

IMPLEMENTATION OF AUTOCONTROL IN FINLAND

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National Food Administration was established in 1990 and a new strategy for food control was introduced. This new strategy was based on autocontrol of food business operators. At the beginning, the autocontrol was not written in the food legislation and we wanted to introduce it as a new useful tool to voluntary operators. In 1991 National Food Administration invited all the interested branches to a preparative meeting where it was agreed to establish five HACCP based autocontrol programs within retail branch, food industry and restaurant and catering branch. The programmes were created individually and with close co-operation with the National Food Administration.

Experiences were quite good and some other businesses started to show their interests. In spite of that, we wanted to have the autocontrol mandatory, in the legislation. Then came the EU directive 93/43/EES and Finland joined the Community in 1995. HACCP based autocontrol became mandatory at the same moment.

It was of course impossible for each and every establishment to start the autocontrol program at once. There was not enough information. National Food Administration continued to educate local food control authorities to help the entrepreneurs and we also continued to publish guidance for different branches, altogether seven guides during the years 1994 – 1996.

To motivate, to encourage the businesses to create better plans and to obtain publicity to the autocontrol, the National Food Administration arranged an autocontrol contest in 1997 in four categories. We obtained 39 plans and after studying them carefully we audited five best plans in all categories. The results were published at an annual Food Conference, organized by food industry. The effect was satisfactory, but in order to gain more benefit, that type of contest should be organized annually or at least once in every three years.

We also followed each year, how well the food business had started the autocontrol. Altogether there are some 70 thousand food establishments in Finland. After the first mandatory year (January 1996) only 17 per cent of them had submitted a HACCP plan to the local authority. One year later the figure was 49 per cent, then the year after it was 65 per cent and in 1999 75 per cent of all the establishments had submitted their plans and started the program.

The HACCP based autocontrol is a totally new approach in most food establishments. Therefore we must be patient and we must continue the training at different levels. We have to give time for this new culture in food safety.