

Execution/Implementation of audit in a FBO

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Abstract:

Food safety and quality audits are used widely in the food industry for various reasons (to evaluate management systems, obtain certifications to certain food safety and quality standards, assess the condition of premises and products, confirm legal compliance, and so on). Nowadays, the increased interest of consumers on food safety and quality matters, triggered mainly by recent food scandals, has enabled the public and private food sectors to develop a variety of food safety and quality standards. These standards have both advantages and disadvantages and their effectiveness depends on several factors such as the competency and skills of auditors and the standard used in each case. Although the industry continuously invests in developing and improving these systems, the number of foodborne outbreaks per year appears to be quite stable in both Europe and the United States. This may be an indication that additional measures and techniques or a different approach would be required to further improve the effectiveness of the food safety and quality management systems. This article examines the role of audits and food safety and quality assessment systems in the food industry.

What is Audit and its implementation in FBO:

The word “audit” comes from the Latin “audit us”, which means hearing. The audit procedure usually incorporates documentation review and conduction of checks and interviews to confirm compliance with a standard. Traditional inspections evaluate the structure and construction of the sites and visually assess the state of cleanliness, although these may not always be the best

indicators. The auditing process may involve the inspection of the whole manufacturing process from a raw material through preparation to dispatch/service specifically, within the frame of a food safety audit; information about a food business is gathered in order to identify areas of potential improvement in the company's food safety processes and systems. Another purpose of the audits is the identification of areas of the business that present deficiencies in order to implement measures for their correction.

Audits are very important tools for maintaining food safety standards and any relevant certification, through enabling transparency and reassuring that standards are being maintained. This transparency can increase the collaborative capacity of stakeholders within the supply chain, and improves safety and efficiency, while promotes the continual improvement within each part of the supply chain Audits are an essential tool in the process of certifying that proper food safety practices are followed . Across the globe, the food inspection and control systems are evaluated and reorganized in order to improve their efficiency, rationalize human resources and introduce risk analysis-based approaches. Food safety audits are conducted by organizations for a number of reasons. For example, auditing is an essential part of the process of obtaining a certificate, while other reasons can include: Evaluation of the management system or prioritization of management actions, Objectives of commercial nature, Evaluation of incidents occurring at other facilities/organizations, Regulatory or contractual requirements. Nowadays, technology plays an important role in food safety audits. The maintenance

of the necessary food safety checklists and quality insurance documents requires the management of large amounts of data. Furthermore, the access to these data/documents and their analyses is of paramount importance for a successful audit and can be used to prove that a high level of food safety has been ensured. For example, a convenient auditing app can assist in managing documents and workflows for auditing, as well as in improving daily business operations. An auditing app can also assist with processes that include management and archiving of training and certification records, statistics, and data collection and analysis, which can all be easily accessed using, for example, an iPad.

Many organizations categorize their auditing program into: (1) external audits, which are audits conducted by a third-party organization, and (2) internal audits, which are audits conducted by internal auditors that work for the organization. Most companies have experience in external auditing processes. These auditing processes involve detailed assessments in which the companies frequently focus principally on passing the audit. This way of approaching external auditing has resulted in the conduction of misunderstood or underutilized internal auditing. Instead of approaching the internal audits as a necessity to pass an external audit, they need to be seen as an important tool of quality management systems (QMSs) that can contribute to the continuous improvement and validation of the food safety systems.

Audits can be categorized, based on auditor–auditee relationship, into: First Party Audits: A self-assessment, that offers internal verification that procedures and management strategies meet the requirements of a standard and represent the business objectives. Second Party Audits: Also commonly known as proprietary audits, these audits assess the performance of suppliers or contractors. Third Party Audits: These audits involve

the conduction of audits by independent auditors that are not employed by the auditee and often lead to certification

Regardless of their type, food safety audits are usually conducted following the under mentioned steps: Planning Execution, Corrective and preventive action, Verification, Audit evaluation. Planning and preparation of on-site auditing activities should be carried out by the auditors. These activities may include the preparation of an audit plan or a review of the documented food safety program of the company, to confirm that it is in compliance with the requirements of the standard against which the audit will be held. In the case of large and complex companies, an audit team is required. An audit plan should assist in ensuring that the audit team members are properly organized and also give the company an idea of timings for the audit. Prior to an on-site assessment, the auditor should review the company's documented food safety program to confirm that it is in compliance with the requirements of the standard against which the assessment will be made. This can be an indication of whether an on-site audit should follow. This review can be conducted on- or off-site, a decision that depends on logistical constraints and the degree of complexity of the food safety system. In cases that nonconformities are found, they are usually better resolved before an onsite audit is required.

