



HACCP certification for processed foods

The project aims to enhance food safety in Guatemala through the development of an HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point) certification scheme for processed food products (jams and preserves). This effort led to improvements in the necessary infrastructure, which in turn resulted in enhanced food safety and greater access to export markets.

STDF/PG/238

Status

Completed

Start Date

01/02/2010

End Date

30/04/2012

Project Value (US\$)

\$588,652

STDF Contribution (US\$)

\$422,118

Beneficiaries

Guatemala

Implementing Entities

Asociación Guatemalteca de Exportadores (AGEXPORT), Guatemala

Partners

Instituto de Nutrición de Centroamérica y Panamá (INCAP)

Instituto Técnico de Capacitación y Productividad (INTECAP)

Ministerio de Salud, Guatemala

Oficina Guatemalteca de Acreditación (OGA)

Organismo Internacional Regional de Sanidad Agropecuaria (OIRSA)

Background

In 2006, Guatemala exported over 40 different types of fresh and processed fruit, vegetables and seafood products, worth US\$440 million and generating 108,000 employment opportunities. Protecting these exports through proper conformity assessment procedures is a top priority for the Guatemalan economy. However, Guatemala lacked sufficient infrastructure to support the export of these food products to markets outside the Central American region. The Ministry of the Economy, the Guatemalan Accreditation Bureau (OGA) and the Guatemalan Standards Commission (COGUANOR) were aware of the need to update conformity assessment procedures for the food industry in order to promote the competitiveness of Guatemalan products in the world market and improve their access to European and North American markets. Consequently, AGEXPORT

developed an accredited HACCP certification system for food exports, with a view to improving the national support, process control and regulation structure for food safety. The system included the establishment of a legal framework in Guatemala for a voluntary HACCP registration programme officially recognised by the Ministry of Health.

Results

Analysis of the capacity to support food production and exports in Guatemala

Guatemala did not have a regulated HACCP registration or certification system to support food exporters. Moreover, no one knew how much the regulations that were needed to achieve proper support would differ from those already in place. As a result, the first step of the project was to conduct a general diagnosis, which provided Ministry of Health authorities with a better understanding of the issue. This led to the drafting of official documents establishing guidelines and criteria for the operation of HACCP systems in Guatemala, and to an understanding of the effect that this would have on the competitiveness of the food sector in export markets. Another significant result was the understanding and acceptance of the importance of accreditation as a way for inspection service providers to recognize technical competence.

Strengthening the analytical capacity of food laboratories

Strengthening activities enabled food testing laboratories to be brought up to date on the following methodologies: water analysis, identification of chemical food contaminants, identification of Salmonella using traditional methods and molecular biology, and identification of Listeria monocytogenes using traditional methods. All of these methodologies consist of the analyses most often requested by import markets. The training courses were attended by staff from private laboratories, university laboratories and INCAP. A course on food sampling was also offered to staff from laboratories, inspection agencies, the food control department and INCAP. External quality assurance testing of the laboratory results was also conducted, and showed that they were, for the most part, reliable enough to be issued for microbiological analyses, water monitoring and the control of inputs such as sugar.

Implementing HACCP in small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs)

Four workshops were held to train staff from SMEs in the food industry and to enhance the capacity of inspectors to implement and verify HACCP systems. These courses complemented the work done to implement ISO Standard 17020 and ensured that inspection agency staff were trained to evaluate the systems or to assist companies in implementing them. As the demand from food companies to receive training and technical assistance in HACCP remains constant, instructors trained through this project are still being encouraged to provide such services.

Recommendations

Access to training activities

The project resulted in a decline in the number of food inspectors employed by the Ministry of Health, as inspections could now be carried out by accredited private agencies. Nevertheless, it is important that technicians have permanent access to training activities.

Working with a low health risk pilot product

Developing this project using as an example a product with a low health risk allowed the parties concerned to focus their efforts and discussions on implementing the new system and thus waste less time on technical discussions on specific aspects of the product.

Time management

With regard to the time needed to implement the project, some flexibility is necessary as it is difficult to estimate the time required to complete administrative tasks, select international consultants and draw up contracts with foreign companies.