



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

## Why HACCP might sometimes become weak or even fail

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### Abstract

All producers must apply HACCP and they should have mutual trust. In individual HACCP shouldn't be any gaps in hazard control; likewise, there shouldn't be gaps between neighboring producers. However, gaps do exist, mostly due to lack of motivation. After initial HACCP establishing the motivation drops and the system(s) may deteriorate to a GMP level. It's vital to monitor status of HACCP(s) implementation and motivation level(s) on local and national level(s) to analyze changes and draw conclusions about their impact on the food safety management system at the national level, thus providing feedback for the national food protection system.

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Peer-review under responsibility of scientific committee of The 58th International Meat Industry Conference (MeatCon2015)

*Keywords:* HACCP; GMP; functionality; risk assessment; food producers

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### 1. Introduction

In Slovakia, the General Principles of Food Hygiene of Codex Alimentarius is the standard used by food producers and food inspection bodies, and application of HACCP as a part of good manufacturing practices (GMPs) in food production has been obligatory since 2001.

GMPs are the first and inevitable step to HACCP. Although GMPs and HACCP are discussed as specific elements they often do not have sharp border lines but are tangled with interfaces. Establishment of a HACCP system is quite demanding in respect of human, technological and thus also on financial resources<sup>6</sup>. HACCP is

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sometimes implemented mainly with the objective of satisfying the requirement of authorities, or is seen as a task that is mandatory. Establishing HACCP in such scenario gives very little chance of it becoming a meaningful exercise and there is a real risk that it will be seen as a burden by all personnel<sup>5</sup>. For all plants, HACCP system is a comprehensive process control system and it is, thus, an important tool in combating the worldwide escalation of foodborne disease<sup>4,7</sup>. Consumers and other stakeholders are increasingly concerned about the continuing sequence of food scandals and incidents. Penetration of hazards into foods in an unexpected extent may suggest a system failure not only in the local production but also at the national level. These scandals often obtain wide coverage in the news media and in publications and as a result, consumers are familiar with food scandals<sup>1</sup>. Our research shows that the food business operators (FBOs) are quite satisfied with the present status and do not intend to develop their food safety controls further because they are resource-demanding. In the situation when both the production and the consumer environments are changing, any lag in HACCP development may cause loss of its functionality. Evidence of leaks in the preventive function of the present food safety arrangements may be seen in the recent “Horsemeat scandal” in 2013. Adulterated food scandals are significant because they reveal a problem in the execution of basic HACCP procedures<sup>2</sup>.

The gradually changing attitude towards HACCP may be one reason why this preventive approach towards hazard control is being downgraded by routine maintenance of already implemented measures and the preventive control system may slowly degrade to repressive operation practices and become “drawer” documents prone to fail if not completely surrounded by business partners with full-fledged HACCP system. To prevent such a course of HACCP development requires another way to enforce the law, but all the activities have to be done very sensitively and with co-operation of all stakeholders.

## 2. Materials and methods

This paper presents the results of a HACCP field study that was conducted by means of an anonymous questionnaire survey. The survey was carried out from February 2014 to February 2015 with focus on food producers in Slovakia. Most replies were gathered from food producers who produce food of animal origin. An explanatory letter with questionnaires were sent via Internet and mail to fifty registered slaughterhouses and meat product processing enterprises (the register is available at [www.rvps.sk](http://www.rvps.sk)). The final structure of the questionnaire is composed of seventeen questions. YES or NO choices were given for each question with a comment option to allow for better understanding of the producer’s attitude towards HACCP. The first part of the questionnaire asked about the establishment and implementation of HACCP in the premises. The second part focused on attitude of the producers towards to HACCP functionality control by audits and by controlling authorities. In the third part of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked about their opinion about HACCP-related regulations.

The questionnaire was answered by twenty-two from the fifty addressees. Although only twenty-two questionnaires were available, we may say it is enough to serve the objectives of such a survey and allows us to formulate some conclusions.

## 3. Results and discussion

Altogether, 42% of the questionnaires were received and filled correctly by respondents. The highest numbers of questionnaires were returned from Prešov county (31%) the same numbers of questionnaires were from Trenčín and Trnava county (22% each) from Košice county (13%) and the lowest from Žilina and from Banská Bystrica county (4% each). As for the size of surveyed plants in particular areas the situation is as follows (Fig.1). From Prešov county, 4 small enterprises responded (57.1%), 1 middle enterprise (14.2%) and 2 big enterprises (28.5%). From Trenčín county, responses came from 1 small (20%), 2 middle (40%), and 2 big (40%) enterprises, respectively. All respondents were from small enterprises from Košice, Trnava and Banská Bystrica counties, and 1 questionnaire was received from a middle enterprise from Žilina county.

The results were divided into three areas. Table 1 shows the answers of the questions about establishing and implementation of HACCP in their premises. Table 2 shows answers to the question about attitude of producers to audits of the HACCP and to official controls by authorities.

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