

International 58th Meat Industry Conference “Meat Safety and Quality: Where it goes?”

Food hygiene – flexibility in traditional and small meat establishments

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Abstract

Republic of Serbia has a large capacity for the production of meat and meat products. Large majority of establishments are low capacity with local significance. In Serbia there is common appreciation of traditional meat products and almost every region in the Republic is known for some of the traditional products. This paper emphasizes need of defining possible flexibility rules and/or derogations to the national regulations and guidelines for traditional meat products and small-scale producers for the compliance with food safety rules.

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1. Introduction

Serbia is a relatively small country but with a long tradition in production of meat and meat products. Meat production in Serbia reflects the primary production - the most common slaughtered animals are pigs and therefore

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the most common type of consumed meat is pork¹. Beef is very valued from the consumer point of view while poultry meat is an important source of animal proteins, with a growing trend in production. Out of almost 1,000 establishments approved to produce and place the meat and meat products on the local market², the large majority of them are low capacity with local significance. Republic of Serbia has a large capacity for the production of meat and meat products, but the extent of the actual utilization of the most establishments is mainly below installed capacity. The meat sector employs a significant number of people and hence, in line with the legislation changes and available legal opportunities, there is a need for implementation of appropriate actions, in particular for “small” producers and those who maintain the production of traditional products, enabling them to fulfil new regulatory food hygiene requirements.

2. Serbian food hygiene regulations

The food safety system in the Republic of Serbia is based on principles established in the EU Food Law³: the responsibility of the food and feed business operators; traceability of food; and risk analysis. Main Laws, which are the backbone of the whole food safety system in the Republic of Serbia, are the following: Law on Veterinary Matters⁴; Law on Food Safety⁵; and Animal Welfare Law⁶. The Law on Food Safety defines the general conditions for safety of food and feed, duties and responsibilities of food and feed business operators, rapid alert system, emergency measures and crisis management, food and feed hygiene and quality. The purpose of this Law is to provide a high level of protection of human life and health and protection of the consumers’ interests, including food trade, as well as the health of plants and environmental protection. The Republic of Serbia has adopted general and specific rules on food hygiene which are partially/mostly in line with EU “Hygiene Package”^{5,7,8,9}. Within the Food Safety Law there is a legal basis for adoption of regulations covering: food hygiene requirements applied to the direct supply of consumers with primary products in small quantities; derogations from general and specific food hygiene requirements relating to small food business operators, taking into account that such deviations, may be prescribed in the case of application of traditional methods in certain stages of food production and distribution, as well as in the cases where food business operators are located in areas with special geographic limitations.

3. Good hygiene practice and flexibility rules in traditional and small establishments

The requirements placed upon manufacturers nowadays require them to monitor trends in the field of hygiene, to interpret regulatory requirements, of which there are plenty and constantly-issued new ones, plus new technology, equipment etc. Small food business operators have scant access to human resources, which is vital to be able to accompany all of the above trends and requirements. Usually, personnel in such systems, performing basic operations in the production process, do their jobs well, but often do not have sufficient education and knowledge to be able to take full part in the development of a food safety system. Very often, the documentation accompanying the system of good manufacturing practices, good hygiene practices and HACCP principles is complicated and full of phrases and terms which are unclear and confusing to staff, and especially for those in small systems, where they are not qualified enough, or at all. That could create a fear of the unknown and seems complicated, and instead of putting the system in order and providing traceability, often further complicates the conditions in the system. Therefore, it is important that the minimum documentation and records are primarily those really necessary, easily presented to staff in small collectives and help them through the implementation of appropriate training. The main problem is often a lack of material resources, training for HACCP and expertise.

There are many definitions of the traditional food products, as a highly subjective and complex concept, hard to define. However there are some common distinctions that have been researched in many projects and one of the possible complete descriptions would be “*A traditional food product is a product frequently consumed or associated to specific celebrations and/or seasons, normally transmitted from one generation to another, made with care in a specific way according to the gastronomic heritage, with little or no processing/manipulation, that is distinguished and known because of its sensory properties and associated to a certain local area, region or country.*”¹⁰. In Serbia there is common appreciation of traditional meat products and know-how. Every region in the Republic of Serbia is known for some of the traditional products; these are mainly meat (“Uzicka prsuta”, “Petrovska klobasa”, “Sjenicki sudzuk”, “Sremski kulen” and etc.). Those that are listed in the Registry of Registered Geographical Indications in

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