

# From field to fork



## Sanitary Controls on Food



DGAL  
French Directorate-General for Food



# Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| The food safety system .....                                  | 4  |
| 1. The French food safety system .....                        | 4  |
| 2. The French Directorate-General for Food (DGAL) .....       | 4  |
| ● Action .....  | 5  |
| ● Using what human resources ? .....                          | 5  |
| Official sanitary controls .....                              | 6  |
| 1. The distinction between monitoring and control plans ..... | 6  |
| ● Objectives .....  | 6  |
| ● The distinction between “monitoring” and “control” .....    | 6  |
| ● Some examples of plans .....                                | 7  |
| 2. Inspection of premises .....                               | 7  |
| 3. Results : a high satisfactory compliance rate .....        | 8  |
| 4. Non-compliance monitoring matched to risk .....            | 8  |
| 5. Combating sanitary criminality .....                       | 8  |
| Key statistics .....  | 9  |
| 1. Food safety controls .....                                 | 9  |
| 2. Livestock sanitary controls .....                          | 9  |
| 3. Controls on veterinary drugs .....                         | 9  |
| Risk assessment, studies and observations .....               | 10 |
| 1. ANSES .....  | 10 |
| 2. EAT studies .....  | 11 |
| 3. OQALI : knowledge and analysis .....                       | 11 |

# The food safety system

## 1. The French food safety system is based on the following principles :

- ▶ A separation between risk assessment and risk management ;
- ▶ A single chain of command ;
- ▶ An integrated “field to fork” approach ;
- ▶ Operator responsibility (producers, processors and distributors) ;
- ▶ Constant adjustment of regulations to take into account the sanitary science and technology developments and the expectations of civil society ;
- ▶ Official approval and inspection of premises (food and feed) under the responsibility of public official services (Ministry of agriculture), which are able to apply sanctions when necessary ;
- ▶ Product identification and traceability ;
- ▶ A national alert network and a European alert network to ensure a continuous sanitary monitoring and a quick and effective mobilization when there is a potential danger ;
- ▶ The ability of the authorities to manage risks, especially in emergencies, on the basis of an adapted regulation system.



## 2. The French Directorate-General for Food (DGAL)

DGAL's activity in the food safety sphere can be summed up with three key words : foodstuffs, livestock and plants.

DGAL seeks to ensure :

- safety and quality of foodstuffs,
- animal health and welfare,
- plant protection and health.

In 2010, **COFRAC**, the official French accreditation body **accredited the French veterinary and phytosanitary services** on the basis of ISO/CEI 17020, acknowledging their following qualities : rigour, good organisation and operation, transparency and a modern approach.

### ● Action framework

- A strong regulation system ;
- A sanitary system of high-quality including sanitary inspections and controls and law enforcement ;
- A management of sanitary emergencies.

DGAL also defends French positions at the European and international levels. It manages national policy on food and coordinates regional action plans adapted to local circumstances.

### ● Using what resources ?

As an operational instrument for official action, DGAL has a workforce of **5,500** in a system with national coverage and a diverse range of competencies on which it can call, including **14,000** approved sanitary veterinarians, **25** national reference laboratories and over a **hundred** specialized test laboratories, the majority of which are the testing laboratories for each French territorial *département*.

It takes as a basis for action the risk assessments carried out by **ANSES** (the French national agency for food, environmental and occupational health and safety), a body to which it submits matters regularly ; DGAL is ANSES' main supervisory authority in operational terms.



# Official sanitary controls

Every year, the French Directorate-General for Food implements several monitoring and control plans focused on contamination of foodstuffs of plant and/or animal origin and animal feedstuffs<sup>1</sup>. It also controls all the establishments and premises that are part of the food supply chain. Special official inspections are conducted during the Christmas and summer holidays..

## 1. Monitoring and control plans

### ● Objectives

These plans provide a key indicator of the safety of foodstuffs for health and at the same time they help to add value to the agricultural and agrifood products that France exports.

They aim to :

- collect data to evaluate consumers' exposure to risk ;
- ensure that attention continues to be paid to “sensitive” products ;
- implement new programmes for the evaluation of the sanitary situation ;
- evaluate the quality of French products as a crisis prevention tool.

