Food safety training
Rwanda puts ISO 22000 on the menu

Food industry companies across Rwanda are participating in a series of training seminars to encourage implementation of, and certification to, ISO 22000:2005, *Food safety management systems – Requirements for any organization in the food chain*. Launched in March 2010, the training programme, conducted by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in collaboration with the Rwanda Bureau of Standards (RBS), aims at helping local enterprises upgrade to ISO 22000, in a move to help promote exports of Rwandan food products.

“ISO 22000 is like a passport because products cannot be exported if they don’t conform to it,” said Charles Rutagengwa, national coordinator of the trade capacity building project under UNIDO.

Participants become conversant with the requirements of an ISO 22000-based food safety management system (FSMS), hazard analysis critical control points (HACCP), traceability and control of nonconformities. The seminars also review general infrastructure requirements, staff capacity development, levels necessary for standards implementation, and administrative requirements.

According to Athanasie Mukeshiyarime, Head of the Standards Unit at RBS, two enterprises in Rwanda have so far certified to ISO 22000 – drinking water bottler Sulfo Rwanda, and Sorwathé, a tea producer and exporter.

Théonase Munana, Product Manager of tomato paste processor and exporter Sorwatom is optimistic that the training sessions will inspire participants to
implement the FSMS in their respective enterprises. “In four to five months we hope to have the certification, start exporting and provide quality products to the local market,” he said.

**Very positive**

*ISO Focus+* asked Mr. Rutagengwa to comment on early reactions to the training programme, and industry participation so far.

“Comments from the local food industry have been very positive, and participating organizations seem to be committed to certification. We targeted 10 enterprises for the first seminar and nine responded by sending at least two representatives each, totaling 21 participants. Our ultimate goal is to have all food sector companies acquiring ISO 22000 certification. Even though not all may succeed in doing so, at least they will be a step ahead in implementation of the standard.”

“We carried out a candidate selection and gap analysis prior to the training. One of the selection criteria was to determine the level of commitment to achieving certification before committing UNIDO project support, and also willingness to share the costs 50/50,” he added.

**Using local media**

Mr. Rutagengwa explained that the first two training sessions focused on bringing all participant organizations to the same level of understanding of the standard, and on ISO 22000-based documentation. A third session will be conducted later for internal auditors drawn from these organizations.

In addition, the organizations will be visited by experts to observe implementation levels and identify non-compliance and corrective actions. Internal auditing assistance will also be provided.

Besides project support, RBS is organizing more food industry training, and has also trained local trainers to conduct ISO 22000 seminars. “We intended to use local media to publicize these events, disseminate information about the importance of the standard and FSMS certification, and raise public awareness of food safety issues in general,” he concluded.

*Garry Lambert* is a British freelance journalist based in Switzerland.