

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

AUDIFOOD PROJECT

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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.