

APPLICATION OF HACCP PRINCIPLES FOR THE MEAT INDUSTRY

GUIDANCE SHEET NO: 19

VERIFICATION SECOND PART OF PRINCIPLE 6



IS THE HACCP PLAN WORKING? IS IT PRODUCING SAFE FOOD?

The process of verification involves taking sufficient steps to ensure that the procedures set out in the HACCP plan are working properly and that the critical limits are sufficient to ensure that the identified hazards are controlled at the critical control points.

Verification checks should be carried out often enough to maintain confidence in the HACCP-based procedures. The frequency of verification will depend on factors such as the nature of the food safety hazards, throughput, monitoring frequency, end-use, the competence of staff, and the number of times critical / legal limits have been breached. Microbiological test results or customer complaints may also trigger verification checks.

Microbiological criteria can be used in the validation and verification of HACCP- based procedures, including control measures based on good hygiene practices. Microbiological criteria may be defined in food safety laws. In the absence of legally established microbiological criteria, a company could develop its own microbiological criteria. However, this requires access to skilled microbiologists with a laboratory equipped to conduct the experiments to collect the evidence to allow safe levels of specific foodborne pathogenic microorganisms to be defined.

As a minimum, if there have been no serious problems, the whole of the HACCP-based system should be verified once a year, but note that all aspects do not have to be checked at the same time.

WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN VERIFYING THE HACCP SYSTEM?

The following personnel may be involved in the verification process:

- HACCP trained and / or experienced people should be used. External advisers can be used if sufficient in-house expertise is not available;
- HACCP verification may also be carried out by auditors by or on behalf of customers;
- The Public Health Authority or other third parties, such as independent assurance bodies.

People responsible for carrying out monitoring and corrective actions should **NOT** verify the plan, unless there is no other option as these personnel have a possible conflict of interest and may be tempted to input inaccurate data to the verification process to cover mistakes they may have made.

COVERAGE CHECKS FOR VERIFICATION OF ALL ASPECTS OF THE HACCP SYSTEM

Determine whether the HACCP plan appears likely to be effective and to provide a basis for checking the procedures that are actually being operated, by:

Checking the adequacy of:

- The documentation, scope, flow, hazard analysis, control measures, determination of control points, monitoring procedures, corrective action procedures, validation and verification procedures;
- Hygiene procedures and records, for example, cleaning, maintenance, staff training
- Monitoring and corrective action records;
- Validation and verification records;
- Calibration records of instruments used for monitoring.

See where problems with the hygiene procedures may have arisen and any management action taken, by analysing documentation and records of:

- Microbiological results and trends;
- Customer complaints;
- Third party inspection/audit reports;
- Occasions when critical limits were breached and what corrective actions taken, note also the frequency of breaches, has the same problem occurred multiple times?

Physically inspect (walk-through) the production to:

- Check if the hygiene procedures and management checks referred to in the plan are being carried out, especially at control points;
- Check whether the flow diagram is correct;
- Carry out random or targeted checks on a sample of product before, during and after production, which may include visual inspection, temperature measurements, microbiological tests, and traceability and label checks on products on sale;
- Check that monitoring instruments have been calibrated.

Physical inspections should be conducted for both day and night shifts to ensure that production practices remain consistent at all times.

Assess:

- The appropriateness of staff instructions relating to the hygiene procedures, control measures, monitoring and corrective actions set out in HACCP-based procedures;
- The competency of the staff responsible for monitoring and corrective actions (by observation and questioning of staff).