

FOOD CONSULTING SERVICES

ENTERPRISE NO. 2009/099646/23

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Lab No. T0129
ISO/IEC 17025

RE: FOOD CONSULTING SERVICES COMPANY PROFILE

A. INTRODUCTION

Food Consulting Services is an independent, professional food- and hygiene-testing laboratory, which was established in April 1977. The aim of our company is to form a strong partnership with all our clients and help them implement a quality and hygiene assurance system within their food production facilities by means of our “Technical Surveys” (hygiene audits) and professional consulting.

We are associated with:

The Royal Society of Health (UK)
Institute of Food Technologists (USA)
South African Association of Food Science and Technology

We are an internationally-accredited laboratory through SANAS (the South African National Accreditation System) in compliance with ISO/IEC 17025. This means that the results in our reports are recognised worldwide and have legal standing in a South African Court of Law.

We employ qualified Microbiologists and Food Technologists, so you can be assured of outstanding quality, integrity and service.

“QUALITY ASSURANCE IS BUSINESS INSURANCE”

INCORPORATING : MICROBIOLOGICAL LABORATORY SERVICES
DIRECTORS : T.G.THOMPSON (MANAGING), H.A. THOMPSON, G. LAWRENCE, S. RIMMELL
TESTS PERFORMED AT: FCS: 55 LOURENS DRIVE, HALFWAY HOUSE, MIDRAND, 1685

B. HYGIENE AUDITS

The following key result areas are covered in the hygiene audits (Technical Surveys):

1. Bacteriological evaluation of all major food processing areas and equipment

This determines whether or not these areas have been effectively sanitized. The total number of living bacteria per 10cm² of surface or per item of equipment is determined. (This microbiological test is called by many names, like “standard plate count”, “total plate count”, “total viable count” or “aerobic plate count”). The lower the count, the better. Effectively sanitised items should have very few, or no, bacteria.

2. Staff hygiene

Hand swabs are randomly taken from various food-handling staff members. Samples are evaluated for the presence of *Staphylococcus aureus* and *E.coli*. The recovery of *E.coli* indicates faecal contamination and means that staff have broken a basic hygiene rule, like failing to wash hands after going to the toilet. Samples are also be tested for the potential pathogen *Staphylococcus aureus*, which some people naturally carry and which can cause a rapid form of food poisoning. (Due to the presence of large numbers of natural, non-pathogenic bacteria on all peoples hands, there is no point in doing the standard plate count).

3. Bacteriological evaluation of prepared foods

Ready-to-eat hot and cold foods are sampled and tested as appropriate. We test for *E.coli* and coliforms, which can come from staff (as above) or directly from contaminated food or cross-contamination. (The standard plate count on foods is a measure of quality and shelf-life but not food safety, hence omitted).

4. Bacteriological evaluation of drinking water and/or ice

The quality of water in this country, and around the world, is becoming an increasing concern. Water (and/or ice) is tested for the standard plate count, coliform count and *E.coli* count. These tests are performed against the SANS 241 specifications for potable (drinking) water in South Africa and will determine if the water is safe for consumption. Remember that guests and staff not only drink water, but staff also use it to clean surfaces and equipment, wash their hands and clean & prepare food. If the water is contaminated, the probability of the food, hands and equipment also being contaminated is very high.

5. Refrigeration for food storage

All refrigeration units, including cold rooms, undercounter fridges and deep freezers are inspected. The operating temperatures are determined using our own accurate digital thermometers and we also give advice on cleanliness, storage practices, lighting and so on.

6. Chemical application, cleaning and sanitizing

We do not endorse any one chemical company; however we do recommend what types of chemicals are to be used for each application and give recommendations on how to effectively clean and sanitise surfaces, equipment, cutting boards and the like.

7. Pest Control

All food service establishments should use a reputable, registered expert pest control company and we check up on this as well as looking for pest-related problems ourselves.

8. Food Safety & Documentation

All practices that have a direct bearing on food safety are evaluated. For example, the temperatures of hot and cold foods on display are examined to ensure that foods are kept out of the “bacterial danger zone”. It is important for the Client to keep their own detailed records in these and other cases, and we also check for these.

9. Compliance with Legislation

Our audit looks at all of the Legal requirements encapsulated in terms of R918 and successors.

10. Areas allied to production.

Staff canteen and/or toilet facilities, dry food storage, refuse accumulation areas, back of house departments and any other areas that can impact on the overall hygiene of the kitchen are also investigated.

Microbiological (Hygiene) Index

From the above comprehensive evaluation, a Technical Survey (hygiene audit) report is compiled, in which all of the above information is reflected. Depending on the results of the microbiological tests, a Hygiene Index is calculated. This Index is represented as a percentage and gives a good indication of the hygiene practices, as well as the cleaning and sanitising procedures in the kitchen. Comments, suggestions, recommendations and commendations are all included in the report.

