, China

Abstract: The influences of food safety on the human health and even the life safety is direct, as a result, if the food safety system breaks down, it may cause the collective panic among the public. Owing to their special features, the food industry bears the heavier responsibilities compared with other industries. By exploring the food industry from four aspects namely their social influences and the scope of the influences, the potential dangers in food industry, the efficiency of the food industry in carrying out the social responsibilities, the connotation and denotation of the social responsibilities in food industry, this study puts forward that it is necessary to improve or perfect the related law system in food safety and the responsibilities of the food companies, strengthen the government's supervision power, improve the awareness of the food companies' social responsibilities, improve the food testing technology, normalize the food safety standards and establish the recalling system. Meanwhile, this study aims to fundamentally prevent the current status that the food industries bear no social responsibilities and guarantee the food safety by offering the food companies the development direction of their social responsibilities and corresponding strategies from the angle of food safety.

Keywords: Food company, food safety, social responsibilities

INTRODUCTION

Food companies are mainly composed of the companies which produce, process or offer food or related food products. The social responsibilities of the food companies are the specific embodiments of the value, law, moral standards and other criteria in the society (Zhang *et al.*, 2014). The connotation of their social responsibilities means that in the process of food companies' production, operation and development they must focus on people's health, safety and environment-friendliness and it requires the cooperative communication and harmonious coexistence with the interest-related parties moreover it implies the willingness to bear the responsibilities stipulated in the law and required by the society (Kotilainen *et al.*, 2015). Owing that the food industry is quite different from other industries, any unsafe food means the harm done to the human's rights such as the life right, the health right and the property right. While in the process of producing, transporting and using, the food products may cause damages to the human body and the environment due to some external factors, thus the social responsibilities of the food industry concentrate on the protection of the customers' interests and rights. Therefore, the high concern on the food industry from the society can be traced back to these special factors.

Food is closely linked to the customers' life, health and safety. The food companies should take the role in guaranteeing the food quality and safety as its utmost duty and obligation and moreover find out the influential factors and potential dangers of the food safety to prevent the dangers from happening and make sure the reliability of the food products and stability of the food resources (Panagiotopoulos *et al.*, 2015). As for the customers, the food companies not merely offers them food, they also provide them the responsibilities to improve their health and nutrition. Offering products with good quality, reasonable prices, sound services and safety is the obligation of the food companies. Since there were repeated accidents in food safety, customers have required more on the products' quality, performances, functions, services and so on. The food safety is becoming the biggest challenge in customers' daily life. The food quality and the responsibility in maintaining customers' rights of life, health and safety are the social responsibilities which are can't be neglected for the food companies and any neglect happens shows the absence of social responsibilities in the food company.

Because of some limitations such as to some extent the information is asymmetrical between customers and the food companies, the fact that the customers are scattered placed and their claim ability is limited, the

customers are in the weak side and only when the inferior products cause diseases or uncomfortable feelings in customers, the food qualities will be judged (Lee *et al.*, 2014). For customers, the after-sale services of the food companies is the guarantee extension of the food products, the effective approach to protect the customers interests and rights and moreover is the responsibility of the food industries on customers. However, driven by the interests, the strong position food companies choose to cheat the customers by hiding information for the purpose of high profits, such kind of unmoral and illegal acts result in the bulging of inferior food products in the market, leading to the breakout of the food safety crisis in the society. In order to protect the customers' interests and rights, the food companies should public their food quality information so that the customers can consult and know the information as they wish. The food industry is the typical competitive industry thus there is fierce competition among the food companies and the products are becoming similar gradually, the customers' choice has been changed from the product and the price itself to the food company. Whether the food company carries out its social responsibilities or not will be the influential factor to decide customers' choice in selecting food companies. The food company should strengthen the awareness of social responsibilities and correspondingly adjust their role to meet the demands of the customers in the society.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Unlike other social responsibilities, the food companies have their own distinctive features such as the wide scope involved in the society and their great influences on economy and social development. Therefore, the research on the food companies' social responsibilities must start from the four aspects, the influences and scope of the social responsibilities in food companies, the potential food safety dangers or risks in food companies, the efficiency of the food company in carrying out the social responsibilities, the connotation and denotation of the social responsibilities in food companies.

