

PRINCIPLES FOR TRACEABILITY / PRODUCT TRACING AS A TOOL WITHIN A FOOD INSPECTION AND CERTIFICATION SYSTEM

CAC/GL 60-2006

SECTION 1 - SCOPE

1. This document elaborates a set of principles to assist competent authorities in utilising traceability/product tracing as a tool within their food inspection and certification system. This document should be read in conjunction with all relevant Codex texts as well as those adopted by IPPC and OIE where appropriate.

2. Recognizing the dual mandate of the Codex Alimentarius, traceability/product tracing is a tool that may be applied, when and as appropriate, within a food inspection and certification system in order to contribute to the protection of consumers against food-borne hazards and deceptive marketing practices and the facilitation of trade on the basis of accurate product description.¹

SECTION 2 - DEFINITIONS

*Inspection*²: is the examination of food or systems for control of food, raw materials, processing and distribution, including in-process and finished product testing, in order to verify that they conform to requirements.

*Certification*²: is the procedure by which official certification bodies and officially recognized bodies provide written or equivalent assurance that foods or food control systems conform to requirements. Certification of food may be, as appropriate, based on a range of inspection activities which may include continuous on-line inspection, auditing of quality assurance systems, and examination of finished products.

*Equivalence*³: is the capability of different inspection and certification systems to meet the same objectives.

*Traceability/product tracing*⁴: the ability to follow the movement of a food through specified stage(s) of production, processing and distribution.

SECTION 3 - PRINCIPLES

3. These principles cover the context, rationale, design and application of traceability/product tracing as a tool for use by a competent authority within a food inspection and certification system.

Context

4. Traceability/product tracing, as defined above, is one of a number of tools that may be utilised by a competent authority within its food inspection and certification system.

5. An importing country should consider that a food inspection and certification system without a traceability/product tracing tool may meet the same objective and produce the same outcomes (e.g. regarding food safety, provide the same level of protection) as a food inspection and certification system with traceability/product tracing⁵.

6. It should not be mandatory for an exporting country to replicate (i.e. establish the same) the traceability/product tracing tool as used by the importing country, when applicable.

¹ Codex Principles for Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification (CAC/GL 20 – 1995) (para 5).

² Codex Principles for Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification (CAC/GL 20 – 1995).

³ Codex Guidelines for the Design, Operation, Assessment and Accreditation of Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems. (CAC/GL 26 – 1997).

⁴ Codex Procedural Manual.

⁵ Codex Guidelines for the Development of Equivalence Agreements Regarding Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems (CAC/GL 34-1999); Codex Guidelines on the Judgement of Equivalence of Sanitary Measures Associated with Food Inspection and Certification Systems (CAC/GL 53-2003)

Rationale

7. The application of a traceability/product tracing tool by a competent authority should improve the effectiveness and/or efficiency of the actions that may be necessary regarding its measures or requirements within its food inspection and certification system.
8. Traceability/product tracing is a tool that when applied in a food safety context does not in itself improve food safety outcomes unless it is combined with appropriate measures and requirements. It can contribute to the effectiveness and/or efficiency of associated food safety measures⁶.
9. Traceability/product tracing is a tool that when applied in a food inspection and certification system can contribute to the protection of consumers against deceptive marketing practices and facilitation of trade on the basis of accurate product description⁷.
10. In every case a traceability/product tracing tool should be justified within the context of the food inspection and certification system and the purpose, objectives and specifications of the traceability/product tracing tool clearly described. The scope and extent of application of the tool should also be consistent with the described need.

Design

11. The traceability/product tracing tool may apply to all or specified stages of the food chain (from production⁸ to distribution), as appropriate to the objectives of the food inspection and certification system.
12. The traceability/product tracing tool should be able to identify at any specified stage of the food chain (from production to distribution) from where the food came (one step back) and to where the food went (one step forward), as appropriate to the objectives of the food inspection and certification system.
13. The objectives, scope and related procedures of a food inspection and certification system that includes a traceability/product tracing tool should be transparent and made available to competent authorities of the exporting country upon request.

Application

14. The application of traceability/product tracing should take into account the capabilities of developing countries.
15. If in the context of a traceability/product tracing tool an importing country has objectives or outcomes of their food inspection and certification system which cannot be met by an exporting country, the importing country should consider the provision of assistance to the exporting country, and especially in the case of a developing country. Assistance may include longer time frames for implementation, flexibility of design and technical assistance, so that the objectives or outcomes of the food inspection and certification system of the importing country can be met.
16. A food inspection and certification system within which a traceability/product tracing tool is applied should not be more trade restrictive than necessary.
17. The application of the traceability/product tracing tool should be practical, technically feasible and economically viable within a food inspection and certification system.
18. In deciding whether and how to apply the traceability/product tracing tool, in the context of a food inspection and certification system the competent authority should take account of the assessed food safety risks and/or the characteristics of the potential deceptive marketing practices being addressed.
19. Traceability/product tracing tool within the context of a food inspection and certification system should be implemented when and as appropriate on a case by case basis.

⁶ For example, by providing information on suppliers or customers involved in potential food safety issues so enabling targeted product recall/withdrawal.

⁷ For example, by reinforcing confidence in the authenticity of the product and the accuracy of information provided on the products (e.g. country of origin, organic farming, religious concerns such as kosher or halal).

⁸ Production could be interpreted in such a broad manner as to cover food producing animals, feed, fertilizers, pesticides, veterinary drugs and any input of plant or animal origin, etc. if relevant for specific applications of traceability/product tracing to food.