

# MULTI-CRITERIA AUDIT TOOL FOR THE TECHNICAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT WITHIN THE AGRI-FOOD SME'S

## AUDIFOOD PROJECT

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### RESEARCH TEAM

Prof. Dr. ing. J. LENGES and ir. F.E. JUNKER  
Prof. Dr. ir. A. HYUGHEBAERT and ir. K. BOEVE  
Prof. N. FRASELLE and F. DEJEMEPPE  
Prof. P. VERHAEGEN and J.-M. EVERARD

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## MULTI-CRITERIA AUDIT TOOL FOR THE TECHNICAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT WITHIN THE AGRI-FOOD SME'S

### Summary

The Centre for Education and Research for Food Industries (CERIA), the State University of Ghent (RUG - Faculty of Agriculture & Applied Biological Sciences) and the Catholic University of Louvain-la-Neuve (UCL - Faculty of Law (Center of Consumerrights) and the Faculty of Econ. Soc. & Pol. Sciences (Department of Communication)) collaborated in this research project.

The project started early April '98 and was finalised by the end of May '00. The most prominent goal of the study was to set up a multi-criteria evaluation document for agri-food SME's concerning the conformity of the internal quality control with the regional legislation requirements (Flemish, Brussels and Walloon).

Within the framework of the study an assessment was made to develop a tool that can be used by all the SME managers from the different food sectors. An SME is identified as an enterprise that employs *less than fifty persons*.

The document comprises three parts: the first is related to the lay-out of the plants, the manufacture and storage processes with particular interest in cleaning and disinfection, waste management and the optimal use of raw materials, water and energy. The second part investigates the SME's with regard to the rights and expectations of consumers in three essential points: information by means of product description, safety and complaint handling. The third part deals with internal and external communication of the SME's: guaranteeing the transfer of internal information between functions, continuous training of the personnel and the quality of clients relations.

The questionnaire was developed and tested in close collaboration with 22 SME's spread over the three Belgian regions. If necessary, the questions were adjusted in relation to their pertinence and understanding. The results have demonstrated that the managers concerned have been able to identify the weak and key points of their enterprises.

This integrated audit instrument answers the demands of legislation requirements (Responsibility of the Producer). It also stimulates the willingness of the SME's towards quality assurance and will enable the completing of the national database on quality policy in agri-food production.

In the meantime, the document has been submitted to a Belgian publisher - La Charte - Editions Juridiques, rue Guimard, 19 - 1040 Brussels for publication of two editions: a French edition for the SME's from the Walloon and Brussels regions and a Flemish edition for the SME's from the Flemish region.

Each edition contains an audit questionnaire subdivided into three parts and included marks related to the conformity of the prevailing legislation and good manufacturing practice.

## **1. Structure of the audit**

The evaluation criteria are selected according to the following principles:

- applicable to the whole agri-food SME sector
- neutral and independent evaluation of the SME
- improving the functioning of the SME
- securing the quality of the environment
- encouraging SME goodwill to meet the concerned regulations and develop a strategy of good technical and human management.

The relative importance of the developed activities (production, water and energy consumption and waste management - consumer relations - internal and external communications) is determined by assigning scores. The adjustment of each criterion was evaluated by taking into account its

- intrinsic importance in the context of the legislation and quality assurance
- relative importance with regard to the order of the criteria selected.

The report included three parts (topics)

- respect for the environment
- interest and expectation of consumers
- internal and external communication

The most important items included in the audit are undermentioned.

Each part is subdivided into

- audit questionnaire with a score system
- technical support guide
- guide for the evaluation of the impacts on the enterprise
- guide of recommendations for improvements

### **1.1 The questionnaire "respect for the environment"**

(CERIA and University of Gent)

For the set-up of this questionnaire, certain Belgian studies concerning the environment sector were taken into account:

- GOM OOST VLANDEREN: "Milieudoorlichting vlees"
- OREE, entreprises et collectivités: guide d'auto-diagnostic pour la mise en place d'une stratégie environnement à l'usage des PME-PMI
- GUICHET ENTREPRISES-ENVIRONNEMENT (SDRB/GOMDB)
- "l'environnement dans le secteur de la viande et du poisson à Bruxelles"
- P. FOSCOLO (1990): l'audit en environnement appliqué aux entreprises (Région de Bruxelles-Capitale)

The first part of the questionnaire covers the legal aspects concerning the environment legislation applied in each Belgian region and the second part is related to the impacts of the enterprise on the environment.

