

The high food safety requirements in the dairy sector



1. Hygiene at the core of our business

Definition of 'food hygiene' in the EU

'Food hygiene' refers to the measures and conditions necessary to control hazards and ensure fitness for human consumption of a foodstuff considering its intended use. [1]

In the EU, consumers can drink and eat delicious and healthy dairy products with confidence knowing that the food safety system in place in the dairy chain is structured to tackle efficiently all risks that might occur in an early stage at every step of the chain, from raw milk production at the farm, collection and transport, until milk processing at the factory.

Good dairy agricultural and manufacturing practices complement the EU legislative framework in ensuring that all stages are carried out hygienically, supplemented by control activities by both the dairy food business operators and the competent authorities of each Member State, jointly with an effective communication flow on food safety and risk.



European Food Safety Principles

- Producers are responsible for the **safety** and **quality** of their products.
- Products must respect the legal requirements at all stages of production.
- Producers comply with basic common hygiene requirements, possibly further specified for certain categories of food. [2]

Food safety is the result of the compliance with legal requirements in terms of food and feed hygiene and of industry's own checks. During the process of the production (from raw material till end product) every food business operator takes care of their part of the chain, guaranteeing the safety and quality of their products with a transparent, scientific and documented approach, and high quality infrastructure (e.g. internal laboratories for regular tests and specially trained staff). An important element of such infrastructure is the traceability of raw materials and products across the entire chain.

2. Quality checks for food safety

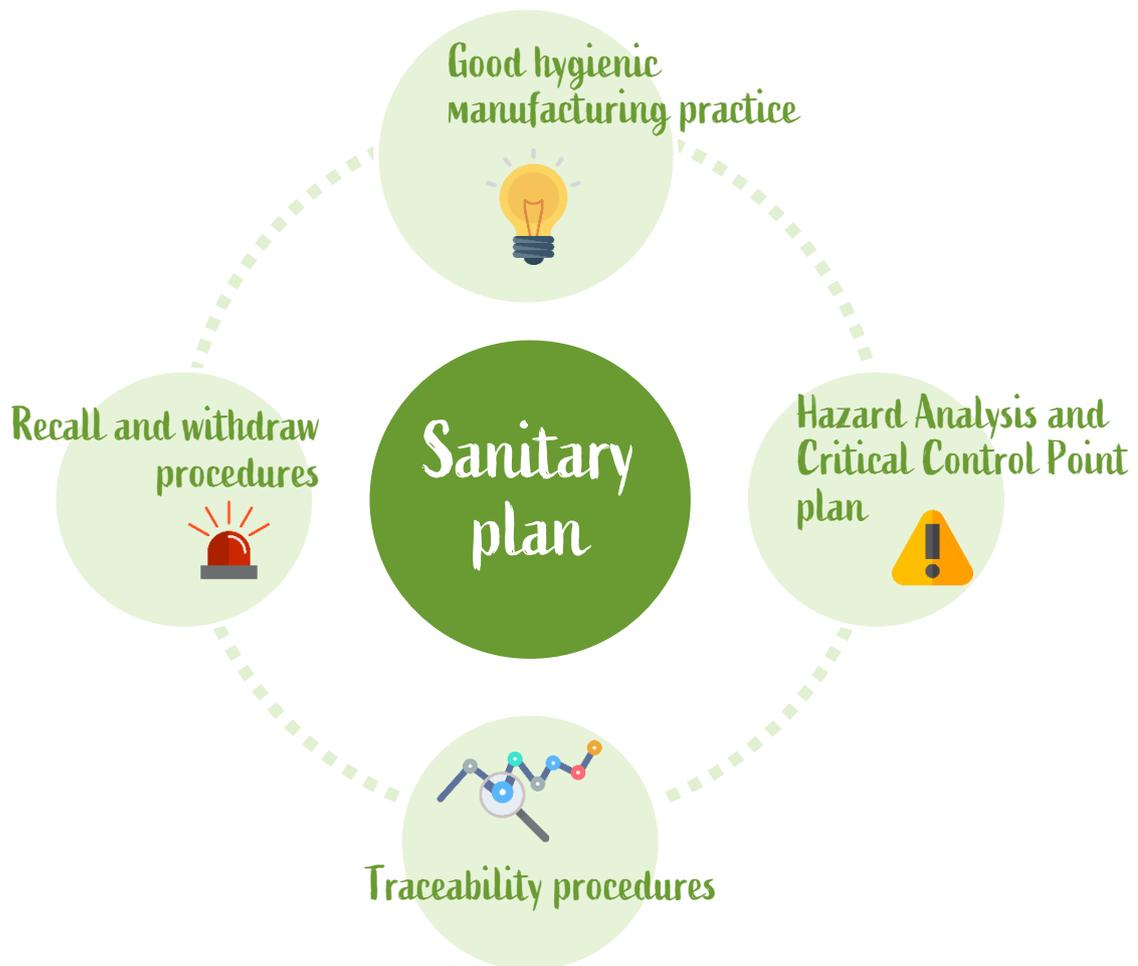
The first quality check on the milk (antibiotic residues, milk's smell, colour and temperature) is carried out already at pickup from the dairy farm by specially trained milk tanker drivers. Raw milk is tested for antibiotic residues before processing and will not be processed if the levels exceed the legal restrictions.