The analysis of the influences and scope of the social responsibilities in food companies: The food quality is closely connected with the public health and safety (Eryigit and Özcüre, 2015). Once there is a food safety accident, it may easily destroy the stability of the society and cause public panic. Some food companies ignore their social responsibilities and the interests of the customers and hide their product defaults from the public, which lead to the food companies' credit crisis. The social responsibilities of the food companies are wide, thus making it easy to involve the responsibilities in different regions and countries. In recent years, china has continuously food safety problems, which draws the

attention of the international society. The Chinese food safety crisis exerts bad influences on the Chinese food industry and moreover causes credit crisis in the international market, resulting in the great impact on the export market of Chinese food and as for those food companies which rely on the export witness a declined profit made by the export foods.

The analysis of the potential food safety dangers or risks in food companies: The food products are quite distinctive. The fake or inferior foods not merely bring damage to the customers' economy but even pose as threat to the customers' lives and health. Customers, the most important interest holders of the food companies, are the standing point of carrying out their social responsibilities (Zhu, 2013). The premise of guaranteeing the food safety is to make sure of the food quality. The social responsibilities of any food company should focus on the food quality. But, some food companies ignore their own social responsibilities by faking, cutting raw materials, abusing the food additives for making short-term profits. All these acts will seriously damage customers' health or even trigger the acute poisoning and chronic diseases. The potential dangers of the foods not only damage customers' physical health but also indirectly harm the economical development and the social stability (Wu, 2015). As customers expect more from the food companies, the food safety problem is becoming the urgent problem and the main social responsibility of the food companies.

The analysis of the food company's efficiency in carrying out the social responsibilities: Customers are the users of the food products and the most important interest related party of the food companies (Baert *et al.*, 2012). If a company reduces the costs and neglects the customers' health and the food safety, the company will definitely risk itself in losing its credit in the fierce competitive society. Companies should actively take their social responsibilities and can only maximize the profits and values on the basis of guaranteeing the customers' safety. Mengniu Guangming, Yili and other leading milk companies in china have made great contributions to the charity and public activities, but they have problem in the basic duty of offering qualified products to the customers, which resulting in food safety crisis. Such behavior not merely greatly damages the company's profits but also damages the interests of the customers' life, health and safety, forcing the government to re-adjust the regulations on products examination standards and stipulate that no product can be escaped from examination and causing the sudden losing of the products credit system and the breakdown of the food companies' social images (Siu *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, the primary social responsibilities of the food companies should be the guarantee of the customers' health and safety. Only by taking corresponding social

responsibilities can the food companies be well developed.

The analysis of the connotation and denotation of the social responsibilities in food companies: The food companies not only need to carry out the internal social responsibilities of the food industry but also should be in accordance with the regulations of the law and moral standards. Judging by the current food companies which implement the social responsibilities well in the food industry, the awareness and the performance of the social responsibilities of the food companies have been developed and improved continuously (Ourania and Aspasia, 2015). It is required that the food companies not only need to carry out the internal social responsibilities of the food industry but also should be in accordance with the regulations of the law and moral standards. The social responsibilities of the food companies should be changed and added with new content along with the development of the society and the economy and the scope of the social responsibilities should also be adjusted according to the laws and regulations timely. The key is to take good advantage of the resources and offer the customers healthy food. It is also vital to value safety, cherish customers' lives, pay taxes and obey the laws and regulations.

