



Distance learning programme boosts ISO 22000 in the Ivory Coast

by **Didier Blanc** *Where can one find skills training to help implement ISO 22000:2005 in countries where none exists? A Swiss distance learning course was the answer for consultant Olga Kouassi, who has since helped a food company in the Ivory Coast to achieve certification to the new food safety management standard.*



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He is a veterinary surgeon specialized in food hygiene, and a member of working groups WG 8 and WG 11 of ISO technical committees ISO/TC 34, Food products, responsible for developing ISO 22000:2005, Food safety management systems – Requirements for any organization in the food chain, and ISO 22003:2007, Food safety management systems – Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of food safety management systems.

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Tuna being processed for canning and export at Pêche et Froid Côte d'Ivoire. (Photos: PFCI)

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Effective implementation of ISO 22000:2005, *Food safety management systems – Requirements for any organization in the food chain requires investment in skills training*¹⁾. But where can one find such training in countries or regions where none exists? Modern distance learning techniques can provide the answer.



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The ISO 22000:2005 distance learning course which I developed was the solution for Olga Kouassi, a quality management consultant and auditor based in the Ivory Coast, who has collaborated on this article. As a result, she is now qualified to help local companies implement the new standard, and audit their food safety management systems.

“With the expertise I gained from this training, I was able to assist a company from beginning to end, right up to its ISO 22000:2005 certification audit,”

1) See also *ISO Management Systems* May-June 2006: “ISO 22000: From intent to implementation”.

The Pesticides Initiative Programme

The Pesticides Initiative Programme (PIP) was launched in 2001 by the European Commission at the request of the ACP (Africa/Caribbean/Pacific) group of countries.

Its aim is to enable ACP horticultural production and export companies to achieve conformity with the European regulatory requirements dealing with sanitary quality, consolidate their share in the European fresh fruit and vegetable market, and maintain small producers within the ACP horticultural export sector.

PIP is financed until 2008 by a EUR 34,1 million European Development Fund, and to date has helped 220 ACP enterprises reorganise, develop structures and adapt their practices to achieve long-term control of their sanitary quality. Its activities cover the sanitary compliance of some 100 000 producers.

The organization has set up a pool of competent local experts/providers in many ACP countries in key areas of sanitary quality to anticipate how European regulations and markets will evolve, and has extensively replaced European expertise.

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she says. Ms. Kouassi was able to finance the training course thanks to the support of the Pesticides Intervention Programme (PIP) funded by the European Commission (see box: “The Pesticides Initiative Programme”).

Practical training

ProCert’s practical ISO 22000:2005 training course aims to help participants to:

- understand the requirements of ISO 22000:2005 additional to the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) system;

- practice case studies in policy, communication, traceability, product recall, selection of prerequisite programmes (PRPs), validation of control measures, etc.;
- implement and audit an ISO 22000:2005-based system, and
- prepare for certification as an ISO 22000:2005 auditor.

The course, which is subdivided into 2-4 hour sessions, is supported by case studies and discusses all the main elements necessary to implement a food safety management system in conformity with the standard.

Participants receive immediate feedback on their course work, and are provided with models adaptable to their own business situations. They can also interact with online discussion groups for support and answers to questions. A detailed description of the course is available at: www.i3academia.com

Implementing ISO 22000 in the Ivory Coast

Olga Kouassi’s successful technology transfer exercise is an excellent example of the global relevance of ISO standards, and the suitability of ISO 22000 for implementation in an African setting.

She believes the new food safety management standard is perfectly suited for implementation by agricultural food enterprises in the Ivory Coast, and confirms that most already have staff with the necessary skills to set up the documentation system.



However, these companies encounter difficulties when introducing the prerequisites, i.e. good hygiene practices. There are often financial obstacles to establishing the necessary infrastructures, particularly in view of the current economic problems in the country.

Nevertheless, she says that this should not pose a major problem since companies are sub-



ject to an obligation of results rather than means, as far as ISO 22000:2005 prerequisites are concerned. On the other hand, there may be reason to fear the attitudes of auditors who, being accustomed to European companies, may have expectations well beyond the local realities.

It is very important, therefore, that the auditors be sufficiently pragmatic to assess actual risk in relation to the quality of the product.

Motivations

A number of food crises in recent years have alarmed consumers in Europe and prompted them and their public authorities to be more demanding in terms of food safety. As a result, there is growing international demand for a framework document on food safety, applicable to all companies along the food chain. Today, food sector companies in the Ivory Coast must provide evidence of having introduced a food safety system in order to access international markets.

Benefits of training

“The ISO 22000:2005 training has been beneficial to us. Indeed, it provided a considerable amount of relevant information and documents that could be easily put into practice. Also, the responses from the discussion groups

were highly appreciated,” Olga reports.

“With the training help we were able to lead a company through to its ISO 22000:2005 certification audit. This was a source of major satisfaction for us since understanding of the requirements and the introduction of a documented system passed without comment, and no major nonconformities were recorded. However, there were comments about the state of equipment and production plant in relation to the prerequisites.”

ISO 22000:2005 implementation in the Ivory Coast

The Ivory Coast ranks first among West and Central African countries in terms

of the number of companies with management systems certified to ISO 9001:2000 or ISO 14001:2004 to date. Some 55 from all economic sectors had achieved such certifications at the time of writing, and of these 18 were food sector companies. So far one company had achieved ISO 22000:2005 certification.

Therefore, the Ivorian food companies represent a good potential for ISO 22000:2005 implementation. The trend is expected to gain momentum as the country emerges from its current social and political crisis. •

(Photos: PFCI)

