



ACCREDITATION - ENSURING THE SAFETY AND QUALITY OF FOOD

Ensuring a safe and healthy environment for more than 500 million people in the European Union is a crucial issue. Member State governments across the EU recognise the social and economic benefits of good health and safety in everyday life. The Irish National Accreditation Board (INAB) plays a key role in ensuring the safety and quality of food products consumed in Ireland through the application of an accreditation system as set out in Regulation (EC) No 765/2008. INAB accreditation is also a key component in ensuring the quality and safety of food products that are exported from Ireland through participation in international organisations that have as their aim, an “accredited once, accepted everywhere!” goal.

WHAT ARE THE ISSUES?

Is our food safe?

Is it free of toxins? Is it free of contaminants or pollutants? Is it free of pathogens? If we have allergic responses to certain ingredients, can we trust the labelling?

Is it authentic?

Are we consuming what we think we are? Are the ingredients what they claim to be on the label?

How is it produced?

An increasing proportion of the population is interested in the way that food is produced,

in terms of the environment, animal welfare, and provenance. Is it fair trade or organically produced?

The production and distribution of food involves complex supply chains and processes. In simple terms, there is the production of crops and the rearing of animals, followed by the practices involved with sourcing, harvest and slaughter. Then there is the storage, treatment and processing, and in turn packaging and distribution. The food industry operates in a highly competitive, dynamic and regulated environment.



There are a series of complex issues and a range of areas where there has to be tight control to ensure that the food supply is safe when dealing with the mass production of food in urban and rural areas. Consideration also needs to be given to the retail environment in terms of storage and display. Increasingly, there is an international aspect to food production, as ingredients, products or parts of products, may come from several countries around the world.

SO HOW CAN WE BE CONFIDENT THAT OUR FOOD IS SAFE?

Samples, products, services, management systems or personnel can be evaluated against specified requirements by laboratories, certification bodies, and inspection bodies (collectively known as conformity assessment bodies). Conformity assessment is used to check that products are fit and safe for consumption against a standard, a code of practice or regulatory requirements.

Conformity assessment therefore provides a means for preventing unsafe, unhealthy or environmentally harmful products from entering the food chain. Regulators can set overall policy requirements or detailed technical requirements and rely on laboratories, inspection bodies or certification bodies to check for compliance.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF ACCREDITATION?

Accreditation is the independent evaluation of these conformity assessment bodies to carry out specific activities to ensure their integrity, impartiality and competence. Through the application of national and international standards, government, producers and consumers can have confidence in the calibration and test results, inspection reports and certifications provided by the conformity assessment bodies.

Accreditation bodies are established with the primary purpose of ensuring that conformity assessment bodies are subject to oversight by an authoritative body.

The importance of accreditation of conformity assessment bodies (CABs) has substantially increased since the late 1980s. Consumers, businesses, regulators and other organisations all over the world want to be able to trust and have confidence in the goods and services they buy and use every day. Consequently, there has been a growth in specified national and international requirements for products, processes and services.

Since its creation, European cooperation for Accreditation (EA) has been working with the European Commission, The European Free Trade Association and national authorities to promote, develop and implement accreditation as the best option for regulating a wide range of sectors of the economy.

Accreditation bodies, that have been evaluated by peers as competent, sign agreements that enhance the acceptance of products and services across national borders, thereby creating a framework to support trade.



The EA MLA (multilateral agreement) benefits European society and all European citizens as accreditation provides confidence in the quality of the air we breathe, the safety of the food we eat, the safety of the environment we work in.

INAB is a member of EA and a signatory to MLAs for testing, calibration, certification, inspection and production of reference materials. INAB is also a member of International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC) and the International Accreditation Forum (IAF). These international organisations are responsible for accreditation of conformity assessment bodies on a worldwide basis. ILAC is responsible for the area of laboratory and inspection accreditation, and the IAF for the fields of certification of management systems/products/services/persons accreditation. Both ILAC and IAF work together and coordinate their efforts to enhance accreditation and conformity assessment worldwide.

The peer evaluation system is a key component of membership of multilateral agreements and INAB undergoes regular peer evaluations, in order to maintain its signatory status.

WHAT BENEFIT DOES ACCREDITATION PROVIDE?

For national authorities and regulators

Regulators can set policy requirements or detailed technical requirements and rely on accredited laboratories, inspection bodies or certification bodies to check for compliance. Regulators can therefore reduce their in-house inspectorates and specialist assessment personnel to reduce cost, or target their inspections more effectively. The use of accredited services can also moderate the need for additional legislation, as well as reducing the risk of unintended consequences. International accreditation arrangements provide regulators with a robust and credible framework to accept accredited test results, inspection reports and certifications from other countries, with an equivalent level of confidence as if they were carried out in the local economy.

Accreditation therefore provides a reliable monitoring tool to support the work of food safety agencies.

For businesses operating in the food industry

Supermarket chains and food retailers are increasingly demanding that their suppliers demonstrate that their products meet food safety standards by requiring accredited test reports, inspection reports and certifications.

Conformity with food safety standards demonstrates that suppliers are meeting appropriate levels of safety, environmental performance, and animal welfare.

Accreditation, and the use of accredited conformity assessment bodies, can also support business in the supply chain against potential liability claims.