The main selected criteria are:

### 1. legal aspects

1.2 generalities

- town planning licence (installation licence)
- environment licence (documents delivered by the regional authority)

1.3 consumption of water

- water catchment
- waste water production
- waste water treatment, control and analysis
- waste water evacuation

1.4 production of organic and dangerous wastes

1.5 quality of the surrounding air

1.6 generation of noise and vibration by engines

1.7 handling of dangerous products

- storage of fuel (in the earth, at the surface)
- asbestos

### 2. Evaluation of the impact of the enterprise on the environment

2.1 generalities

- complaints

2.2 water

- consumption
- separate circuits for domestic, industrial, cooling and rain water
- waste water treatment
- measure systems for waste water evacuation

2.3 solid wastes

- production of solid wastes
- packing paper waste

2.4 quality of the surrounding air

- emission of smell odours

2.5 sources of noises and vibrations

2.6 ground and dangerous products

- ground contamination
- storage of dangerous products

1

2.7 energy consumption

- sources
- energy counters

### 3. Actions to make improvements to the different items including water, waste quality of air, noise and vibration, ground an dangerous products, energy.

## **1.2 The questionnaire " interest and expectation of consumers "**

(CDC Market and consumers - UCL - Louvain-la -Neuve)

### 4. market and consumers aspects

- legal aspects (labelling of prepacked foods)
- using of regulated voluntary norms (Protection of Designations of origin - protection of Geographical Indications and Specific Character - Regional labels "Label de Qualité Wallonne")
- good practice manufacturing (information about GMO, allergens, lay-out of the labelling, prices)
- complementary written information for non prepacked foods
- managing of complaints
- good market practices
- business relation with suppliers

## **1.3 The questionnaire "internal and external communication "**

(RECD - Recherche en communication - UCL - Louvain-la-Neuve)

### 5. Internal and external communication aspects

#### 5.1 quality policy

- structure of the enterprise
- office (function) identification and description
- quality management
- evaluation and revision of the quality policy
- internal communication system
- procedure of change concerning the internal organisation

#### 5.2 training

- identification of training needs
- quality training
- specific environment training
- planing and revision of training programs

#### 5.3 managing of working documents

- filing of invoices from suppliers and customers

#### 5.4 quality handbook

- updating of the production tests and control results
- receipts
- corrective actions
- official certificates and licences
- dangerous wastes
- non dangerous wastes
- identification file of suppliers and customers
- communication file of suppliers and customers
- conformity cards of raw material
- complaints file concerning environment
- corrective actions concerning environmental complaints
- filing of legislative aspects
- filing and internal communication of audit documents
- filing of documents concerning prospection of suppliers and customers
- filing of production check-lists

#### 5.5 follow-up of the analytical reports concerning raw materials and final products

- products delivery procedures to customers
- storage, preservation and selling instructions
- product information to the consumers

- analysis of the selling statistic
- management of environmental and ecological aspects

The detailed audit-questionnaire for SME's established for the Brussels Capital Region, including the respect of the environment, the technical support guide to use this questionnaire, a guide for the evaluation of the impacts on the enterprise and recommendations for improvements are attached in annexe.

The final report also included similar questionnaires for the two other regions of Belgium, a complete description of the specific regional legal requirements (orders of the regional governments concerning these topics), guide-lines for using the questionnaires, impacts on the environment and opportunities for improvements.

The diversity of the examined enterprises was the motivation factor for this study. The final issue of the collaboration with the SME's has led to a practical and general audit tool that can be used and adapted to different cases of small agri-food enterprises. All the information collected has taken into account each SME's sector of activity.

