

Appendix II

PROPOSED DRAFT GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF MEAT HYGIENE**(Advanced to Step 5)**

1. Meat must be safe and suitable for human consumption and all interested parties including government, industry and consumers have a role in achieving this outcome.¹

This draft principle addresses the primary goals of meat hygiene i.e. meat must be both safe and suitable for human consumption. In a risk-based, farm-to-plate meat hygiene system, all interested parties i.e. industry, government and consumers, have a role to play in ensuring safety and suitability.

2. The competent authority should have the legal power to set and enforce regulatory meat hygiene requirements, and have final responsibility for verifying that regulatory meat hygiene requirements are met. It should be the responsibility of the establishment operator to produce meat that is safe, suitable and in accordance with regulatory meat hygiene requirements. There should be a legal obligation on relevant parties to provide any information and assistance as may be required by the competent authority.

Although all interested parties have a role in meat hygiene, the competent authority is responsible for setting standards and has the final responsibility for ensuring that safety and suitability requirements as specified in regulations are met.

3. Meat hygiene programmes should have as their primary goal the protection of public health and should be based on a scientific evaluation of meat-borne risks to human health and take into account all relevant food safety hazards, as identified by research, monitoring and other relevant activities.

For food in international trade, the WTO SPS Agreement requires that sanitary measures be based on scientific principles and an assessment of the risks to human health, using risk assessment techniques developed by the relevant international organisations. It is now generally accepted at both the international level i.e. Codex, and the national level i.e. Member government competent authorities, that food hygiene standards should be based on science and risk assessment to the extent possible and practicable.

4. The principles of food safety risk management should be incorporated wherever possible and appropriate in the design and implementation of meat hygiene programmes.²

The Codex system is working on several fronts to develop practical guidelines for incorporating risk assessment into the design and implementation of food hygiene standards. Development of a framework for management of food-borne risks to human health is based on four steps: risk evaluation (including risk assessment), assessment of options for managing risks, implementation of hygiene measures, and monitoring and review.

5. [Wherever possible and practical, competent authorities should formulate food safety objectives (FSOs)³ according to a risk-based approach so as to objectively express the level of hazard control that is required to meet public health goals.]

FSOs are a relatively new concept in Codex. Given the primacy of HACCP systems in food control, it is apparent that achievement of risk-based food safety goals requires a “bridge” between the level

¹ Specific meat hygiene requirements should address biological, chemical and physical hazards; and pathophysiological and other characteristics associated with suitability for human consumption

² Codex Committee on Food Hygiene, proposed draft Principles and Guidelines for the Conduct of Microbiological Risk Management (CX/FH 01/7 and ALINORM 03/13 paras. 99-128); Codex Committee on General Principles, proposed draft Working Principles for Risk Analysis, CX/GP 02/3

³ As a temporary compromise solution, the 34th Session of the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene decided that its drafting group should use the following definition proposed by the ICMSF as a basis for its discussions. Food Safety Objective: The maximum frequency and/or concentration of a [microbiological] hazard in a food at the time of consumption that provides the appropriate level of health protection [(ALOP)].” (ALINORM 03/13 Para. 123)

of protection desired for the consumer population (“appropriate level of protection”) and the level of hazard control that the HACCP system must necessarily deliver. The concept of a FSO is founded on the need for an objective measure of the level of control of hazards in the food that is required to achieve a desired level of consumer protection.

6. Meat hygiene requirements should control hazards to the greatest extent practicable throughout the entire food chain. Information available from primary production should be taken into account so as to tailor meat hygiene requirements to the spectrum and prevalence of hazards in the animal population from which the meat is sourced.

Food safety measures can be implemented at many points in the food chain and an optimal meat hygiene system will apply available measures at those points where they are the most efficient and effective in terms of reducing food-borne risks to human health. Because of the particular nature of meat production systems, optimisation of meat hygiene activities at the processing level requires appropriate information to be supplied from the primary production level.

7. The establishment operator should apply HACCP principles. To the greatest extent practicable, the HACCP principles should also be applied in the design and implementation of hygiene measures throughout the entire food chain.

HACCP is now acknowledged as the food hygiene system of choice, and the establishment operator has the primary responsibility for its application. However, there are some concerns over the practicality of HACCP at the farm level and therefore this draft principle must remain flexible in terms of application to all sectors of the food chain.

8. When voluntary quality assurance systems have been put in place, competent authorities should take the contribution of such systems into account during verification of regulatory requirement.

QA systems are widespread in the food industry. Voluntary inclusion of meat hygiene activities in an overarching QA system operated by the establishment operator is likely to result in enhanced delivery, and competent authorities may take properly-functioning QA systems into account when carrying out their regulatory responsibilities e.g. by decreasing the frequency of HACCP verification checks. The Codex Committee on Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems is currently considering a discussion paper entitled “Proposed Draft Guidelines for the Utilisation of Quality Assurance Systems to Meet Requirements in Relation to Food” which explores the possible role of the competent authority in officially recognising such QA systems.

9. The range of activities involved in meat hygiene should be carried out by personnel with the appropriate training, knowledge, skills and ability as and where defined by the competent authority.

Meat hygiene involves a complex range of activities and the personnel carrying out those activities are not always directly employed by the competent authority e.g. a number of countries are trialing ante-mortem and post-mortem inspection systems that partly involve industry personnel. The training and competency of all personnel involved in meat hygiene is a key element in ensuring food safety and suitability, and defining training, knowledge, skills and ability, and roles of appropriately-trained personnel remains the responsibility of the competent authority.

10. The competent authority should define the role of those personnel involved in meat hygiene activities where appropriate, including the specific role of the veterinary inspector.

11. The competent authority should verify that the establishment operator has adequate systems in place to trace and withdraw meat from the food chain. Communication with consumers and other interested parties should be considered where appropriate.

Adequate systems for recall of product are an increasingly recognised requirement of industry.

12. As appropriate to the circumstances, the results of monitoring and surveillance of animal and human populations where available should be considered with subsequent review and/or modification of meat hygiene requirements whenever necessary.

A framework for effectively managing food-borne risks to human health requires monitoring and surveillance of the consumer population to determine if hygiene measures are achieving the required level of consumer protection. Further, monitoring of the animal population for specified hazards may be required to determine the prevalence of infected or contaminated animals entering the food chain.

13. Competent authorities should recognise the equivalence of alternative hygiene measures where appropriate, and promulgate meat hygiene measures that achieve required outcomes in terms of safety and suitability and facilitate fair practices in the trading of meat.

The equivalence of food hygiene measures is an increasingly important issue in the international trade in foods. “Equivalence is the state wherein sanitary measures applied in an exporting country, though different from the measures applied in an importing country, achieve, as demonstrated by the exporting country, the importing country’s appropriate level of protection” (Codex Committee on Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems; ALINORM 01/30A, Appendix III).