In addition, in the context of the single European market and the free movement of goods, these programmes are a response to the request for harmonised controls across Europe to ensure a uniform sanitary status for all

Member States. With this goal in mind, each year, at the end of March, each Member State submits to the European Commission an overview of its activities in the preceding year.

### ● The distinction between “monitoring” and “control” plans

The core objective of a monitoring plan is to overall assess consumers' exposure to a risk. It is always based on random sampling.

The main objective of a control plan is to seek out anomalies, non-compliance or even frauds. It is based on a target or suspect sampling, that means that samples are collected according to predetermined targeting criteria.

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<sup>1</sup> Right from their initial drafting these plans are coordinated with the other ministries whose activities are relevant to food safety (health and consumerism) and with the official bodies charged with risk assessment (ANSES and InVS).



## ● Examples of plans

An average of a little over twenty such plans are implemented each year, including the followings :

- ▶ Control plans to detect **chemical residues** in the primary production of meat, poultry meat, rabbit meat, game meat, farmed fish, milk, honey (banned substances, veterinary drugs, some organochlorine or phosphorus compounds) ;
- ▶ Monitoring and control plans directed at **animal feedstuffs** ;
- ▶ Monitoring plans for “**antibioresistance**” in cattle, pigs, poultry, etc...
- ▶ Monitoring and control plans for “**fishery products**” (e.g. phycotoxins, residues, histamine) ;
- ▶ Monitoring and control plans to detect “**contaminants**” (e.g. dioxins, radionuclides) ;
- ▶ Monitoring and control plans focused on “**microorganisms**” such as *E. coli*, *Listeria*, *salmonella* ;
- ▶ Monitoring and control plans for **plant protection products** ;
- ▶ Spot check plans for products of animal origin arriving at **border inspection posts**...

These plans are designed in consultation with the other French ministries in charge of risk management and with the official risk assessment bodies (ANSES, the French national agency for food, environmental and occupational health and safety, and InVS, the French institute for sanitary surveillance).

Every year in the framework of these plans, over **60,000 samples** are collected by the state services in charge of public protection in the French territorial *départements* (DDPP, Directions départementales de protection des populations), resulting in more than **100,000 laboratory tests**.

## 2. Inspection of premises

Official controls are carried out regularly on a risk basis according to the EU regulation. Since 2009, a risk grading is calculated for each establishment or facility part of the food chain, these being ranked according to four different levels (from level I – low risk – to level IV – high risk). This ranking takes into account the theoretical risks (linked to the process or the type of product), production volume, consumer sensitivity (e.g. children) and the score awarded following the previous inspection.

Inspection programmes cover all food chain establishments ie. from the moment the products leave their point of primary production (or enter national soil in the case of imported products) until they reach the end consumer (approved, non-approved, direct sale). They have a multiyear framework (five years from 2011 to 2015) and the inspections are performed with three different purposes :

- ▶ **Prevention** : inspections are scheduled in this case for all types of facilities considered to be most at risk ;
- ▶ **Improvement** : the focus aims to improve the sanitary situation in defined economic sectors and to evaluate the efficiency of official controls (e.g. maintenance of the cold chain during transportation). The number of inspections carried out is decided at local level (*département*) ;
- ▶ **Sanction** : inspections of “short, sharp spot check” type carried out in facilities, especially those involved in direct sale to the consumer. Premises are selected at local level on the basis of categories defined at national level, as well as the number of inspections.

An overview report on inspections carried out in the preceding year is distributed as part of a preventive support role for operators and professional associations. An official decree on hygiene training (June 2011) has been drafted to raise the general hygiene level in all facilities.

### 3. Results : a high satisfactory level of compliance

The important work done on the field by officers of the territorial regions and *départements* services in charge of sanitary, veterinary and phytosanitary inspections and controls contributes effectively to maintain an excellent national level of food safety.

### Lumping all types of check together, laboratory testing results show compliance of almost 99.7%.

The details of the results of each programme are published every year in an overview report that is accessible on the website of the ministry in charge of Food :

[www.agriculture.gouv.fr](http://www.agriculture.gouv.fr)

## 4. Non-compliance monitoring matched to risk

DGAL’s sanitary emergency unit (MUS) is informed of all non-compliant outcomes. This unit provides *départements* services with technical support for assessing the outcomes, implements suitable procedures for withdrawal or recall of product batches and suggests changes in the sanitary safety system when necessary.