## **2. Using the audit**

Reading the audit is apparently easy and creates no problems. The weighting system is appreciated and helps to identify the strong and weak points within a company.

The audit satisfies its objectives as a self-evaluation tool to define the strong and weak points from an environmental point of view within a company. The guide has proved to be an indispensable complement in understanding the audit and in its use by the head of a company or the person nominated to be responsible for environmental affairs. The results of the audit can serve to define objectives from an environmental point of view and permit their realisation via further audits.

The fact that this tool gives a global perspective in only one volume, was very much appreciated in the pilot companies. It groups together not only environmental obligations, but it also gives advice on how to reduce the impact of a company on the environment. A lot of companies receive such information in a fragmented way through folders, magazines and sometimes technical aid centres, which makes it difficult to have an overall view of the subject. The document which assembles all the official and non-official addresses was considered interesting. **However, it is necessary** to devote considerable time any in-depth study of a particular subject and this is not readily available within the small company.

The system of weighting can be used as an **own value, internal to the company**, in fact it is rather dangerous to compare companies within the same sector for several reasons:

- the geographical location of a company has an effect on some of the factors studied; a company on an industrial estate can hardly be compared with a company in an urban setting with regard to "noise and vibration". This problem could be resolved by the integration of a coefficient of importance related to location. However to perfect of such a coefficient would demands a much broader study because each company has its own site layout.
- some of the sections in the category comprise only one or two questions; the influence of negative responses is preponderant, (100% for two affirmatives, 50% for one affirmative, 0% for two negatives or else 100% for one affirmative, 0% for one negative) and could be the reason for a weak score in this section and category. This effect is even more marked regarding legal aspects, which are weighted threefold.
- size is an important factor: having an engineering workshop will generate considerable waste (used oil, solvents); for some companies the quantity of dangerous waste will require a register. Fuel tanks, buried or above-ground, will also have an effect. Therefore, a high score for dangerous products does not mean the same thing from one company to another.

A coefficient of correction based on non-applicable questions could be used and tested. This coefficient would be calculated from questions "without object" and would erase the differences among the different companies. If such a coefficient can be defined it risks complicating the weighting calculations, and its usefulness to the company is not really clear. On the other hand, such a coefficient is necessary for an external auditor. It is necessary to have a test, on a much larger scale, including this coefficient, to show if it is applicable.

### **3. Level of requirement of the audit**

The audit is considered as a demanding tool. Some of the questions require analysis or the measurement of parameters (analyses of effluents, internal and external measurements of the level of noise). The audit has been developed around the principle that a company, in order to satisfy the conditions of the different permits and authorisations, must show proof, even though there is no obligation in Brussels Region or Walloon Region legislation to carry out such analyses.

The absence of analyses will result in a weak score which could be considered unfair ("we have never had any complaints about noise", "no problems regarding our waste water") and it is true that the situation can appear more negative than it really is, if a whole series of measures or investments have been made to diminish potential nuisances or to make economies.

Some questions require technical know-how (material of the buried fuel tank, presence of condenser batteries, refrigeration fluids used). If the person using the guide does not understand what is being talked about, his/her answer must be 'no' and this leads to a score lower than it should be. A negative answer from the user can become an affirmative one after reading the guide which specifies the technical information.

The realisation of a complete audit takes a company a lot of time. The legislative aspects have been shown to be the most difficult to understand, partly because of the terminology used. Hence, use of the guide is indispensable, and the reader should refer to it frequently in order to answer the questions.

### **4. Analyses of the results concerning internal and external communication**

The diversity of the enterprises which were the object of audit or pre-audit is at the same time a restrictive factor (less possible generalization of the results) and a boost for search. It led to work out a tool for audit at the same time general enough to be adapted to the various situations of the companies and sufficiently precise to answer their waitings. This diversity, as well as the results of the pre-audits, also led us to build the guide of the audit under two points of view:

- clarification of the questions ;
- recommendations for the management of quality.

These two aspects are present for each question of the audit.