The quality checks at the farm and during transport are followed by tests on milk samples collected from milk tankers that are performed by specialised laboratories, looking at contents of milk fat, milk protein and other milk components, cell count, bacterial count, contamination levels, antibiotics, and other parameters, along with in-depth and frequent controls at the manufacturing plant, all under the responsibility of dairy companies.



* formerly Food and Veterinary Office

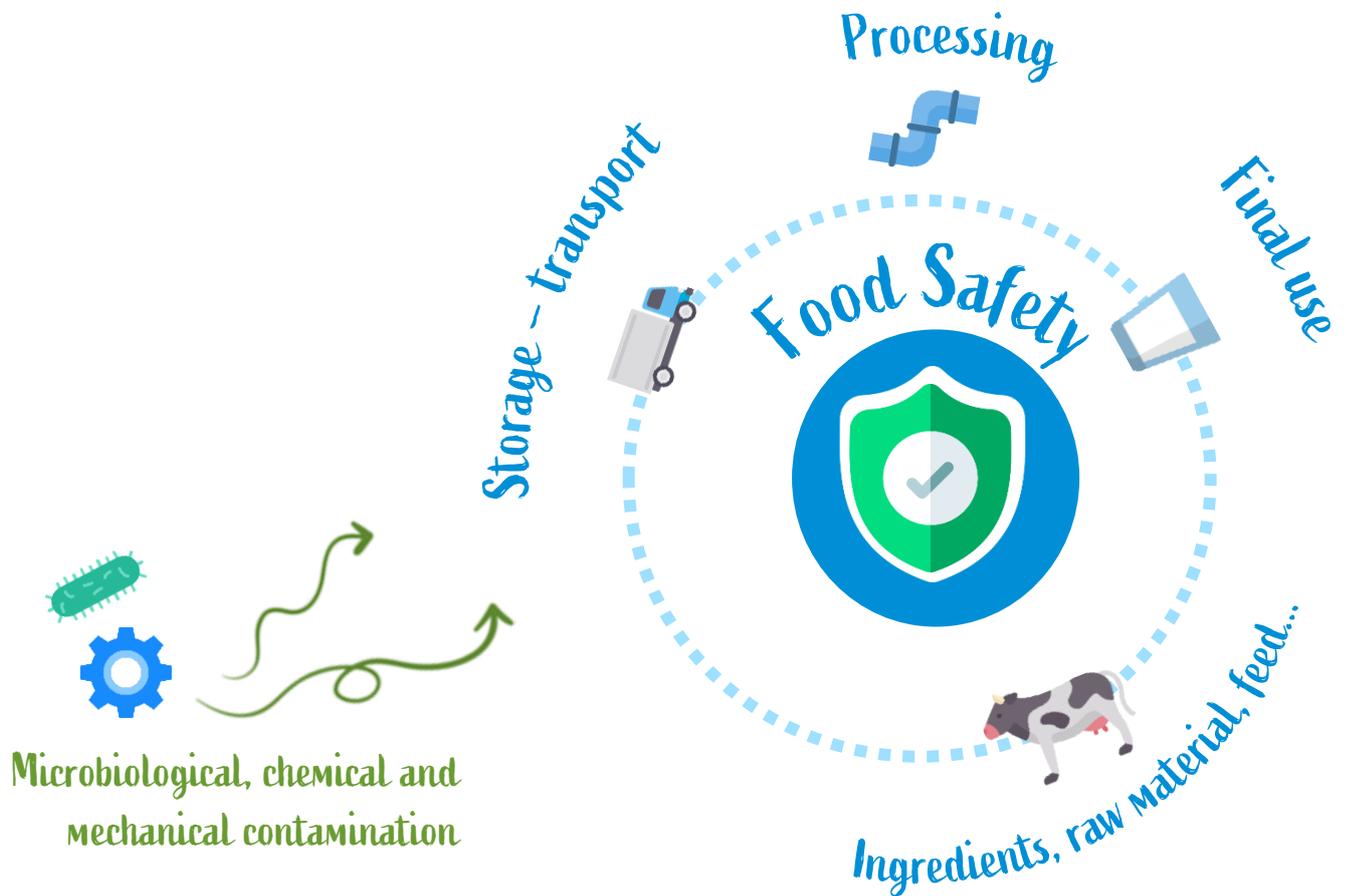
3. Management of risks by the dairy industry



