

ISO 22000 STANDARD: A FOOD SAFETY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The Quality Institute is a New Caledonia-based company that brings together quality, hygiene, safety and environmental consultants. A leader in the International Organization of Standardization (ISO) procedures, the Institute assisted the first New Caledonian companies in getting their ISO 22000 certification.

ISO 22000 certification allows companies in the food industry to show that they are capable of providing customers with safe products. But what exactly does this new certification guarantee? What type of company is it for? Why do companies decide to commit themselves to the procedure?

WHAT IS THE REASON FOR ISO 22000?

At the time when a major credibility crisis is affecting the food sector and overwhelming public opinion, gaining control of food safety has become a vital issue. A lack of hygiene can have negative consequences in terms of both public health and economics.

Given this, initiatives have been undertaken in many countries to formulate more or less voluntary rules. But the vast increase in the number of private reference systems based on the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) method led to a certain amount of confusion among the various groups in the food industry. In September 2005, after three years of work, ISO published a universal reference framework (i.e. the ISO 22000 standard), which was the result of a consensus between 45 countries.

Vincent Talbot
Institut de la Qualité
Noumea
New Caledonia
(iqtalbot@lagoon.nc)

This standard meets a two-part need to:

1. improve safety for all food sector stakeholders, and
2. harmonise existing food safety methods through a internationally recognised reference system.

Just over a year has passed since ISO 22000 was issued, but already more than 50 countries have adopted it.

WHO IS THE ISO 22000 MEANT FOR?

The ISO 22000 certification is for all food sector companies (producers, processors, distributors) as well as all related industries, such as packaging, transport, animal feed, cleaning and disinfecting, equipment production, etc.

This standard implements a common vocabulary and improves communications between everyone involved in the food industry.

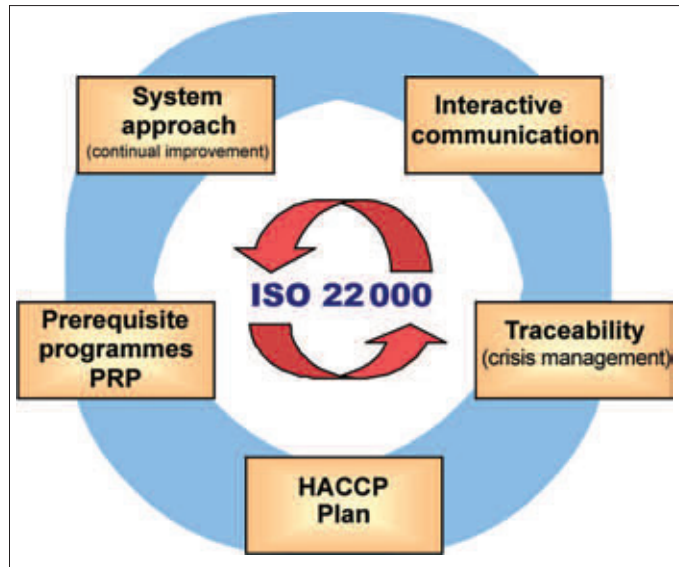
Hedelab, Belgium, states: 'For us, the ISO 22000 is designed to allow — whatever the country or product involved — harmonised implementation of the HACCP method, recognised by experts as the best tool currently available to guarantee food safety for consumers. Since the large increase in the numbers and types of food crises, certain countries and even certain food industries and companies have created their own safety standards. As a result, there are more than 20 different sets of standards. Through the international consensus that led to its development, the ISO22000 certification is destined to become the reference in international food safety.'

What added value does ISO 22000s provide?

- requires the creation of a complete food safety management system;
- provides an international dimension;
- allows a smaller number of more harmonised standards;
- imposes structured and targeted communications;
- subjects all control measures to hazard analysis;
- meets food industry expectations;
- fills the gap between ISO 9001 and HACCP;
- suitable for all types of business since it imposes results and not resources ;
- is based on a system approach, not a product approach;
- proposes clear, easily audited requirements;
- provides a reference base for the food chain as a whole;
- focuses on mastering the essentials;
- provides an auditing (and not inspection) standard composed of clear requirements;
- allows third-party certification;
- makes resource savings possible by reducing the number of redundant audits; and
- can serve as a reference base for national legislation

KEY FEATURES OF THE ISO 22000 STANDARD

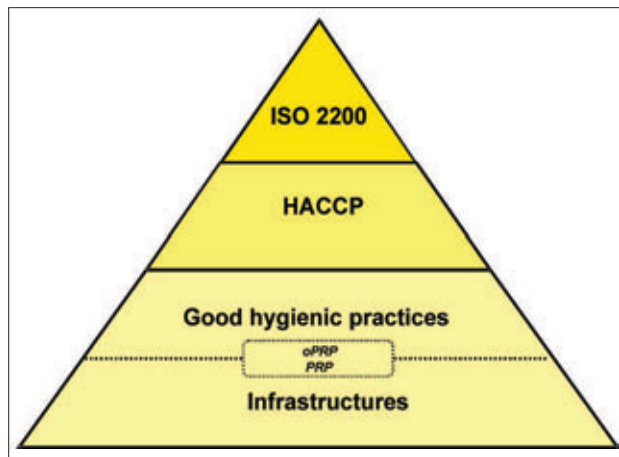
The ISO 22000 standard is a management system standard that sets requirements for results without setting requirements for resources. The HACCP system is based on organisation and is guided by a policy and objectives with clearly defined responsibilities, allotted resources, and control over how objectives are met. This organisation is designed to ensure continual improvement in food safety. This standard sets out specific requirements for the five areas shown in the figure at right.