#### **4.1 Quality policy**

This part meets the greatest consensus on the whole of the audited enterprises (pre-audit and balanced audit). The strategic factors for the introduction and the maintenance of a quality plan in the company seem to be well perceived by the whole of the companies. However, let us notice that this exact and positive perception is not always accompanied by a real application. This remark aims especially the dichotomy that can exist between the perception of the direction (initiator of the projects related to quality) and the whole of the actors of the enterprise.

Indeed a good perception of the structures of the company and regulations means founded in its centre is necessary to the good course of quality procedures. If this perception seems relatively acquired by the people in charge of the administrative duties, it isn't necessarily the same for the employees. Thus, what appears sufficiently clear for the ones, is not for the others, to start with the need for adopting a quality plan. Generally, the degree of formalization of communication, of the strategic stages to consider, of the identification of the key actors for quality, and of all the procedures is very different from one enterprise to another. Those which are already committed in a process of certification (type **ISO 9002, HACCP, ISO 9002** etc ...) carried out a certain formalization of the procedures whereas the others are satisfied with non-formal systems. Far away from any value judgment, one can underline that this informal way of working which seems to give a greater flexibility for the company at first sight, also constitutes a danger for the perennisation of the good processes. Indeed, without a minimum of formalization, competences and functions remain closely related to the people. What would happen then in the event of departures, of long time absences, etc? Moreover, as said before, this informal character concentrates the most total visions of the company (and often competences) in the hands of some individuals close to the direction, which accentuates the differences in representation of the actions of the enterprise between direction and employees, with the possibility of a less implication of the latter.

## 4.2 Formation

The interest for formations is crucial for the enterprise which want to maintain a quality of production. The study of pre-audit had revealed a great interest carried by the directors for the formation. However, it is in this part that one notes the greatest disparities at the time of the balanced audit. This fact can be explained by the highly informal character of the formations in the majority of the visited companies. The formations " on the workstation " seem to be the rule, the institutionalized formations are the exception. However, the company can save neither the effort of knowing the needs for training, general or specific to quality, nor that of their installation, if it wants to ensure the life of the quality plan. Indeed, the formations "on the workstation", are neither systematized, nor specifically recorded. Thus, the competences acquired by the employees are likely not to be mobilized where necessary; worse they can prove to be obsolete short-term. From where, need for also envisaging a continued training. Moreover, these informal formations don't make it possible to the employees to develop capacities of autonomy within a total process which they could apprehend (this problem is related to the one evoked at the preceding point).

## 4.3 Management of the documents

Generally, the management of the documents seems apprehended relatively well by the audited SME's. More precisely, companies already committed in a procedure of installation of quality, or those which intend to do so (which constitute the majority of the visited enterprises) had to face a rationalization of the management of their documents. The major problem detected by this part of the audit is the definition of the access to the documents. We were faced to two very different logics. One was leaving the documents in free access to the whole of the personnel (excepted for the more " strategic " documents: costs, invoices, audits, etc ...), the other, on the contrary, was to concentrate the accesses in the hands of some people considered to be only qualified for redistributing them or not afterwards (in general members of the direction or close to it). In this last case, only the documents " creatures of habit " (receipts, procedures of talks, etc ...) are accessible for the personnel (and in general only for the concerned people). The danger of this attitude, which could prove to be legitimate in certain cases, is a potential devalorization of competences of the personnel and then a progressive demotivation or on the contrary a confrontation. Actually, a third method arises: no access is clearly defined and no clear publicity of the documents is made. It goes without saying this last case (in relative importance) can lead to harmful situations for the enterprise. The audit however did not want to support a " bureaucratic " attitude, often reproached to the system of management of the quality (standard ISO 9000) and badly adapted to SME, but tries well to approach a certain form of rationalization of the management of documentation.

