

COLLABORATION DUTCH PUBLIC FOOD SAFETY AUTHORITY AND PRIVATE CERTIFICATION BODIES

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Introduction

In the Netherlands, there is a long tradition in practices in the field of food safety. The obligation to have a good working HACCP-system in each place where food is being produced, stored or processed already exists since 1996. Another important driver for Dutch food producers to upgrade and improve the HACCP-system continuously were the specific requirements on food safety of some leading food retailers in the Netherlands. They claimed that each supplier not only had to fulfil the legal requirements of having a well working HACCP-system, but also had to have a HACCP-certificate. As a result of these requirements, nowadays 60% of the Dutch food producers/processors possess a HACCP-certificate which is a much higher number than in any other country, either in EU or in the rest of the world.

This claim could be set due to the fact that a Dutch HACCP scheme exists that is already accredited since 1997. This Dutch HACCP scheme (“Requirements for a HACCP based Food Safety system”) results in a private certificate. The Dutch HACCP-scheme is compiled by the National Board of Experts – HACCP in The Netherlands and is owned by the (private) Foundation for Food Safety Certification. The Dutch HACCP scheme is GFSI approved since 2002.

Need for less duplication of audits.

Of course the Dutch Food Safety Authority (VWA = Dutch Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority) has a legislative task and responsibility to safeguard the food safety. This authority surveys, assesses and communicates the risks and makes them manageable in the society. They try to realize this task by monitoring the safety of food, feed and consumer goods, the health and welfare of animals and the alcohol and tobacco legislation. The VWA until now disregarded the HACCP-certificates which were achieved by the food businesses. The motivation for this was the own responsibility given by the EU and Dutch government. Certified food businesses were assessed and monitored on the same way as non-certified food businesses. Certification is a private initiative and is a company’s choice. Of course this way of monitoring and assessing was criticised by the certified food businesses which put a lot of effort in gaining the HACCP-certificate.

Recently started a discussion between the public VWA and the private certification bodies to discuss how more confidence from the VWA could be achieved. A better collaboration was seen as a general interest for anybody. When the VWA could be convinced of the quality of these private certification audits, this could benefit all HACCP certified food companies and the VWA as well. So an intensive discussion started. A number of measurement were discussed which were already implemented since many years as qualification of auditors, harmonisation of audits and audit reports and making the information available for VWA. In return, the VWA is willing to share their specific knowledge and experience, e.g. by opening their unique database which gives a clear view of all possible risks in a certain sector of the food industry.

New public and private partnership

Very recently the certification bodies and the Food Authority and the food industry agreed in a unique cooperation which resulted in a change in the policy of the Dutch Food Safety Authority: a risk based policy and using private initiatives of the food industry. Transparency in the market and sharing food safety knowledge are important preconditions for this collaboration. Finally it has to result in less audits and an improvement of food safety throughout the whole food supply chain. This new way of monitoring and surveying food businesses by the VWA has already started in 2008 as a pilot. If the experiences are positive this cooperation will be extended to other sectors of the Dutch food industry.

References

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