International accreditation agreements provide an infrastructure that allows accredited certificates to be accepted around the world. This reduces the risk of products being rejected by international trading partners, and for the need to have products re-evaluated on entry into each country.

For consumers

Consumer confidence can be gained from goods or services that are accompanied by an accredited certificate of conformity. International accreditation agreements ensure that such goods and services placed on the market, from whichever country of origin, meet standards of quality and safety.

EXAMPLES OF FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY IN ACCREDITED AREAS:

Laboratory - Food testing

There must be confidence in the data generated by laboratories carrying out testing, measurement or calibration in these fields.

Using an accredited laboratory can help establish and assure this confidence. When a laboratory is accredited by a recognised accreditation body, such as INAB, it has demonstrated that a prescribed level of technical competence to perform specific types of testing, measurement or calibration activities has been achieved. The result is assurance that the laboratory is capable of producing data that is accurate, traceable, reproducible and reliable – critical components in governmental decision-making

INAB accredits a number of food testing laboratories. The test results from these laboratories may be used by the Food Safety Authority (FSAI) to monitor the compliance of food products with food safety legislation in Ireland. Laboratories accredited in this area include public and private laboratories, more details can be found on our website under the directory of accredited clients.

Laboratory - Pesticide Residues Analysis

Food and feed test reports generated in one country and reinforced by the accreditation mark of an Accreditation Body (AB) may end up in other countries as part of the information required by operators for their trade within the EU. The international dimension of the economy rests upon equivalence and reliability of conformity assessment services: accredited once, accepted everywhere!

The national reference laboratory for this type of testing is based in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine laboratories in Backweston and is accredited by INAB.

The testing carried out by these types of laboratories provides assurances that the food and feed products tested here meet international standards.

By using accredited laboratories, industry may export their products without the need for re-retesting in each new market.

Laboratory - Virology

Virology laboratories accredited by INAB include a number of National Reference Laboratories, accredited to ISO17025, to service national and EU legislation regarding exotic, endemic and zoonotic veterinary viral diseases.

These labs provide scientific and diagnostic support for disease control and eradication programmes and perform official tests for statutory and trade purposes.

In addition, the labs deliver a virology diagnostic service for farmed animal species, including poultry, through the regional veterinary laboratory and private veterinary practitioner networks. That testing capacity supports animal health, and related production and welfare aspects thereby ensuring trust and confidence in the food chain.

Inspection

Every European citizen has the right to know how the food they eat is produced, processed, packaged, labelled and sold. This farm to table policy covers all sectors of the food chain, including feed production, primary production, food processing, storage, and transport and retail sale.

The services of ISO/IEC 17020 accredited inspection bodies are used at all stages of the supply chain to detect unsafe food and monitor hygiene levels. Inspection bodies are accredited to carry out activities in the food

industry such as pre-shipment, plant health, meat and slaughterhouses' inspection. Accredited inspection is also used to ensure the road worthiness of vehicles involved in food transport and also inspection of warehousing facilities for the storage of food and feed material. Farm inspections check compliance with hygiene standards, animal welfare and disease control and INAB accredits farm inspection bodies for the delivery of these schemes. Catering facilities are also inspected for food handling and hygiene standards

Other examples internationally include the use of standards for the inspection of hygiene levels in commercial catering facilities. Accreditation of inspection bodies in this area will help to ensure a high level of hygiene and, as a direct consequence, the protection of consumers.

Certification

In the field of certification, INAB is active in management systems certification (ISO/IEC 17021-1), product certification (ISO/IEC 17065) and certification of person (ISO/IEC 17024). There are specific food safety management systems (e.g. ISO 22000) and also general quality management systems (e.g. ISO 9001) that can be applied to companies in the food sector. There are also specific product standards and schemes for food groups such as eggs, meat, fish and organic produce. Certification standards can be applied at farm, transport, processor and retailer level.

Accredited certification of management systems for companies involved in food production and services help ensure that the food chain is secure from contamination and that the quality and safety of the food is at an optimum level.

Certification - food safety management system

ISO 22000 is a food safety management system standard for the implementation of best food practices. It outlines what an organisation needs to do to demonstrate its ability to control food safety hazards, helping to ensure the health of consumers of food products.

The implementation of food safety management systems can assist in the reduction and elimination of food safety risks and lead to benefits such as

- Establishing and improving internal processes to provide consistently safe food
- Providing confidence to management and staff that practices and procedures are effective and safe
- Provide confidence to customers that safe hazards are controlled and products are safe
- Provide a means of continual improvement
- Provide effective control at all stages of the food supply chain to prevent introduction of food safety hazards.

SUMMARY

Accreditation plays a vital role in helping to ensure the safety and quality of food supplies in Ireland and in meeting regulatory requirements. It also plays a vital role in the production of food products for export thus contributing to the employment and well-being of a significant number of the Irish workforce.

INAB as the national accreditation body for Ireland is responsible for the maintenance of Ireland's position within the international accreditation community, which means that goods, products and services that have been tested, inspected or certified by INAB accredited organisations are recognised and accepted worldwide.

Further information on INAB and the organisations that it accredits can be found at www.inab.ie



INAB is part of the HSA



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