## 4.4 External communication

A great diversity of the results appears in this part. It generally results from the disparity of the situations of the SME's themselves. Indeed, some do not have almost any contact with the end consumer, all their products forwarding by the distributors or other processing undertakings. Nevertheless, the majority testify to a relatively low interest for the information of the consumers as regards health (nutritional information, information for general public on the health risks...). Only a third of them state to have recourse to analyses of waitings of their customers or consumers. Majority referring simply to their statistics of sale like only indicator of satisfaction of the customers. In addition, the efforts as regards publicity are very low and few preventive measures are taken to face a degradation of the image of the company or branch of industry as a whole. Factors of image, such environmental impact, the social contribution, good practices etc.. are in general relatively neglected. However, the visited SME's seem to attach a certain importance to their image, but this one is defined more compared to their customers that compared to the end consumers (when the enterprise do not maintain relations with the consumer, majority case in our study). It is, for example, why certifications (ISO9002 etc ...) are judged rather positively, just as the shows or professional fairs (besides the majority of the external communications with an advertising vocation pass by this kind of demonstrations with a reduced visibility), whereas the actions of information for general public are rather forsaken, except for one or the other " visit of company ". On another side, the relations with the suppliers and the customers are the subject of a particular attention and are sufficiently formalized.



## **5. Conclusions**

### **5.1 Environment**

The interest shown by the companies in protection of the environment seems to be weak. Increasingly stricter regulatory restrictions could inverse this tendency.

However, in some of the companies studied there was an ignorance of the regulations.

Just as in the area of quality, one of the greatest needs is for information. There is a lot of information available but it is decentralised. There are services available within the Regions (Ecobru, Brussels capital Region) but these are not well-known.

All the agri-food companies, and particularly the SME's have to submit not only to pressure from the standard food legislation pertaining to this sector and necessary to ensure consumer safety, but also to environmental legislation restrictions, which are indispensable in the long-term. The SME's sometimes give the impression of being buried under all these obligations.

The cost of these restrictions should be calculated. If the cost of quality improvement is amortised in the long-term by control of procedures, what about other costs?

Certain investments aimed at reducing energy consumption can be amortised quickly; rational management of energy being judicious. The management of waste materials would also have a quick and favourable impact (reduction in tax on waste).

But what about the management of packaging materials? If the Interregional Agreement on Packaging aims to reduce the volume of packaging on the market (according to the policy of the polluter pays), it raises a large number of questions on the logistics problem if a company decides to accept responsibility for the different obligations. Taking back waste packaging demands a very high investment of time and hence, money. If the SME decides to subcontract its responsibilities for waste packaging and information to recognised companies like FOST PLUS (which is responsible for collecting and collating information about household packaging) or VAL-I-PAC (which does the same for industrial packaging), the front-line costs are not negligible. Currently, the distinction between household packaging (from consumers' homes) and industrial packaging (e.g. bulk packaging like cartons) is not clear for some companies.

The need for multi-skilled technical aid is more than ever necessary for the SME in order to help it, not only produce an agreeable and safe product, which does not generate too much packaging, but also so that waste into the environment is limited and that the energy used in production is optimised. (These few aspects are far from exhaustive.) Where a large company can afford to appoint a person to manage one or more of these aspects, this is not the case for an SME. There exists financial and technical aid, therefore, the SME must be guided in order to find its way in the maze of its different obligations. It is important to underline the fact that a company which is pro-active at the level of Quality Assurance is not necessarily pro-active at the environmental level, however there is evidence of a trend in this direction in other companies.

### **5.2 "Consumer Market"**

Consumer expectations concerning food quality have undergone a number of changes in the last ten years. Other factors than price, hygiene and food safety, guide consumer choice today.

The impetus given by internal law, and then Community law, to quality labels (AOP, IGP, specificity attestations, labels) link the concern of the consumer to products which answer a variety of quality demands.

Globalisation has exacerbated competition among companies, with a resulting precariousness in working conditions. The consumer now questions child labour and conditions imposed on the weakest link in the chain of production (unqualified workers, insecure status, small producers, small self-employed workers). A kind of social consumerism with ethical values is tending to contradict the logic of competition and become enriched with new values.

The impact on the environment of different styles of consumption has become one criterion of choice for a growing number of consumers.

Nowadays the new demands of the market are taken into account by the agri-food multinationals who share the market. An intensification of industrial competition imposes increasing demands for competitiveness on companies. Within this context, the strategic advantages which enable the SME's to consolidate their position and permit a better adaptation to an ever-changing environment, become essential.

