

*Do You Need Outside Help?
Selecting A Food Safety Advisor/Consultant*

- 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 at haccp.advantage@omaf.gov.on.ca

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Once your company has decided to implement a food safety program your next consideration is how to get it done.

Using Staff

If you are going to use staff to implement the food safety program, you will need to consider:

1. Does anyone have a food safety background? For example, quality control staff may already be familiar with biological, chemical and physical hazards.
2. Does anyone have the skills and background to implement the program? For example, one of your employees may have been a member of a food safety team at another company.
3. Does Anyone Have Time?

If no one currently has the knowledge or skills, they may be able to obtain food safety training where they can learn about food safety programs and gain the skills to implement the programs. There are a number of organizations offering courses and training related to food safety – Food Handler Training, Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs) and HACCP, as examples. Information about these is included in Fact Sheet #1.

If your employees do not have either the time or necessary skills to implement a food safety program, you may want to consider hiring an outside consultant. Consultants are independent firms or individuals that can provide knowledge and support during food safety program development and implementation. While hiring a consultant may appear to be more expensive at the beginning, it may prove to be the best solution as they will be able to help you move through the process faster and share industry 'best practices' so that you avoid costly mistakes.

Using A Consultant

The increased focus on food safety has fueled the growth in the number of consultants in the food safety field. Do your homework upfront to make sure the consultant you want to hire is properly trained and credible to ensure that you get good value for your money and a food safety program that works for your business. The following section provides some questions to ask and things to look for when talking with a potential consultant for your business.

Questions and Considerations for Potential Food Safety Advisors/Consultants

Find out how many food safety or HACCP systems the consultant has developed and whether any of these were in a business similar to yours. Ask for samples of work the consultant has done.

Tips on Finding A Consultant:

- Speak with management from other plants that have used consultants and find out if there is someone that they would recommend.
- Contact your industry association and ask if there is a consultant who has been working in your industry.

What types of references can the consultant provide? Be sure to talk to the references and find out whether they were satisfied with the approach and work of the consultant.

Will the consultant write all of the documentation including policies, procedures and records? Ensure that the consultant will provide all of this and in addition, ask that it be provided in electronic form to allow you to make changes in the future.

Ask how much time and how many visits the consultant will be providing. You want to make sure that the system that is developed represents your individual plant.

Determine whether the consultant is prepared to use input from your plant employees. This is critical as developing and implementing an effective food safety system requires intimate knowledge of the facility and products being processed. A good consultant should work very closely with plant personnel. Plant personnel should review and test proposed procedures and documents and provide feedback to the consultant.

Ensure the consultant will assist with proposed audits.

Require the consultant to provide and follow a schedule that outlines key target dates for development and implementation of the program.

Determine whether the consultant will provide training to your employees.

Ask what type of support the consultant will provide after the plan has been implemented.

Determine the composition and qualifications of the consulting team.

Determine the total project cost and whether there are any payment options.

The Contract

Once you have decided on a consultant, you will need a contract that specifies a number of things including:

- All of the duties the consultant will perform (e.g. policy and procedure development, training, auditing, etc.).
- The requirements or duties that you and your staff will perform.
- The timeframes for expected completion.
- The cost of the development of the program.

Your industry association may be able to assist you by providing a standard contract that you can tailor to your needs with a few simple modifications.

Working With the Consultant

It is important that you work with the consultant to ensure that your needs are met. Make sure that you and your staff are fully familiar with all procedures before the consultant is finished (e.g. monitoring, verification and validation, record keeping and record review, corrective action, audit).

Implementing a full food safety system such as HACCP is an investment in your future. And while it is a big undertaking, so are the rewards. A comprehensive food safety program will provide you with assurances that you are doing everything possible to ensure the safety of the products that you are processing.