

Exceptional Leadership In the Food Industry Award – Debbie Hawkes

Our winner tonight has a Food Technology degree from Massey University and has been working in the Food Industry for over 30 years. The majority of her career has been in New Zealand-based Quality and Food Safety Operational roles, for businesses such as Germantown, Danisco and Dupont marketers of food ingredient products covering Asia Pacific and South Asia regions. She is currently IT Systems & Process Manager at Hawkins Watts.

Her governance experience includes a term as NZIFST Auckland Branch Chair (1995-1997) and as a current board member of the Allergen Bureau.

As many here will know, she has an affinity for quality systems and information technology, an affinity that has enabled her exceptional contribution to the food industry.

She has been involved with the Allergen Bureau from the beginning when she was nominated in 2006 to represent Danisco, one of the Bureau's Founding Members. Since then, her involvement has been continuous, participating in many Working Groups, and stepping up to a position on the Allergen Bureau Board in October 2017.

As industry and health systems developed better understanding of food allergens, it became clear that a framework was needed to build a quantitative allergen risk assessment tool and tonight's awardee was instrumental in the initial development and creation of the Voluntary Incidental Trace Allergen Labelling (VITAL®) calculator, which was launched in 2007, in the form of a free, downloadable spreadsheet from the Allergen Bureau website. Many hundreds of downloads followed, as Australia and New Zealand food industry recognised the value of the VITAL calculator and what became an Allergen Bureau world-recognised achievement. It is this contribution that we are recognising at this NZIFST 2024 Annual Conference.

Today we recognise the Excel-loving developer of the 'First Architecture' of VITAL, and the VITAL calculator. This remains today as an exceptional achievement that has underpinned the evolution of world-class allergen management within the Australia New Zealand and broader food industries, enabling scientifically-supported allergen information to be provided to thousands of food allergic consumers and their caregivers, who rely on accurate food labelling to keep them safe.



**DIVERSITY in the food industry
NZIFST Conference 2024**

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