Several factors can be put forward to explain the SIVIE's delay in this respect.

The SME's do not have either the information or the appropriate technological aid to take part in these new strategies. To improve quality, the small companies tend to meet consumer demand on condition that they have sufficient technological control to act. The obligations which they should fulfil are not effected because they do not have the corresponding testimonials (e.g. labelling of GM foods, packaging recycling). There is a manifest need for legal and technical assistance.

However, the SME's do have some advantages. A flexible structure, an ability to adapt quickly to change, the integration of production and **commercial functions, and good** personal service, are proof of a real capacity to integrate new customer expectations.

How is it going to be possible to explain, train, make the whole workforce, and particularly the blue collar workers, stick to and participate together in this challenge? Are there not in the current processes - the way companies work- and in the procedures - the way they are made to work - some contradictions? What new rules, what procedures can be adopted to facilitate trading? As a whole these rules are certainly not the same for the workforce of a large group as for an SME.

- Within which legal framework to act?
- Why manage quality?
- Which foundations to take as a base?
- Which methods to develop?
- What are the possible applications?
- What would be the repercussions on the company?

Initiatives need to be taken in favour of the SIVIE's at the level of:

- information on existing legislation. This information should also be aimed at new consumer challenges concerning allergens, GM foods, nutritional labelling, ethical and fair trading,
- technical aid: the SIVIE's develop their advantages badly. They should be helped to develop appropriate marketing strategies (marketing plan, good communications).

Such initiatives also aim to sensitise the companies to the new realities in food quality (safety, standards and environmental performance, standards and ethical performance).

40% of the Walloon SIVIE's do not respect the environmental permit. The misunderstanding of norms, the absence of perception of what is at stake in the market, the lack of 'savoir-faire' to develop the strength of their brands and to gain a position on the market, the negligence observed concerning internal and external communication with their environment and the different players in the commercial chain, all justify the establishment of continuous training programmes in quality management, marketing and communication.

The process of training would be based on the different parameters taken into account in this present audit (test the audit instrument, develop it as an auto-evaluation tool, use it as information support).

A detailed documentary support and a variety of contacts with the sector should make it possible to take into account the true situations of the companies, their preoccupations and their affectivity for that sector which is theirs. By the end the training programme should have established a common framework of reference, integrated methodologies already practised by people in the field, suggested rules of the game acceptable to all, contributed to improving dialogue, confidence and, starting from the basic relationship (producer - distributor - consumer), encourage each one to adopt positive behaviour.

### 5.3 Communication

Communication plays a primordial role in the management of a quality plan within a company.

*- During the initialisation phase*

Before a quality plan can start it is necessary to make an adequate survey of the company's situation and a register of available resources: identification of the different structures in the company, identification of the key quality management functions, identification of manufacturing procedures etc.

The initialization of the quality plan generally requires an adhesion and a motivation from all the actors of the company. For that, the communication **cannot be restricted** to announce the will of the direction to found a particular operating mode in agreement with a quality plan. Even if it must assume this role indeed (generally), it cannot be good enough. The very structures of the enterprise often have to be analyzed : company's culture, relations in its centre, the whole of its operating mode. It will less be a question of causing adhesion for the direction, and in the worst case submission, than to found a true collaboration between all the actors of the company concerned with this change, ie. generally all the members. The phase of initiation is thus crucial because it will condition all, or at least a significant part, of the good development of the quality plan.

*- In routine: like a tool of assistance to management*

Once the procedures of management of quality founded, communication will act to make the quality plan live. Indeed, a plan describes in details in a filer but which cannot be implemented and developed is not great utility. This is why, from the design of the plan, the stress will be laid on the modes of regulation necessary to the life of the plan. In facts, that will signify making it possible the procedures to adapt according to the context, of the environment of work or the socio-economic environment. There still, the communication is one of the average privileged tool for regulation via meetings, Boards, memos, and especially formations... In addition, the discouragement in front of the first significant difficulties, the falls of motivations, the resistances to change are common in any establishment of innovation. The accompaniment, listening, the constitution of groups can help to overcome this type of difficulties.

