

Appendix H
Questions And Answers/Hazard Analysis And Critical Control Point (HACCP) Systems



Food Safety and Inspection Service
United States Department of Agriculture
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Pathogen Reduction/HACCP

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Q. What does HACCP mean?

A. HACCP (pronounced has-sip) stands for Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points. It is a system of process control that was developed by the National Aeronautic and Space Administration in preparation for space flight and has been adopted in many industries. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) sees the application of HACCP to the meat and poultry industry as a process control system that can be used to prevent hazards to the food supply and a tool in the control, reduction, and prevention of pathogens in meat and poultry. USDA views HACCP as one of the tools in its new regulatory approach to protect public health.

Q. Why is USDA adopting this new regulatory approach?

A. The 1993 outbreak of foodborne illness caused by the E. coli O157:H7 pathogen focused the attention of the public, the Congress, and USDA on the fact that the organoleptic system of meat and poultry inspection based on visible detection did not address the major cause of foodborne illness, which is invisible pathogens. Modernization of the meat and poultry inspection system has also become necessary due to new and highly consolidated meat and poultry production methods, widespread transportation, scientific advances, mutation and emergence of new pathogens, research, and new ways of detecting and tracing foodborne illnesses.

Q. Effective January 26, 1998, how much of the nation's meat and poultry supply is inspected under the new methods?

A. Effective January 26, 1998, about 75 percent of the nation's raw meat and poultry products came under HACCP inspection.

Nearly 50 percent of the nation's processed food products came under HACCP inspection after January 26. All other products are being produced in small plants with between 10 and 500 employees, which will come under HACCP in January 1999, and in very small plants with fewer than 10 employees, which will come under HACCP in January 2000.

Q. Why will only approximately 312 plants out of 6,500 be under HACCP this year?

A. FSIS decided that a phased-in implementation of HACCP would enable smaller plants to make the necessary adjustments in a more efficient and cost effective way.

Q. What about the safety of the products produced at the remaining 6,200 plants?

A. Since January 1997, all Federal plants, regardless of their size, have been required to have Standard Sanitation Operating Procedures (SSOPs). FSIS can take action, based on failures of those sanitation systems. Inspectors will continue to enforce existing rules to ensure the safety of products. FSIS is encouraging all plants to implement HACCP before their regulatory deadline.

Q. What impact will HACCP have on the consumer?

A. The new science-based system will improve food safety and reduce the incidence of foodborne illness attributed to meat and poultry products. The cost to individual consumers for their meat and poultry purchases is estimated to be approximately one-tenth of a cent per pound.

Q. Why so much discussion of records and verification? Will inspectors just be doing paperwork?

A. The records will verify that plants are following procedures that prevent hazards and ensure food safety. The records of microbial testing compiled by the plant for generic E. coli and by the Agency for Salmonella will provide data that will show if products are meeting performance standards that have been established by the Agency.

Q. How many plants has FSIS taken action against, based on violations of the Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures (SSOPs)?

A. Since January of 1997, FSIS has temporarily withheld the mark of inspection from about 20 plants and has moved to withdraw inspection from one plant, based on violations of the SSOPs.

Q. Will any inspectors lose their jobs because of the new system?

A. No inspectors are losing their jobs due to the new inspection system. FSIS is maintaining the size of the 7,400 inspection force and adding 100 compliance officers to the inspection force.

Q. Is it true that plants will be policing themselves and that inspectors will just be doing paperwork?

A. Such a statement is absolutely untrue. Inspectors have the same authority under HACCP as they do now. HACCP is another tool they will use to ensure that products are being produced in systems that will prevent contamination.