WHAT DOES ISO 22000 BRING TO THE HACCP METHOD?

PRP, operational PRP, CCP and validation

ISO 22000 has made it possible to fill in, in a targeted manner, certain gaps that hindered proper understanding and use of the HACCP method, in particular, by introducing prerequisite programs (PRP), and operational PRP (oPRP). The standard makes it possible to prioritise control measures based on criteria linked to the probability of the occurrence of a certain type of hazard and its severity. In addition, ISO 22000 requires that control measures associated with oPRP and critical control points be validated before they are implemented.



System components

ISO 22000 has also set up, around the HACCP method, all the system and organisational components, based on the principle of continual improvement that made ISO 9001 such a success.

In fact, once companies have met the challenge of setting up an HACCP the first year, they then face a new challenge —



keeping it operational over the coming years, something that ISO 22000's 'PDCA: Plan-Do-Check-Act' system approach makes possible. By providing system components (procedures, audit, indicators, operating reports, management reviews, steering committees, etc.), this standard contributes to efforts to structure and improve management. These measures allow companies to avoid fixed HACCP systems and move towards systems that constantly adapt to the situation and to food safety needs.

As the first New Caledonia company to receive ISO 22000 certification reports: 'Our system really became dynamic and involves our staff a great deal more.'

Communication between participants in the food industry

The requirement for communication about potential hazards, both upstream and downstream depending on the needs, is a new and major asset of ISO 22000, one that will promote the development of an integrated sector culture and approach. In the seafood sector, for example, processors will not only have to have good communications with fishers, packaging suppliers and transporters but will also have to prove that they fully master the requirements that they have set with these participants in the food chain.

For in-house communications, emphasis is placed on providing the ISO 22000 team with timely information on any changes that could affect food safety. A lack of communication in this area can have a significant impact as has been demonstrated by recent cases of food poisoning caused by changes in maintenance or in raw materials or packaging without the ISO 22000 team's prior approval.

ISO 22000: A PASSPORT FOR EXPORTING?

By selecting an ISO 22000 certification, you are adopting an internationally recognised system. Whatever the country, you will share a common language with your customers, suppliers and competent health services. Also, from a health point of view, the ISO 22000 standard has a great potential to partially fill the gap between rich importing countries and developing countries that want to export.

In the seafood sector, Thailand was one of the first countries to benefit from the development of processed product exports by adopting an effective and internationally recognised food safety programme.

ISO 22000 is also a good way to reassure consumers who are increasingly wary about the food they buy. Certified companies demonstrate their food manufacturing professionalism by guaranteeing better study of and communication about related hazards.

WHY DO COMPANIES COMMIT THEMSELVES TO AN ISO 22000 APPROACH?

Mainly because some exporting companies want to adopt a common language to facilitate exchanges. Other companies because they want their hazard analysis and control techniques to be consolidated, validated

and recognised by an outside agency. And other companies commit to an ISO 22000 approach in order to complete their ISO 9001, ISO 14001, HACCP plans through the implementation of an integrated system.

In all cases, everyone recognises the interest of the standard's managerial dimension in moving their current fixed HACCP plans towards a well-adapted dynamic system that strongly involves staff and is constantly improving.

In the end, ISO 22000 combines a series of advantages, involving quality management, external and in-house communications, designating responsibility, implementing crisis management, continual improvement, good health practices and differentiating between PRP, oPRP and CCP.

To find out about ISO 22000, visit the following websites:

www.codexalimentarius.net

www.iso.org

www.institut-qualite.nc



Goodman Fielder New Caledonia, first company in the South Pacific to be certified for ISO 22000 in December 2006 by the Bureau Veritas Certification: 'We were already certified for ISO 9001 but we knew that our existing HACCP plan needed to be revised, optimised and included in a dynamic approach to continual improvement. With strong support from management, this approach allowed us to gain the full participation of production staff and federate all our departments and teams. Today, our ISO 22000 certification demonstrates our efficiency in food safety control, increases our customers' confidence on the local market and allows us to develop an export market.'

Vincent Talbot, a free-lance consultant from the Institut de la Qualité in New Caledonia, was invited by the SPC Nearshore Fisheries Development and Training Section (NFDTS) to develop a tailor-made course for staff from various local institutions dealing with or interested in seafood safety issues including HACCP principles and the new ISO 22000 standard. Overall, the course was designed to enable participants to gain a good understanding of the new ISO 22000 standard and its implications. This involves quality management, external and in-house communications, designating responsibility, implementing crisis management, continual improvement, good health practices and differentiating between prerequisite programs (PRP), operational prerequisite programs (OPRP) and Critical Control Points (CCP).

The one-day course was held at SPC in Noumea, on Monday 08 February 2007. Post-course feedback from the trainer and the 10 participants – covering 7 government administrations and organisations (including SPC) — was very positive, particularly with regards to the training methodology and resource materials. At the end, participants left with a greater understanding of ISO 22000 standards but many felt that this very intensive course should preferably be delivered in two days.



Participants of the one-day course held at SPC