Walkthrough Visual Scoresheet (WVS)

A comprehensive visual inspection is also performed on all of the above areas and is represented on the second part of the report, which is called the “Walkthrough Visual Scoresheet”. A checklist containing hundreds of checkpoints relevant to overall hygiene is used. The checkpoints can all be assessed visually with only a thermometer as equipment, so management and staff can also do it themselves. Each point is weighted according to its significance in terms of food safety (e.g. temperature control is far more heavily weighted than chipped wall tiles). Each problem area is defaulted (i.e. receives none of its allocated points) and the ratio of points scored out of the theoretical maximum is expressed as a percentage (the Composite Risk Index). For more detail, sub-indices for Cleaning, Food Safety and Facilities are given. All the Indices are represented on bar graphs.

Technical Surveys are tailor-made for each client and are performed on a regular basis as required by the client, however we do recommend two to three month intervals.

C. METHOD OF OPERATION

Usually (unless otherwise requested by the client) the audits are unannounced. The audits will be performed throughout the day, and usually take between two and seven hours on site to complete depending on the size of the premises.

As far as possible, a post-audit meeting takes place after the audit with available and relevant Management of the Unit to highlight the main findings in the audit, and to discuss other problems and suggestions.

Usually one, but occasionally two, technical consultants (hygiene auditors) will perform the audits. Every technical consultant is a competent qualified microbiologist with at least a BSc degree from a recognised University in South Africa. All hygiene auditors are recognisable from the white laboratory coats worn.

The samples are sent back to our laboratories in Midrand, Gauteng for analysis, after which the detailed Technical Survey Report is compiled and e-mailed to the relevant persons within five working days from the *receipt* of the samples in our laboratory. Upon request, an original signed report is also sent via the SA postal system.

A certificate detailing the performing of hygiene audits on the kitchens is also usually awarded for marketing purposes, and a certificate of Merit can be issued if outstanding Hygiene and Walkthrough Indices are consistently achieved.

D. REGULATORY & HACCP COMPLIANCE

As can be seen from the above, our Technical Surveys are extremely comprehensive and are designed to not only give you an independent, professional and scientific view as to the Food & Beverage operations, but also to give the Management a “handbook” on how to improve and maintain the highest levels of food safety and quality.

Our audits more than comply with the strictest regulations and requirements from the Department of Health, including all requirements of R918, although they far exceed these in advocating “best practice” in all cases. These audits are actually welcomed by the Department of Health as it shows pro-activity in terms of food safety.

The HACCP concept is a buzz word in the industry today. HACCP is a comprehensive food safety programme that was originally developed by NASA in the USA to help improve safety levels. HACCP has two prerequisite programmes (PRP's) namely (1.) sanitation programmes, and (2.) Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP). Our hygiene audits fully satisfy the sanitation programme requirements, whilst our Walkthrough Schedule takes care of most of the elements of GMP (HACCP procedures and records-keeping obviously have to be tackled by the actual food premises).

Because HACCP is a system of control over the critical control points, to reduce hazards, the control involves much paper work and standard operating procedures (SOP's), much like keeping financial control over a company: records need to be kept of each transaction, and budgets prepared to indicate any abnormalities.

Once the Technical Surveys are scoring above 90%, HACCP can then be considered. We can help with regards to attaining HACCP accreditation, but the SABS or another SANAS-accredited organization will have to be contacted to audit the facility for HACCP compliance.

Please remember that unless the hygiene audits are being performed and scoring consistently at 90% or above it is pointless even considering HACCP.

E. ISO/IEC 17025 LABORATORY ACCREDITATION THROUGH SANAS

The South African National Accreditation System (SANAS) is authorised by the South African Government to be the single national accreditation body for laboratories, certification bodies, inspection bodies, proficiency testing scheme providers and good laboratory practice (GLP) test facilities.

SANAS certificates are a formal recognition that an organisation is competent to perform specific tasks.

SANAS is responsible for the accreditation of certification bodies to ISO/IEC Guide 62, 65 and 66 (and the IAF interpretation thereof), and laboratories (both testing and calibration) to ISO/IEC 17025.

Benefits of Accreditation

SANAS accreditation gives formal recognition that laboratories, certification bodies, inspection bodies and good laboratory practice (GLP) test facilities are competent to carry out specific tasks such as analysis and testing.

Organisations accredited by SANAS become a stakeholder in SANAS and are entitled to use the appropriate SANAS logo on the certificates they issue, their letterheads and promotional material.

Independent Assessment of Competence

SANAS is an independent body capable of assessing organisations for compliance to the relevant international/national standards and verifying their appropriate competence for tasks as per their scope of activities. SANAS accreditation benefits accredited organisations through an impartial assessment by experts on their performance.

This independent assessment and recognition of an organisations' competence allows the accredited organisation's tests, inspection reports and certificates to be recognised as equivalent to organisations in other countries accredited by their national accreditation bodies with which SANAS has concluded a Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA).

Please visit www.sanas.co.za for information on our laboratory's accreditation.

F. MEMBERSHIP OF SAAFOST

SAAFoST (The South African Association for Food Science and Technology) is the national association concerned with advancing the knowledge of food science and technology. It does this through encouraging scientific research, organising meetings, seminars, workshops and congresses, publishing papers and assisting in educational activities.

The National Secretariat maintains a membership office nationally. Currently SAAFoST has about 1400 members throughout Southern Africa, divided amongst the Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Northern branches of the Association, as well as members throughout Africa.

FCS is a Corporate Member of SAAFoST, to help us stay abreast of trends in the Industry.