



Selecting a Food Safety Consultant

Where to start

When developing any HACCP system the first step is to consult someone who has the necessary practical experience. You may have staff with the required education or experience; otherwise you will need to select a food safety consultant. The consultant will be able to provide the needed technical knowledge transfer to your staff, which is essential as it will be your staff that will be responsible for the implementation and maintenance of the HACCP system.

Determine what you need from a consultant.

<i>What is my current situation.....?</i>	<i>Your consultant should be able to provide.....</i>
You don't have any written programs. You are concerned when a customer asks if you have a HACCP system or asks you to implement one, as you do not know where to start. You sometimes have issues with production that results in product losses.guidance and assistance in creating and carrying out a detailed plan to implement a HACCP system. This may include employee training on HACCP systems, development of written programs, implementation of the written programs, maintenance of your HACCP system, and development of a record keeping system.
You have a clean and sanitary facility. The products you produce are consistently of good quality, and you never have food safety concerns that you are aware of. You and your staff are very concerned about food quality and food safety. You have sent your staff for food hygiene training and you provide technical training about specific details of the operation. You lack the written documentation and records to prove that you are producing food in a safe manner and meeting the food safety requirements of your customers.guidance and assistance on the development of written HACCP programs and records for your activities. A food safety consultation to help you ensure that there are no food safety concerns that have been overlooked.
You may want the consultant to provide assistance on validation of the HACCP plans.guidance on how to go about validating the HACCP Plans.
Your facility may have a HACCP coordinator and HACCP system in place and you feel the need to improve on your HACCP system, prepare for an audit, or obtain a second opinion regarding your HACCP system.an assessment (e.g. a mock audit or gap assessment) of your current system to determine what is working and what is not. They will be able to provide advice and suggestions on what changes could be made.

Furthermore, a consultant should be able to provide these services:

- Conduct an initial assessment (usually called a gap assessment or a needs assessment) of your facility to determine what is needed in your facility to implement a HACCP system,
- Train at least one person in the business to act as a HACCP Coordinator, and provide pertinent training to operational staff,
- Conduct a follow-up review (i.e. mock audit) of the working HACCP systems at a future date (preferably well in advance of a formal audit),

Consultant Qualifications

The following list is intended to be a guide to what technical knowledge a person must have in order to be an effective food safety and HACCP consultant. If you are employing a consulting company these qualifications should also apply to their staff.

Education: A consultant should possess and provide documented evidence of sufficient technical and/or practical application of HACCP systems and food processing technologies including:

- a diploma or degree in food science, microbiology or other science degree; or
- technical diploma in a related field to those mentioned in 1.1 i; or
- extensive practical experience in food processing environments and the development, implementation and maintenance of HACCP systems (e.g. minimum of 3 years as HACCP coordinator)

Technical Knowledge: A consultant should be able to demonstrate an understanding of food processing and HACCP systems including:

- a thorough understanding of HACCP principles;
- demonstrated knowledge of HACCP systems in a particular industry/commodity area(s);
- successful completion of a recognized HACCP training course;
- demonstrated written and oral communication skills; and
- demonstrated ability to conduct training, as well as train the trainer activities (adult education), if applicable to your operation.

A consultant must be free from any conflict of interests that might cause them to act in any way other than an impartial or non-discriminatory manner. For example the consultant must not:

- have direct or indirect ownership or other financial interest in an establishment; and
- have any direct or indirect financial interest in the products produced or marketed by the establishment.

Some clear questions to ask the consultant

1. What are your qualifications as a HACCP system consultant?
2. What HACCP training do you provide?
3. How do you assess the current state of my food safety system and how do you determine where we need to go?

The consultant should perform a gap assessment (or similar service) against the standard you will be implementing, to determine the current state of your

food safety system. The consultant should use this assessment to create a work plan for developing and implementing your food safety system.

4. How much time will you spend in our facility working with the staff and learning what we do and how we do it?

The consultant should be committed to learning your daily procedures and operations to ensure the food safety system developed is applicable to your facility. The consultant needs to spend a significant amount of time in your facility.

5. Can you provide some examples of previous work?
6. Can you provide some references of previous clients? Ask the consultant to provide three references.
7. What type of follow up service will you provide?

To ensure your food safety system is effective and being maintained, follow-up visits should be conducted after the HACCP system is developed and implemented.

Warning signs that a consultant does not have your best interests in mind

- The consultant offers you a HACCP system in a binder. This system may not be applicable to what you do in the plant. There is no effort put into training you and your staff about the contents of the program.
- The consultant says training is not required. Training is critical to ensure staff are aware of what is required for an effective food safety system.
- The consultant does not take into account regulations when developing your HACCP system. You must ensure you meet regulatory requirements.
- The consultant offers to develop your HACCP system without working with you or your staff. This is called “writing in isolation”. This can result in improperly written programs that do not reflect your employee’s activities in the plant. Your programs should reflect the current activities of the staff. Remember, your staff are the best people to consult with when developing and implementing a written program. They are the people who perform the daily activities and will know what will work and what will not.

If you have any more questions or need guidance please feel free to contact the Food Safety Division @ 780-427-4054 and request to speak to a food safety specialist.