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FOOD INSPECTION SYSTEM IN TURKEY AND A SHORT LOOK TO NEW DEVELOPMENTS

SUMMARY

Turkey, The Ministry of Health (MH) and The Ministry of Agriculture (MARA) share the responsibilities on food safety. Both Ministries have great role on food control area. The MH inspects the food production establishments to give the working license and also inspects the food sale and consumption places where the MARA inspects the food products which are produced in these production places and besides has the responsibility of import and export food control. The responsibilities of the two ministries are given in the Main Food Law and supported by their own regulations.

Within the harmonization process to European Union, the national legislation on food is being revised in some main topics such as official control of foodstuffs. The regulation of the MARA on Food Production, Consumption and Inspection of Foodstuffs, introduced HACCP principles and brought a new approach to food inspection system. In new plans for food control systems of the MH, hygiene codes in addition to HACCP system is included to improve the current system. By this way more efficient and effective food control system is aimed to be achieved by the MH in Turkey within the cooperation of MARA.

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Food safety is the most important issue in recent years. Since it is directly related to health, governments give much importance to this fact and try to ensure that consumers have healthy and safe food products. That is why the new food safety policy in Europe focuses on the high level of consumer protection.

In Turkey, The Ministry of Health (MH) and The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (MARA) are carrying out the food safety responsibilities. According to the Main Food Law of Turkey, MH mainly concerns the technical and hygienic aspects in food production places and focuses on the issuing of working licences for producers of foodstuffs and the control of sale and consumption points of foodstuffs. Besides, the MH is responsible for the regulations on mineral and spring waters. The responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture concerns the issuing of licenses for the production of foodstuffs, control of production lines, permission and control of import and export foods. In addition, MARA is the contact point of Codex Committee in Turkey and these two ministries work in cooperation in Codex and related product communique studies.

The food inspection system of the MH is structured in 68 provinces where the inspection office is situated together with the related laboratory facilities. At present MH has almost 3500 trained food inspectors who have at least the bachelor of science degree in food, nutrition, pharmacy, chemistry, biology, veterinary and medical fields. Generally food engineers, chemical engineers, biologists, veterinarians, medical doctors, pharmacists, chemists, medical technologists, environment-health technicians take part in inspection process as an inspector. The food inspection system of the MARA consists of 40 laboratories within provincial directorates and approximately 700 food controllers are carrying out the food inspection under their responsibility.

The control of the inspection for registration of the food production establishment consists of checking the environmental contamination, water safety which will be used in the premise and also for obtaining ice and steam, technical tools, worker health (e.g. if they are porter of some illnesses or not), the proper entrance of the raw material general hygienic conditions. After registration, the MH operates a strict scheme of inspection varying from once per month to once per year depending on the estimated risk related to the product. The inspection frequencies of sale and consumption places differ from 2 months to 1 year excluding the district bazaars and the foods fairs which are subjected to continuous inspection. During inspections, samples are taken according the Sampling Manual for routine analysis and in the cases of suspicion and poisoning.

Food Inspections under the responsibility of the MH are followed the inspection frequency which is formulated in appendix 9 of the Regulation on Food Production and Sale Places. Inspectors are having problems since there is no standard inspection method or procedure for “good inspection practice”.

Province public health laboratories which are the official laboratories of the MH are the units which investigate, analyze and make diagnosis for the cases which have negative effects on human health and caused by the physical, biological and social environment and they find out the data which in basis of preventive health services. They have a great role on analyzing the samples taken during inspections. The analysis concerns;

- ❖ the standard assessment of quality items indicated on the label,
- ❖ All quality and food safety assessment of water,
- ❖ Chemical and microbiological testing of food safety.

The methods used are described in AOAC and the Turkish Standards issued by the Turkish Standardisation Institute. The results of the analysis from the labs are sent to the Provincial Health Directorate in order to issue appropriate measures.

Strengthening the administrative infrastructure for the control of foodstuffs is identified as a high priority in the accession partnership and the national programme of Turkey for the adoption of the EU acquis. On this basis we are following the new developments in EU legislation and do the necessary revisions in our legislation. The control system in Turkey is based on the EU directives on official controls including hygiene of foodstuffs.

To ensure the food safety, these two ministries have their own regulations based on the Main Food Law, which are having the details of food control system in related areas. The Regulation on Food Production, Consumption and Inspection of Foodstuffs of the MARA, introduced HACCP principles which have to be followed by the food producers. They also have been working on Good Manufacturing Practices and Good Hygienic Practices which will be connected to inspection systems.

By introducing the HACCP principles, MARA brought a new approach to inspection services. Especially the high risk content food sectors (meat, dairy and fisheries industries) are obliged to use HACCP from the beginning of 2001 and inspections are carrying out by taking into account the HACCP principles. The food sale and consumption places also need to apply HACCP principles but no obligation found in the Regulation of the MH.

It is important for the big factories to have HACCP system, however small sized food production places have difficulties on implementation of HACCP. Since some European countries, e.g. The Netherlands, are implementing the hygiene codes, which are sector specific and for small enterprises, we also have a need to train our inspectors and food sector to introduce this system. To succeed this aim, inspectors have to be trained in new inspection logic and methods and by this way, the awareness of central and provincial food inspectors should be increased by taking into account the self control systems. Besides, in order to ensure the proper and effective implementation of the relevant directives, the implementation of food control needs to be upgraded by introducing annual inspection planning and evaluation.

Because of the shared responsibilities in food area, we are facing problems. While the technical and hygienic inspection of the food production places are being carried out by the MH, there can be no intervene to the products which are produced in these places. Furthermore, the authority which controls the food products in sale and consumption places is again the MH and depending on the problems related to these shared responsibilities within the two ministries, autocontrol cannot be supplied.

In the line of EU legislation, our national legislation on food is being harmonized and new inspection techniques, standard analysis methods are being introduced which are considerable interest.

Both the developed and developing countries should work together on food safety issues on the global movement of foods, the system and the points which are limping have to be improved by cooperation.