Forming the HACCP Team

Introduction:

We can think of the ‘formation of the HACCP team’ not only from the perspective of coffee enterprises that want to establish HACCP programmes but also from the perspective of other organizations – governmental and non-governmental - that wish to develop generic HACCP models or hygiene codes that are consistent with HACCP principles for the sub-sector.

In the case of the hygienic production of green coffee, the latter case is very important as the production and trading of green coffee is generally carried out by very small scale operators who do not have the necessary resources to develop their own hygiene programmes.

In many coffee producing countries governmental and industry organizations have been established whose mission is to provide technical support to the coffee sector so as to maintain the competitiveness of a sub-sector that is of major social and economic importance. The structure, scope, size and resource base of these supporting institutions vary considerably in the various coffee producing countries. These differences no doubt give rise to different constraints and opportunities in the various coffee producing countries for the supporting institutions seeking to develop advice on HACCP-based approaches to improving food safety management in the coffee sub-sector.

One of the main focuses of the global project on ‘Improving coffee quality through the prevention of mould formation’ has been the training of a core group of staff within the main coffee institutions in producing countries on general principles of food hygiene and in HACCP programmes. This group has a two-fold core responsibility:

- To design and implement further training on food hygiene and HACCP to selected target groups;
- To participate in teams to work on the development / refinement of HACCP models and hygiene codes for selected categories of coffee operations (this work clearly feeds back into the training programmes that they design and implement).

Required expertise:

To fully understand the coffee production / processing / marketing system and be able to identify all likely hazards and appropriate control measures, it is important that the HACCP team be made up of people from a wide range of disciplines. The team should include:

- Specialist(s) with a detailed knowledge of coffee production is required. This specialist would have a major role in advising on aspects of production practice that might have a potential to affect food safety, or how food safety considerations can be integrated into overall sound production practices;
• Specialist(s) with a sound understanding of processing and marketing systems. This specialist(s) would have main responsibility for identifying potential hazards associated with different raw materials, process steps, and marketing chains. He would also have to advise on possible control measures that are both practicable and sensitive to quality and other market considerations;
• An experienced microbiologist, specialised in mycology, is required to provide the scientific information on mould growth and mycotoxin production and factors implicated in their control;
• Specialist(s) in the area of HACCP application who can ensure that HACCP principles are properly interpreted and effectively applied to the coffee chain;
• Specialists in areas such as food law / regulations and bio-statistics may be required to provide advice on selected issues;
• Several specialists, each with an understanding of particular hazards and associated risks, may be required to provide advice on specific issues, e.g. chemist, toxicologist, food scientist/technologist, process engineer;
• People with other areas of expertise, such as packaging specialists, quality control experts, raw material buyers, production staff, farmers, traders, exporters, who are involved with the process, and have working knowledge of it, may be brought into the team temporarily in order to provide relevant expertise as required;
• Specialists in the fields of human behaviour, training / adult education, and socio-economics may also make an important contribution to the HACCP team’s work.

Forming the team:

There are many areas of expertise that should be represented for a comprehensive analysis of the coffee production / processing / marketing system, which are needed in order to develop a HACCP or HACCP-based hygiene programme. Each member of the HACCP team may cover more than one area of expertise according to their technical background and professional experience.

Team dynamics
It is important to bear in mind the need for efficient team dynamics. A large number of team members could easily lead to regular absences at team meetings which can obviously retard team discussions and decisions on tasks that have been assigned to the various team members. Many areas of expertise outlined above may only be required to advise on specific areas and suitable experts can be co-opted into the team for limited periods or simply consulted periodically.

Access to expertise
Access to the expertise necessary to develop sound HACCP programmes is one of the main limitations facing many small-scale food enterprises in developing countries. As discussed earlier, this constraint underlines the importance of technical assistance in this area from supporting institutions. In many coffee-producing countries, governmental agencies have been established to provide technical support to the industry. Some of these agencies have quite strong academic / research traditions. Most of the core competencies required for the
HACCP team may be found within their staff. National coffee institutions have also other opportunities for accessing the required expertise:

- Their position within the government can often facilitate access to experts in other government agencies;
- Their position in government may also facilitate access to experts through programmes of technical assistance from multi-lateral or bi-lateral agencies;
- Through their contacts with international coffee organizations - private sector or governmental – they may be able to obtain expert advice from time to time;
- Their central position in the national sector should facilitate cooperation with all stakeholders at national level.

**Facilitating the work of the HACCP team:**

Commitment of management is essential for the successful functioning of a HACCP team – whether it be a team developing HACCP-based hygiene codes for the sector, or a specific HACCP programme for a particular enterprise.

Management must ensure staff time, accountability and other resources if the team is to execute its task in a thorough and timely fashion. If the management successfully ‘champions’ HACCP development in the coffee sector as a national priority, it is more likely to gain access to the resources required by the HACCP team to do its job well. The multi-disciplinary nature of the work is most likely to require a high level of cooperation with other organizations and institutions. The smaller the resource base of the supporting coffee institutions, the more important it is to mobilise a ‘national support network’ to contribute to the development of HACCP-based food safety programmes.

**Ownership of HACCP-based Programmes:**

Governments certainly do have a role to play in developing HACCP-based hygiene programmes in order to promote the production of safe coffee in their countries and in providing direct training for stakeholders in the coffee sector. There must be no mistaking the fact, however, that the responsibility for producing safe coffee lies with the producer of that coffee. The coffee enterprises themselves bear the responsibility of implementing adequate programmes of quality assurance.

Larger coffee operators (processors and exporters) are likely to have the resources to ‘fine-tune’ model hygiene or HACC P programmes to suit their operations and existing management systems. In building programmes of assistance to the smallest of the operators, supporting agencies need to be aware of the constraints that these operators face, and help them develop programmes that the operators can realistically implement. Sensitivity to the constraints facing small-scale operators means that HACCP teams must invest considerable time and effort to simplify the food safety management requirements while maintaining adequate control of all potential hazards.