The actual conduction of the audit is the collection of data that starts with arrival at the audit location and ends with the exit meeting. An on-site audit involves on-site audit-management, a meeting with the representatives of the company, gaining an understanding of the process and system control measures, verification that these measures work effectively and communication of results and observations among team members and with the auditee. A process audit is carried out through performing a review of procedures and documentation, and interviewing

members of the personnel directly involved in the process being subjected to audit. At the next step the auditor evaluates the responses and decides whether they are consistent and in accordance with documented policies, objectives, procedures, and records. Inconsistency of responses would mean that the auditor would have to continue searching for the reasons of the inconsistencies and find the necessary proof that support the inconsistencies. Therefore, audit trails are an important part of the auditing process. The auditor seeks to identify the reason of the inconsistency and then correlate it with the management system and a standard, giving the food company the tools they need to identify and address the inconsistency. The use of this system requires the substitution of the detailed audit checklist by a less detailed checklist (a memory aid) that aims at simultaneously assessing various elements of a food safety management system (FSMS). The corrective action process generally involves locating and documenting the root cause of the non-conformities, scanning the entire system to ensure no other similar nonconformities could occur, analyzing the effect such a nonconformity may have had on a product or service produced before the nonconformity was discovered, and taking action appropriate to the severity of the situation by either recalling the product, notifying the customer, downgrading or scrapping product.” It is also of paramount importance to follow-up with checks on whether any corrections are effective and recurrence can be prevented. The preventive action process commonly involves the establishment of proactive measures to prevent a potential nonconformity from occurring, and the conduction of thorough process and system analysis in order to determine what actions are required and what controls should be in place to prevent nonconformity. The verification stage of an audit involves the conduction of an

assessment that aims at evaluating how effective the corrective and preventative actions are in achieving their purpose, as detailed in the management strategy. The individual responsible for conducting the food safety audit should not be the same individual who determined the corrective action, to add a degree of impartiality and a 2nd viewpoint. Furthermore, third-party audits, being only 1 performance indicator, usually need to be supported by microbial testing, second-party audits of suppliers and the organization's ability to analyze the results and outcomes of audits and inspections. None of the raw product suppliers should be excluded from the audit scope. Consumers' concerns about food safety have led government agencies into being more prescriptive and proactive when food safety and quality regulations are considered. It has been noted that while the food safety laws clearly aim at providing safe food to consumers, they often rely strictly on following government regulations, which are used as their sole tool. On the other hand, food safety laws have also been criticized for not controlling the industries in a more complete way, while food safety incidents are frequently attributed to a government regulatory system that allows tainted food to reach the consumers.

It is important to note that there have been many foodborne illness outbreaks associated with food businesses that have been successful in third-party audits and inspections, which renders the utility of these practices questionable. People supporting the role of third-party audits claim that they can ensure food safety, even when the economic resources are limited. People criticizing external audits and inspection, though, claim that although they are useful tools, their results represent only a snapshot in time. Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) assessment is a valuable tool that can be used for verifying whether a food manufacturer or distributor can produce or distribute safe products.

The standard audited can greatly affect the way an audit is conducted as well as its outcome. However, another very important factor in the auditing process is the auditor. The competence degree of an auditor is of paramount importance and can vary depending on several factors. The personnel responsible for developing and managing the audit programs should determine in advance the criteria and requirements in relation to auditors and their competencies. So we all can conclude that there is foremost need of implementation of audits in each and every Food Business Organization (FBO) so that everyone should get safe and secure food.

References:

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