

An information series for Ontario food processors from the Alliance of Ontario Food Processors and The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

Adopting A Food Safety Strategy

• To learn more about food safety contact the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs at 1-888-466-2372 ext 64752, follow the food safety links at www.omaf.gov.on.ca or email haccp.advantage@omaf.gov.on.ca

Adopting A Food Safety Strategy

Producing safe food is critical to the success of all food processing companies. Each year presents more and more challenges to producing safe food. These challenges include new food production and processing practices, new ingredients, emerging food-borne pathogens and changes to buyers and consumers' expectations. The government has responded to these challenges with an increased focus on the policies, regulations, resources and structure to reflect the importance of food safety. Industry is responding to these challenges through the implementation of food safety programs.

There are a variety of options available when it comes to implementing a food safety strategy for your company. These options range from basic steps such as requiring your employees to complete a Food Handler Training Course, to implementing Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs), or to full scale implementation of a HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point) system. A brief description of each of these options and where you can go for more information is included below.

Food Handler Training (FHT)

A Food Handler Training Course is important for all employees that work with food. Together government and industry have developed a self-study program that can be completed by your employees at home and therefore, not disrupt your daily processing operations. The focus is on safe handling practices covered under three main areas – Preventative Practices; Product Handling; and the basics of HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point). The manual also includes sample record keeping forms. Specific topics covered in the course include:

Preventative Practices

- Hazards to food safety
- Food spoilage
- Foodborne illness and allergens
- Personal practices

Product Handling

- Product flow
- Maintenance and equipment
- Cleaning and sanitation
- Pest control
- Use and storage of chemicals

HACCP

- The 12 steps of HACCP

Food Handler Training is an important part of any food safety program for your company. For more information call 1-519-763-4558.

Some Benefits of Implementing A Food Safety Program:

Although the adoption of food safety programs worldwide is due primarily to the added food safety protection provided to the consumer, a number of other benefits to the food industry, including your company, can be realized.

i. Increased Focus and Ownership of Food Safety:

Food safety is the responsibility of everyone in the food supply chain. Through the process of developing and implementing a food safety program, your company's employees will become more aware of food safety and their roles in maintaining and contributing to food safety. This increased awareness leads to increased ownership and pride in the production of a safe product.

ii. Increased Buyer and Consumer Confidence:

There is an increasing trend for buyers to request a food safety program from suppliers. Food processors, who have a food safety program, provide buyers and consumers with a greater degree of confidence that the facility is producing a safe food product.

iii. Maintaining or Increasing Market Access:

Market forces continue to drive food safety awareness and food safety programs throughout the food processing sector. As food safety systems, particularly HACCP, become more common, market access is limited for processors who do not implement them. In many cases buyer demands require food safety programs to maintain market share and/or gain access to previously inaccessible markets. Food safety programs may also permit re-entry into a market that had been lost.

Some Benefits of Implementing a Food Safety Program (cont.):

- iv. **Business Liability Protection:** A food safety program, particularly a HACCP system can provide your facility with some degree of increased business liability protection and may lead to reduced insurance premiums.
- v. **Reduced Operational Costs:** The process of developing and implementing a food safety program requires that the entire manufacturing process be reviewed and analyzed, and written procedures developed. This process often reveals areas where operational costs can be streamlined.
- vi. **Efficient Oversight:** Implementing a food safety program can provide your company with ongoing efficient oversight. It can be cost effective to implement in spite of associated costs. Activities that are performed on a regular basis, such as product and process monitoring, employee training and review procedures, allow your company to maintain control over the facility and product. You may find there are certain areas of the process that can be made more efficient and productive.
- vii. **Improved Product Quality and Consistency:** A food safety program may indirectly enhance product quality. Procedures that minimize the presence and growth of pathogenic micro-organisms can also minimize the presence and growth of spoilage micro-organisms, leading to an increased product shelf life. In addition, the attention given to standardization procedures will improve product consistency.
- viii. **Reduced Wastage:** The preventative nature of a food safety program allows a company to control costs by minimizing the amount of product requiring rework or rejection, and focusing resources on areas that have been identified as critical in the manufacture of a safe food product. You will find that many problems are addressed before they escalate and before products are shipped from your facility; you will not simply be waiting for the results of end-product testing. With the regular monitoring inherent in a food safety program, you will become aware of problems earlier, and your costs of wastage reduced.

Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs)

Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs) are a combination of manufacturing practices and written policies that promote good hygiene and the production of safe food products. While it is possible to implement GMPs on their own, they are also referred to as the 'prerequisites' under a HACCP system. Therefore, if you decide to implement GMPs as a first step in a food safety strategy, you are well on your way to developing a full HACCP system. At a minimum, GMPs should include policies and procedures for:

- Building location, construction and facilities for sanitation, ventilation, drainage, lighting, waste disposal
- Shipping, receiving and storage
- Employee hygiene and safe food handling practices
- Sanitation and equipment maintenance
- Pest control
- Recall plans
- Water safety
- Identification of allergens where appropriate

For more information about implementing a Good Manufacturing Practices Program contact the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs at 1-888-466-2372 ext. 64752 or e-mail to haccp.advantage@omaf.gov.on.ca.

HACCP Systems (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point)

HACCP is an internationally recognized, science-based, food safety system that is used to help ensure the manufacture of safe food products. HACCP is designed to prevent, reduce or eliminate potential biological, chemical and physical food safety hazards. During the implementation of a HACCP system, potential hazards are identified and control measures are implemented at specific points in the manufacturing process. It is focused on preventing problems before they occur. HACCP is internationally recognized as the primary means for enhancing food safety throughout the food chain, and it is increasingly being used around the world. Implementing a HACCP system should be the end goal for all food processors.

In Ontario, the *HACCP Advantage* has been developed as part of the initiative underway by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) to develop a HACCP approach and recognition framework for non-federally registered food processors. The program has been designed to be practical and feasible for all facilities, regardless of size, commodity produced, or volume processed. For more information on the *HACCP Advantage*, contact OMAFRA at 1-888-466-2372 ext. 64752 or e-mail to haccp.advantage@omaf.gov.on.ca.