## 5. Combating sanitary criminality

BNEVP (the national veterinary and phytosanitary investigation force), a unit being able to take action everywhere on the French national territory, concentrates on fighting against organised criminality and provides technical support for inspection services, especially in situations of sanitary crisis. Its powers cover the whole range of veterinary and phytosanitary sectors. It has administrative and judicial enforcement powers and forms, in specified situations, a strike force that can be mobilised in the field, on an emergency basis.



# Key statistics

The activities of Directorate-General for Food in the sector of food safety led in 2011 to the performance of hundreds of thousands of checks in the field at every level in the food supply chain, from “field to fork”.

## 1. Sanitary controls on food

### ● 88,299 inspections (documentary-based and/or on site) including :

- ▶ 39,089 in factory and school cafeterias and restaurants, with 5.67% formal requests for corrective action, 1.55% forced closures (partial or total) and 1.25% notices ;
- ▶ 19,836 in retail sector (including supermarkets and transport), with 5.37% formal requests for corrective action, 1.47% forced closures (partial or total) and 2.25% notices ;
- ▶ 104 tonnes of products seized.

### ● Under monitoring and control plans :

- ▶ 60,664 samples collected (testing to detect dioxins, bacterias, viruses, antibiotics, etc.).

## 2. Sanitary controls on livestock

### ● 149,994 official checks on livestock farms or during transport, including :

- ▶ 101,932 sanitary inspections on cattle (to raise awareness) ;

- ▶ 23,160 inspections (animal welfare, livestock identification and health issues) ;
- ▶ 7,802 environmental inspections ;
- ▶ 17,100 samples collected (testing to detect salmonella in poultry).

### ● Follow-up of checks on livestock farms, initiated by livestock farmers :

- ▶ 160,547 prophylactic on-site visits to holders of cattle herds ;
- ▶ 51,094 prophylactic on-site visits to holders of sheep and goats herds ;
- ▶ 168,639 samples collected (testing salmonella in poultry farms).

## 3. Controls on veterinary drugs

- ▶ 6,227 inspections focused on veterinary pharmaceutical issues (surveillance for presence of residues and contaminants).

This is completed by monitoring programme post issuance of the drug approval.



# Risk assessment, studies and observations

## 1. ANSES

The French national agency for food, environmental and occupational health and safety (ANSES) was set up on 1 July 2010 by merging two bodies, AFSSA and AFSSET. ANSES uses independent, pluralistic scientific expert analysis to ensure human safety in the environmental, occupational and food domains. It also contributes to protect animal health and welfare as well as plant health and assesses the nutritional and functional properties of foodstuffs. It is also in charge of tasks relating to veterinary pharmaceutical products (ANSES delivers veterinary drugs approvals).

ANSES thus provides its risk assessment expertise to the risk management bodies under whose authority it operates, specifically the government ministries responsible for Food and Health.

The ministry responsible seeks expert assessments from ANSES every year (81 dossiers in 2011) in areas as various as the abnormal oyster mortality, hepatitis E virus or PCBs in the Seine bay area.





## 2. EAT studies

The aim of “total food intake studies” (*Études Alimentation Totale* – EAT) is to measure the food-related exposure of the French population to problematic substances such as residues of plant protection products, environmental contaminants, neoformed compounds, natural toxins, additives, trace elements and minerals.

This type of research involves taking samples of foodstuffs regularly consumed by French people, preparing them in the way they are actually consumed and grouping them together to form samples that are then homogenised for the detection of a number of substances. This makes it possible to measure the average quantity of a given chemical ingested by the general population and by certain population sub-groups (e.g. regional, age-related). Data of this kind are needed to improve the assessment of risks to consumers’ health and are important for the work of the governmental bodies responsible for risk management.

This method provides the risk managers with data completing those issued from official checks.

## 3. OQALI : knowledge and analysis

The food quality observatory (*Observatoire de la Qualité de l’Alimentation* – OQALI) was set up in February 2008 by the ministries of Agriculture, Health and Consumption.

It centralises and handles data on nutrition. It is intended ultimately to integrate the **Food Observatory** which creation is required by the Law on the Modernisation of Agriculture and Fisheries.

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