RESULTS

At present, some food companies neglect the public interests, which cause the serious absence of the social responsibilities (Vidal *et al.*, 2015). Currently, there mainly exist the immature related law system, multi supervision departments that don't understand their specific duties clearly and the fact that the food safety breaks the lure of low costs (Huotilainen *et al.*, 2006).

Since the Chinese food related laws and regulations are scattered and immature, the current status poses great difficulty in the process of investigating the food companies' performance of their social responsibilities. Although china has already established the Law of Protecting the Customers' Interest and Rights, the Law of the People's Republic of China against Unfair Competition, Food Safety Law, Product Quality Law and other related laws, the social responsibilities are still unclearly defined in these laws, making it hard to carry out the terms and articles of the laws and regulations. For example, the article 3 of the Food Safety Law stipulates that the food producers and operators shall follow the relevant laws, regulations and food safety standards in their production and business operations, be responsible for the public, ensure the food safety, be subject to the supervision of the public and bear the social responsibilities. Such a regulation is just a general stipulation of the social responsibilities of the food companies with the clear and detailed explanation of the specific duties and responsibilities, moreover, the local

government also has limited stipulations on the food company's social responsibilities, which causes the immature and unified laws (Bartels and Reinders, 2010). Due to the immature laws and regulations, the effects of the relevant laws and regulations will be affected and the quality of protecting customers' interests will be also affected.

At present, the food supervision departments involved in china are the business administrative, quality supervision, hygiene supervision, agriculture, food and medicine supervision, business management and other 10 departments. Because the functions of each department are overlapped and lack the cooperative linkages among departments, the whole functions of the supervision departments will be severely impaired. Since the departments can't cooperatively work together and the suspending supervision duties of each department, thus there are severe supervision bugs in the market. The state council has stipulated each department's duties (Farooq *et al.*, 2014). For example, the food production and processing linkage are supervised by the local government and the business administrative, quality supervision, hygiene supervision, food and medicine supervision department are separately in charge of their regions. However, as for the stipulated duties, the quality supervision department is in charge of the food production and processing linkage within its administrative region, namely the food production and food processing companies. While the food production and food processing companies refer to the fixed producing and processing places, the food production and selling companies with corresponding producing and processing equipments and technological process without including the food processing spots of the moving on-spot making and selling food processing spots. The supervision mainly focuses on the senses the food have brought, hygiene and label logo and other aspects (Effing and Spil, 2016). The supervision measures include the permit license of the production, the compulsory testing and severe examination of the foods and punishment of the unqualified food and usage of non-food raw materials to process food and other illegal acts. The food safety supervision is complicated and difficult and the food safety supervision duties are quite limited.

The intensity of the punishments on the food safety stipulated in the Chinese food related laws is relatively light and the level of law enforcement in part of the executive departments or agencies is quite low and the awareness in carrying out punishment is not strong, meanwhile Chinese laws only compensate for the actual loses and lack the necessary punitive compensation system, thus when the food companies break the related laws, the punishment on the direct and indirect charger is relatively light, resulting in the low cost of breaking laws for food companies (Zhu, 2014). Meanwhile, the cost of law enforcement also limits the punishment on

food companies that break the related food laws. Some food safety incidents involve different regions and the punishment on such cases requires the cooperative work of different law-enforcing department in different regions, which will lead to the high cost of law enforcement. Although china has already established relevant laws systems, the matched enforcement regulations haven't been issued, resulting in the absence of the powerful legal ground in food supervision. As for the local regulations' supervision articles, most of them are just unpractical (Yongyong, 2013). Some related local regulations should be issued to supplement the national related laws and regulations but they are just the form deep and can't be carried out practically (Wang and Chaudhri, 2009).

DISCUSSION

If the social responsibilities of the Chinese food companies are to be improved, it is necessary to start with improving food safety and enterprise responsibility law system, strengthening the government's supervision duties, improving the food companies' social responsibility awareness and the food testing technology, standardizing the food safety system and implementing the calling-back system. Then in this way, the food company can be wholly improved.