*- Downstream: as a tool for valorization*

The procedures of quality assurance probably will bring personal satisfactions (after the difficulties related to starting) and an increase in the security of the products and processes. However, this effort is likely to be choked if it does not profit from an external recognition. The communication (external) can then become a tool for valorization of achieved work, that is via publicities, of a marketing plan or simply from recognition by the customers. On the contrary, it would be illusory to only consider a quality plan like one marketing tool. Moreover, it could not probably develop without a strong intern motivation.

This non-exhaustive panorama of the roles of the communication in initialization and then in the life of a quality plan is naturally somewhat idealized but also far too normative. The study showed that reality can be slightly different. The attention paid to the formations for example appears often too tiny. In the same way, the external communication is sometimes limited to a good management of the relations with the providers and the customers. This work was also the occasion to highlight a paradox or a dead end: they are the most implied SME's in procedures of certification which are ready to use the communication advisedly. This implies that the tool for audit should constitute not only one means of evaluation of accomplished work but also a help for the initiation of a quality plan. Indeed, the part " Quality policy" accompanies the enterprise in the identification from its structures, the identification of its way of communication, the forecast of the tools suitable for the " life" of the quality plan. The part " formation " draws the attention to the need for keeping a description of the formations and for updating them; it recommends a general training at the time of the recruiting, checks the introduction of continuous **trainings and tends to develop the formations**. The part " management of the documents " checks the minimum of necessary documents to ensure the safety while insisting on the use of the supplies already in hand, it binds current commercial management and quality, draws the attention to the essential forms, checks the revision of the documents, is based on assets, proposes to define accesses to documentation. Lastly, the external communication part stresses the use of the supplies in hand, proposes a systematization of the procedures of communication with the providers and the customers, encourages an pro-active attitude from the SME and sensitizes the latter with the management of its image.

The interdisciplinary tool of audit can thus appear an invaluable help **for the SME's**. On another side, it can constitute a kind of response to the paradox raised higher (only the companies most sensitive to the questions concerning quality are evaluated very favourably) while becoming the instrument of sensitizing and valorization of a real quality policy.

## **6. Annexes**

- Audit-questionnaire for SME's (Brussels Capital region)
- Technical support guide
- Guide for the Evaluation of the impacts on the enterprise
- Recommendations and improvements

## RESEARCH TEAM

### Environment

**Prof. Dr. ing. J. Lenges et ir. F.E. Junker**

**asbl BRUFOTEC**  
c/o SEA/POS (CERIA-COOVI)  
avenue E. Gryzon 1  
B-1070 BRUXELLES  
Tel. : 02/526.72.52  
Fax : 02/526.72.59  
E-mail:           brufotec@village.uunet.be  
                  brufotec@hotmail.com

**Prof. Dr. ir. A. Huyghebaert et ir. K. Boeve**

**Universiteit Gent (UG)**  
Faculteit Landbouwkundige en Toegepaste Biologische Wetenschappen  
Vakgroep Levensmiddelentechnologie en Voeding  
Coupure Links 653  
B-9000 Gent  
Tel. : 09/264.59.61  
Fax : 09/264.62.18  
E-mail : Koen.Dewettinck@rug.ac.be

### Consumers

**Prof. N. Fraselle et F. Dejemepe**

**UCL**  
**Centre de Droit de la Consommation**  
Place de Montesquieu 2  
B-1348 Louvain-La-Neuve  
Tel. : 010/47.85.31  
Fax : 010/47.85.32  
E-mail : vanpeel@dpri.ucl.ac.be

### Communication

**Prof. P. Verhaegen et J.-M. Everard**

**UCL**  
**Département Recherche en Communication**  
Ruelle de la Lanterne Magique 14  
B-1348 Louvain-La-Neuve  
Tel. : 010/47.28.07  
Fax : 010/47.30.44  
E-mail : verhaegen@reco.ucl.ac.be