Good agricultural and manufacturing practices (GAPs and GMPs)

Both on farm and manufacturing sites, there is a maximum effort to protect the product safety and quality. It is not only the final product safety that is guaranteed, but legislation demands certain standards at agricultural and manufacturing sites.

Appropriate feed prevents contamination of the milk. Strict quality requirements apply to all water sources. Special attention is paid to hygiene on milk production holdings and during transport, animal health, prudent use of medication such as antibiotics, milk equipment, milk production, heat treatment, cooling and storage.



Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP)

The 7 HACCP principles:

Identify:

- Hazards
- Critical Control Points (CCPs)

Establish:

- Critical limits
- Monitoring procedures
- Corrective actions
- Verification procedures
- Documentation and records

The food operator must control the implementation of the sanitary plan and must be able to prove the good application. For that purpose, a HACCP system (implying well determined procedures and records systems tracing back all incoming materials) has been introduced (Reg. 852/2004 [1]), or at least the principles thereof depending on certain conditions.

Some flexibilities are being foreseen: in certain cases, minimal hygiene requirements should be sufficient to ensure that potential hazards linked to the concerned activity are correctly managed. In such situation, having recourse to guides of good manufacturing practices and applying HACCP principles is recommended.

Traceability procedure

Food traceability is an essential element when ensuring food safety. Dairy establishments should also ensure that all their products placed on the market bear an identification mark (Reg. 853/2004 [3]). Via the traceability systems and procedures in place, dairies can identify in 'real time' production lots and batches in terms of input and in terms of destination and make this information available to the competent authorities on demand.



Identification marks mentioning the Member State and establishment of the last processing step

Recall and withdrawal procedure

The dairy industry – whenever there is a suspicion that the food safety requirements have not been met – will withdraw the affected product from the market as a precautionary measure, and immediately inform the competent authorities (Reg. 178/2002 [4]). It can happen that the request of recall/withdrawal comes from the national authorities' control bodies. In this case, traceability (see above) is the key element allowing this action. Where the product may have already reached the consumer, the dairy operator will effectively and accurately inform the consumers of the reason for its withdrawal, and if necessary, recall from consumers products already supplied to them.

► [To know more about the dairy food hygiene legislative framework, check out our factsheet!](#)

References

1. Regulation (EC) No 852/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 on the hygiene of foodstuffs, see [link](#)
2. Eric Poudelet, DG Sanco, Baltic Forum 2012
3. Regulation (EC) No 853/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 laying down specific hygiene rules for food of animal origin, see [link](#)
4. Regulation (EC) No 178/2002 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 January 2002 laying down the general principles and requirements of food law, establishing the European Food Safety Authority and laying down procedures in matters of food safety, see [link](#)

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