Improve the food safety and company responsibility law system: It is necessary to specifically stipulate the social responsibilities of the food companies in relevant laws and strengthen the establishment of related laws to meet the demands of a modern legal society. Push the legal construction in china and improve the legislation level by improving the social responsibilities system of the food companies. On the legislation level, it is a must to perfect the amendment of the Company Law and Food Safety Law so as to offer legal founds for the customers when their interests are harmed. When the laws and regulations are being established, the suggestion that the food companies should bear the basic social responsibilities should be taken into consideration and the legalization and normalization of the supervision on food companies must be enhanced. After amending, the Food Safety Law will restrain the bad behavior of food companies in producing and selling links. The amendment of the Company Law should be based on the food companies' internal agency setting to clearly set the independent credit evaluation agency which honestly record the concrete information in production, selling, transportation and other links so as to wholly evaluate the credit status of the food companies and in this way to give corresponding levels to the links in food making process and realize breakthrough of the self-discipline management in food companies (Faour-Klingbeil *et al.*, 2015).

The food companies should take their social responsibilities as the basic obligations and legal duties and require that each link in food making process should strictly follow the regulations and laws. By enhancing the importance of obeying laws and externally forcing the food companies to obey the regulations and related laws, make sure that each link in food making process is carried out legally and guarantee that the food companies offer customers safe, qualified and reliable foods, insure the food quality and protect the customers' rights. As more and more laws and regulations are being constructed and implemented, the companies will definitely bear more social responsibilities than before and they will be affected by the external social responsibilities to achieve the self-discipline management, in this way, the food companies and the social responsibilities are combined together.

Strengthen the government regulatory responsibilities: Since Chinese Government is lack of social regulatory responsibility for food firms which will cause bulk-passing, bulling management and chaotic enforcement, etc. It will have a serious impact on regulatory effectiveness. Thus, the strengthening of government regulatory responsibilities should be carried out as the following 3 parts: Firstly, clear division of labor and responsibility, a reasonable rights partition of Central and Local Government. So far, there are a lot of Chinese Management of Food Safety departments, besides the State Council also set up a Food Safety Commission as well as administration department, such as Industry and Business, Health, Food, Agriculture, Quality Inspection etc. But the unclear functions, powers and the repetitive law enforcement lead to an inefficient law enforcement and low intensity. Thus, regional management should be brought into use first and the products management second which will help to clear the liability Investigation system and individual responsibility. Regard the regulatory effectiveness as the year-end assessment for the law enforcement departments which will help to make a clear reward and punishment system. As for the demotivated who will be strictly held liable according to the law. The law enforcement of local government should be in accordance with the requests of Central Government and with its local realities. Secondly, regulatory information should be brought into the public and be transparent. So far, consumers can not be informed timely and effectively on the food firms' products regulatory information by China food regulatory department, which leads to the misunderstanding and customers think that relevant department fails to enforce the law strictly and shield food firms too much. Food regulators can make full use of newspapers, television, the Internet and other media and publish the regulatory information of food product quality, production links and other regulatory information regularly so that make it easier for

customers to know it on time. If it is possible, some information consultation desks could be set up. Only in this way can the consumers concerns be addressed and government improved their credibility. Thirdly, improve the standard of law enforcement and establish a skilled, high qualified law enforcement force. Comprehensively improve the quality of law enforcement team and make the personnel with good characters, outstanding capability, good knowledge and high sense of responsibility enter into the law enforcement team. Law enforcement personnel should be selected from various law enforcement departments to ensure the talented people can join inside (Maxwell *et al.*, 2010). The management of law enforcement personnel should be strengthened; meanwhile the assessment should be regularly carried out. Make an exploration on law enforcement level, law enforcement capacity, effects and other factors and implement the end elimination system to stimulate the work enthusiasm for law enforcement personnel.

