

Food safety



Philippines' Mekení puts ISO 22000 on the menu

The Mekení Food Corporation (MFC) of Pampanga in the Philippines has come a long way since 1991 when the original Mekení Meat Products company managed to survive the devastating Mount Pinatubo volcanic eruption which killed 800 people, made 100 000 homeless and sent an ash cloud around the world. While many companies closed shop or pulled out, Mekení decided to ride out the disaster and help rebuild the local community.

Today, despite being further challenged by a serious outbreak of foot and mouth disease in 1996 and the Asian financial crisis of 1997, MFC is now a major food processing organization, employing over 1 000 people on a 14.8 hectare site in Pampanga. The company produces local “longganisa” and “tocino” sausages and hotdogs, and processes ham and bacon.

Food safety management

Prudencio S. Garcia became President of MFC in 2005 with the objectives of streamlining operations, enhancing quality and upgrading the company’s food safety procedures.

In 2006, MFC became reportedly one of the first meat processing plants in Asia to implement and certify to ISO 22000:2005, *Food safety management systems – Requirements for any organization in the food chain*. The company also holds Hazard Analysis & Critical Control Point (HACCP) accreditation issued by the National Meat Inspection Service (NMIS) of the Republic of Philippines Department of Agriculture.

MFC takes its corporate social responsibilities seriously, and has been involved in outreach programmes for orphanages, depressed communities and homes for the elderly. The company has also invested in a wastewater plant to reduce the impact of its operations on the environment.

President Garcia comments

ISO Focus+ asked Mr. Garcia to comment on the company’s experiences in implementing ISO 22000, and the advantages of doing so, and on its social and environmental initiatives.

ISO Focus+: *Did you find ISO 22000 easy to implement, or were there any significant obstacles to overcome or adjustments to make en route to certification?*

Prudencio S. Garcia: At first, our food safety team was hesitant because ISO 22000 is relatively new. However, when we analyzed and reviewed the requirements of the standard, we realized that most of the major requirements such as HACCP and Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) were already in place, and it was a matter of realigning them to the requirements of the standard.



Photo: Mekeni Food Corporation

Prudencio S. Garcia, President, Mekeni Food Corporation.

ISO Focus+: *Could you outline the changes you made in your practices and procedures in order to conform to ISO 22000?*

Prudencio S. Garcia: Documented procedures and established programmes were enhanced in line with the standard, specific targets and objectives were drawn up at departmental level to support the overall food safety management system (FSMS) objectives, and we improved the system of performance monitoring and evaluation.

ISO Focus+: *Do you run ISO 22000 awareness training for your employees?*

Prudencio S. Garcia: As part of our Competency Improvement Programme, all employees regardless of position and status were required to attend an FSMS basic awareness course. We then required attendees to pass a written exam set by the training team, with any failed candidates expected to attend re-briefing and retake the exam. New employees are not integrated into their respective departments without passing the test.

For key movers such as members of the Food Safety and Internal Audit Teams, we conduct intensive FSMS courses run by external ISO FSMS experts. Workshops on how to further improve our practices have been integrated into these courses. Again, written and practical exams are set to gauge participant understanding.

On a yearly basis, I allocate a budget to support the annual training plan proposed by the management system support team. The plan is based on the required employee



Photo: Mekeni Food Corporation

Workers observe strict food safety and hygiene practices at every stage of the hot dog filling line.



Photo: Mekem Food Corporation



Photo: Mekem Food Corporation

are confident in offering our products to foreign buyers because we believe that our system, which is compliant with International Standards, would ensure quality and food safety to buyers outside of our country. It gives us the confidence level.

ISO Focus+: Can you comment on your corporate social responsibility activities?

Prudencio S. Garcia: Although we do not currently follow any standard on corporate social responsibility, we have an informal way of assisting our community based on perceived needs. Right now, our Founder is helping scholars to pursue their education. We are also active in a cleanliness and livelihood drive in the municipality. Likewise, we extend support to some care institutions in Pampanga. But our primary goal is to contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of people in our community through the provision of employment opportunities.

ISO Focus+: It was reported that MFC had invested in a wastewater plant facility to reduce the impact of its operations on the environment. Is the company certified to ISO 14001?

No, we are not certified to ISO 14001, but our system and documentation is in place. Having the wastewater treatment plant is one of our tangible commitments towards environmental protection. The company has also been awarded by the Philippine Government's Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Eco Watch Programme for four consecutive years for having surpassed the requirement of the Environmental Management Bureau.

We are also participating in several international environmental protection programmes such as the Green Framework for Innovative Sustainability sponsored by the Japanese Government, and the Green Philippines Programme, sponsored by the European Union. Both target CO₂ emissions reduction through greener and cleaner production. ■

An MFC employee in protective clothing monitors the internal product temperature of 'footlong' hotdog sausages as part of the company's ISO 22000- and HACCP-conforming food safety procedures.

competencies identified during periodic performance evaluations. Also, we ensure that refresher training on food safety, internal audit and document improvement is always included in each training plan.

ISO Focus+: What are the key advantages of implementing and being certified to ISO 22000?

Prudencio S. Garcia: The confidence of our clients and customers in our products and processes, as well as that of the local regulatory agencies and trade partners, also as a marketing tool.

ISO Focus+: Is ISO 22000 certification demanded by any of your customers as a condition of doing business?

Prudencio S. Garcia: No, it is a self-imposed target because of our desire to uplift the level of quality and safety consciousness of the local food industry and the consuming public.

ISO Focus+: You have been active in advocating the benefits of this food safety management system to others – could you comment further?

Prudencio S. Garcia: We have two approaches in advocating food safety and quality:

1. Through industry advocacy – our company is an active member of the Pampanga Association of Meat Processors. As the major source of processed meat products in the country, Pampanga is host to hundreds of small meat processors and a few medium and large meat processors.
2. Our plant is open to educational tours for academic and other institutions.

ISO Focus+: Do you think ISO 22000 certification will help support your export plans in 2012?

Prudencio S. Garcia: Definitely! We are currently exploring export markets and we