



pork industry handbook

Employee Involvement in HACCP is as Easy as Who, What, When, Where, Why and How

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Introduction

Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures (SSOP's) were successfully implemented in January, 1997. Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) programs were implemented according to the Pathogen Reduction Final Rule. On January 26, plants with greater than 500 employees were required to implement HACCP programs. In January, 1999, plants with between 10-500 employees were required to implement HACCP.

Why Should I Involve Employees?

The involvement of employees in the development and implementation of your HACCP plan is vital. Their "buy-in" into the program is the basis for developing a systematic, preventative approach to a safer meat supply. However, the question remains whether or not the very small plants of less than 10 employees or those with sales of less than \$2.5 million are up to meeting the challenge of implementing HACCP programs by January, 2000. Although given extra lead time and generic HACCP plans to use as resources, it is uncertain if these small operators have the manpower and/or the expertise to address such an overwhelming task. The answer lies in how these establishments approach the job before them. HACCP programs can be daunting and seemingly impossible if one "only sees the forest instead of the trees".

When Should I Start?

The good news for very small processors is that the extra time allowed to implement plans in their plants should be sufficient, provided that they use the time wisely and avoid becoming exasperated with the first impression most people have; that being "I don't have a clue where to begin". Start as soon as possible. Do not put off training or developing your plan in hopes of reduced regulations. To alleviate some of the tension and stress associated with developing and implementing HACCP programs in the smaller plant environment, the following guidelines are recommended. Although these are recommended for very small plants, they may be employed by larger plants with the same benefits.

How Do I Start?

First, gather available information related to development and implementation of HACCP programs and familiarize yourself with the general concepts of HACCP. These concepts include the seven principles of HACCP, the prerequisites needed for a successful HACCP program, the potential cost of HACCP, and most importantly, where you can get help when you run into a roadblock. Trade magazines and associations are excellent resources and generally can direct you to sources for further information or assistance. Another

excellent resource is your state extension meat specialist. These individuals are generally well versed in HACCP program development and implementation and are an excellent source of free help. Also, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has developed a set of thirteen generic HACCP models which is available for use as guides in plan development. These along with a wealth of knowledge is available on several internet homepage sites for no charge. Many magazines also offer experiences and examples from other smaller processors. Additional NPPC/AAMSA fact sheets also cover other areas of interest.

Where Do I Go For Help?

Once you have become comfortable with the concept of HACCP, it is time to attend a training course designed to provide you with the knowledge necessary to develop and implement your own HACCP program. Numerous courses are being offered by trade associations, universities, extension specialist, and consultants or contract services around the country. Most courses are very similar with three days of instruction and ample time devoted to hands-on participation in HACCP plan development. Although USDA does not certify or accredit specific courses, they or your trade association can provide you with a list of dates and locations of most up-coming courses. Attendance at one of these courses allows you to satisfy the training requirement specified for individuals developing and signing the HACCP plan. When at all possible, it is recommended that more than one person from an establishment attend a training session. This allows two people to work together to formulate the program in your plant that best works for you.

Who Do I Involve?

After attending a training course, the next step is to return to your own operation and set the stage for developing your own program. In order to make everyone feel a part of the process, setup a series of meetings during regular work hours to educate all of your employees in the concepts, benefits and necessity of a HACCP program. To be a success, *everyone* must understand the reasons for implementing and be supportive of a HACCP program. These meetings should be short interactive discussions about how each employee fits into the program.

How Do I Involve Employees?

When all employees feel comfortable about the concepts of HACCP, then it is time to actually start the HACCP program development by setting up different teams to approach the various parts of the operation. Have those responsible for certain operation in the plant be in charge of those areas. Due to the limited number of employees, many people (sometimes everyone) will serve on most, if not all, of the teams. Regardless of the number of employees, there should be an overall team to mesh the various parts of the program together. By involving everyone, the task of HACCP becomes smaller and more manageable. Under no circumstances however, should the development of the program be *put off* on lower ranking employees. The ultimate responsibility lies with the management and owner to see that the program is approached with the proper attitude.

What Should I Involve Employees In?

After the team structure has been formed, it is now time to develop the plans according to the seven principles of HACCP. The type of product produced and the end-user of the product should be determined. This is necessary to identify possible hazards and controls needed to produce a safe product. Employees most familiar with the operation should develop a flow diagram for each operation. This should be accomplished by walking through the process, not from an office, to assure that no step is overlooked. Once this is accomplished you are ready to actually determine hazards, critical control points, critical limits, monitoring procedures, corrective actions, record keeping and verification procedures. Detailed information is available on each of these HACCP steps explaining how the process should be completed. By involving all employees in each step of development, you not only gain valuable expertise but also give them a sense of ownership in the program itself.

When Will the Plan Be Completed?

Finally, as you work through the HACCP program, expect problems to arise. You must remember that the HACCP plan is a living document that will change as your operation changes over time. It should be reviewed on a minimum basis of at least annually, or more often during the first year and times of change.

Although this is a challenging task, it can be accomplished effectively by smaller processors who approach it in the proper manner. Most importantly, HACCP gives the responsibility of food safety back to the processor and allows him the flexibility to work within his specific confines to produce the safest product possible.

Will This Really Work In A Small Plant?

The ultimate question is, "HACCP: Will it Work in Small Plants?!" The answer is most definitely yes! Through trial and error, the 8,700 small and very small meat and poultry plants across the country, will be able to remain viable and produce the worlds safest meat supply by utilizing the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point Concept.

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