Improvement the awareness of food firm's social responsibility: Improve the awareness of food firm's social responsibility and infiltrate it into enterprise business links. On the premise of improving the food firms social responsibility system, the guiding function of government should be played actively, turn the social responsibility assumed by food firms into consciously action. Government could regularly announce the qualified enterprises' list to consumers, differentiate the food firms which has ignored the social responsibility, improve the awareness of food firms social responsibility, help food firms take this awareness into actual productions, sales and transport so that really ensure the products' quality and guarantee consumers' interests. Through the supervision of public opinions and the media, a widely range of interview rights will be given so that make food firms' production, sales, transportation more transparent and make it easier for customers to supervise. Except for the reflection on whether the firms obey the social responsibilities made by social and media supervision, the frontage report of strict products guarantee and food safety, the negative reports on the ignorance of social responsibility, fake and unqualified products should also be reflected. Increase the awareness of enterprises and affect on consciousness of social responsibility all by the supervision of social opinions.

Improvement the food inspection technology and standardized system of food safety: We need to improve the introspection and self-checking system and constantly link up with international standard. However the fact is that China's food safety standardization system is not sound enough and food inspection technology is at a lower level which leads to the lack of social responsibility of food firms. Thus making uniform

standards, requiring a strict compliance of the standard in production, selling and transportation is imperative and which can successfully avoid the ignorance of social responsibility by enterprises. Meanwhile, enterprises are required to carry out the internal self-checking system. These enterprises who has signed the warranty but failed to execute will be suspended operation for rectification or just closed. With the improvement of international testing standards of food safety, China should introduce some advanced testing system and standards actively and ask enterprises certainly carry out these standards. Only in this way, can we merge with the international standards and enhance enterprises' global competitiveness.

Implementation of the product recalling system: The customers should be timely informed when defects or flaws on the products are appeared. The products recalling system could be appropriately brought into use in accordance with the enterprises' situations on the premise of reducing customers' losses. Products recalling system aims at preventing and resolving the violation of personal safety and property loss for the customers caused by the safety hazard products. The products recalling system is obviously different compared with general tort liability. However the products recalling system is much more effective in prediction and also it is a prevention of possible violation. When quality defects occur, the products recalling system will be implemented for the similar products of the company in order to avoid the violation spreading for the customers' legal right and the potential risks, thus to ensure the benefits of customers.

The remedy for implementing products recalling system should not be proposed by the customers but by the food firms actively which aims at protecting customers' benefits as well as avoid the spreading of personal injuries and property loss. The food firms are responsible for all the charges caused by this which is so-called the remedy for food firms avoid the products crisis. The subject of liability of products recalling and any other relevant subjects of main interest are not fixed, but with a wide ranges. The principle for products recalling is that any of the food firms have been authorized to apply for the products recalling when some of the quality defects occur, which subject is not appointed but the ranges is also wide compared with other relevant subjects of main interests. It means that any of the customers is entitled to get compensation for the violation when purchasing this kind of products.

CONCLUSION

Food safety not only relates to people's health but also affects the healthy development of national economy directly as well as the social harmony and stability. The social responsibility of food firms includes

the influence and scope of food firms' social responsibility, food safety concern, social responsibility connotation and extension as well as the fulfillment of social responsibility etc. Enterprise should take social responsibilities in accordance with laws and regulations, build up the sense of social responsibility while pursuing their own maximum profits so as to hook the profits into social responsibilities.

It is irresponsible for business stakeholders in ignorance of food safety, which can also reflect the absence of social responsibility from the enterprises. A small part of food firms disregard public interest which leads to the serious lack of social responsibility. Thus it is imperative to improve the system of social responsibility for food firms. Enterprises should sharpen its focus on the social legal responsibility, surveying their own behaviors, taking responsibility for the problems related to the public and environment caused by their own behaviors, disclosing the relevant information reliably, implementing responsibilities for the protection of customers' health and their safety as well.

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