

Developing a Food Safety Program: Pre-requisite programs Approved suppliers

A dairy processing business must have a system to identify the immediate supplier of dairy products and ingredients.

Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code Std 4.2.4 Div 4 Clause 14

2) A food business must provide, to the reasonable satisfaction of an authorised officer upon request, the following information relating to food on the food premises –

(a) the name and business address in Australia of the vendor, manufacturer or packer or, in the case of food imported into Australia, the name and business address in Australia of the importer; and

(b) the prescribed name or, if there is no prescribed name, a name or a description of the food sufficient to indicate the true nature of the food.

Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code Std 3.2.2 Div 3 Clause 5

Introduction

An approved supplier program complements your incoming goods procedure by describing how you identify, evaluate, select and monitor suppliers to ensure that the products they supply consistently meet defined safety, quality and regulatory specifications and standards. Approved suppliers are considered reliable sources of goods and services of an agreed and suitable quality.

An approved supplier program provides assurance that suppliers are reputable, are effectively implementing their own food safety and quality management programs and have the same commitment to food safety and quality as you do. An effective approved supplier program allows you to identify the source of all incoming goods and services to support traceability and reduces the risk of issues related to incomplete information, poor or inconsistent quality, or unreliable delivery. An approved supplier program can also help with production planning and accessing back-up sources of supplies and services, which can be critical for maintaining business continuity.

Preparing and implementing an approved supplier program

1. Determine which supplies need to come from approved suppliers

An approved supplier program should include suppliers of all incoming goods and services used in food production or other support activities (e.g. maintenance). Other items, such as office supplies, general maintenance tools, or items unrelated to the food production process, need not be purchased from approved suppliers. Examples of inputs that should be sourced from approved suppliers include:

- Ingredients - including raw materials, processing aids, additives and laboratory consumables (e.g. milk, cream, whey powders, starter cultures)
- Packaging – including any materials that have direct contact with food products (e.g. primary and secondary packaging)
- Other products used to establish and maintain safe processing conditions such as cleaning and sanitation chemicals, equipment and utensils, lubricants, seals, gaskets, hoses
- Services, for example
 - cleaning contractors
 - laundry services
 - waste removal services
 - pest control contractors
 - maintenance contractors (e.g. equipment, refrigeration etc.)
 - calibration service providers (e.g. pasteuriser, metal or x-ray detector, scales etc.)
 - testing laboratory
 - labour hire company (e.g. production, warehouse)
 - transportation services (e.g. milk supply, distribution)



2. Selection, assessment and approval of suppliers

It is important that your selected suppliers can meet the required specifications for goods, or service delivery requirements of your business. It might be helpful to consider their business as an extension of your own - each contribute to the other's profitability, so it makes sense to work cooperatively.

The potential food safety risk of incoming goods and services is evaluated as part of the hazard analysis in your Food Safety Program. Suppliers of higher risk goods and services should be prioritised and subjected to more detailed assessment to confirm they have robust systems in place to ensure the goods they supply can consistently meet your expectations of safety and quality.

Suppliers can be assessed as competent and suitable for supplying goods and services to your business in one or more of the following ways, depending on the level of assurance required (as determined by the food safety risk of the goods supplied):

3. Supplier questionnaires

Questionnaires are an efficient tool for gathering food safety and product information from the suppliers. Requests for information may include:

- whether they have accreditations with a certification body
- licenses or registrations (e.g. regulatory)
- audit reports (and any corrective actions)
- Product information form (PIF)
- current raw material specifications
- HACCP plan
- verification of their own suppliers
- contracts of supply details and documentation that would be supplied with deliveries (e.g. certificate of analysis (CoA)).

All documentation should be reviewed carefully and discussed with the supplier if necessary. If there is any doubt about the validity of information provided, consider another method to clarify concerns (e.g. an on-site audit) or consider identifying an alternate supplier.

4. Third party accreditations to a recognised HACCP standard

Third party certification by an independent accreditation body (e.g. BRC, SQF, ISO, FSSC 22000 etc.) is a common consideration for assessment of suppliers tool to assess the suitability of suppliers. The following criteria may be included:

- the accrediting body is reputable (e.g. Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) recognised)
- the audit location relates to the site where the product is made and the accreditation scope includes relevant products and manufacturing sites

5. Onsite audits and ongoing monitoring

Audits of potential suppliers provide the best visibility of a supplier's food safety production processes, manufacturing practices (GMP) and food safety systems. It can also provide you with a helpful insight into a company's food safety culture.

It may not be practical to audit all suppliers, but on-site audits may be appropriate for suppliers of high-risk goods (e.g. raw materials which will not be subjected to further pathogen control treatments, or those that are known to have the potential for chemical (including allergen), contamination or foreign material contamination.

6. Documentation and records

Document the methods and criteria used for selection and approval of suppliers. Ensure records are maintained to enable review as required.



Monitoring supplier performance

Ongoing monitoring of suppliers can help ensure continued compliance with safety and quality standards. This may include reviewing supplier performance, testing product samples, and conducting site visits. The degree of monitoring should be proportionate to the food safety risk posed by each product or service being provided.

Regular reviews of receipt records and delivery documentation and certificates against specifications (as described in your management of incoming goods and raw materials program can indicate whether the supplier is meeting expectations or requires further investigation. The personnel responsible for performing such checks, and the frequency at which they are done, should be documented within your approved supplier program.

The level of monitoring should be proportionate to the food safety risk posed by each product or service being provided (e.g. in a cheesemaking operation every delivery of milk may warrant being tested for a range of parameters, but for salt a certificate of analysis provided on delivery may be sufficient)

Maintaining a supplier register (e.g. using a spreadsheet) can be a simple but effective method for keeping track of suppliers, maintaining contact details, scheduling performance monitoring and recording any actions taken. It can also be useful for traceability purposes, such as in product recall situations.

Alternative suppliers

It is important to have alternate approved suppliers for critical goods and services to allow for unexpected circumstances such as unforeseen supply shortages, peak periods, collapse of a supplier's business or weather events which can impact on the supply or delivery of goods. These suppliers are assessed and approved in the same manner as regular suppliers. Records of all current and back-up suppliers should be maintained as part of your Food Safety Program and business continuity plan.

Verification of your approved supplier program

Verification of pre-requisite programs is an important element of your food safety program and involves ensuring that activities designed to manage food safety have been effectively implemented and are working as intended.

Your approved suppliers program can be verified by:

- Internal and external audits
- Review and sign off of receipt records
- Reviews of supplier performance
- Annual checks of supplier certifications and supplier audits

An effectively implemented approved supplier program helps demonstrate how you manage potential food safety hazards associated with goods and services used in manufacture.

Further information

Further food safety technical information is available at www.dairysafe.vic.gov.au or by contacting Dairy Food Safety Victoria at info@dairysafe.vic.gov.au

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