

# Evaluation of the food control systems in saudi arabia

[Business](#), [Industries](#)



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## Introduction

According to the World Trade Organisation, Saudi Arabia is a developing country and is part of the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Due to increased tourism, religious trips, foreign workers, recent food scares, and a high reliance on imported food, the need has arisen for the establishment of a common market and common approach to food control throughout the region.

## **Food Control Management**

The Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations (2006) defines food control management as “ the continuous process of planning, organising, monitoring, coordinating, and communicating, in an integrated way, a broad range of risk-based decisions and actions to ensure the safety and quality of domestically produced, imported and exported food for national consumers and export markets as appropriate. Food control

management covers the various policy and operational responsibilities of competent government authorities responsible for food control.”

The main food control management board within Saudi Arabia is the Saudi Food and Drug Authority (SFDA). According to the SFDA, their purpose is to regulate, administer, and control all imported and local foods. The SFDA is managed by a Board of Directors that includes ministers from Health, Interior, Rural Affairs, and Agriculture, just to name a few. The Authority is also responsible for all food safety licensing procedures and grants. The SFDA has proposed a two-phased approach to food control management within Saudi Arabia, of which the first phase is set to take place over a five-year period (SFDA, 2011).

Whilst the SFDA seems to have a clear plan on how to address food control management within Saudi Arabia, it seems the actual establishment and fulfilment of food control management policies and procedures lies with the Saudi Arabia Standards Organisation (SASO) and can pass across many committees, agencies, and administrators, at both federal and local levels (FAO, 2005). This often results in duplication and overlapping of duties, lack of coordination, and information stagnation across the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

## **Food Legislation**

As Saudi Arabia is a member of both the World Trade Organisation and Codex Alimentarius, it has the responsibility of abiding by Codex standards. Whilst some implementation of these standards has taken place within Saudi

Arabia, there still exists a disparity of food control procedures within the region. This can largely be attributed to the reasons mentioned above: lack of coordination and information, etc.

In recent years Saudi Arabia has worked hard to ratify new food safety laws that cover all foods. There has also been much effort to integrate and coordinate between different agencies both nationally and internationally. For instance, because Saudi Arabia imports a large amount of food products from the United States, in recent years the two countries have worked closely together to establish strict import guidelines and procedures. These guidelines and procedures cover anything from dairy products, eggs, fruits and vegetables, processed foods, to forest products and plants (GAIN, 2009).

Recently, SASO has also helped to establish food-labelling requirements for all food and food products sold in Saudi Arabia. Typically food and food products require the following before they can be sold in the Kingdom: certificate of origin, bill of lading, or steamship certificate, insurance certificate and packing list, food manufacturer's ingredients certificate, consumer protection certificate, and a price list, just to name a few. There are also certain additional requirements for items such as meat, seeds, grains, fruits and vegetables, and livestock (Saudi Network, 2011).

## **Food Inspection and Audit**

Food inspection and audit is defined as “ the examination of domestically produced or imported food to ensure that it is handled, stored, manufactured, processed, transported, prepared, served and sold in

accordance with the requirements of national laws and regulations, thus protecting the health and well-being of consumers” (FAO, 2006).

Within Saudi Arabia, food inspection consists mainly of laboratory examination and actual physical investigation of the end product, which is carried out by various authorities. Although the Department of Environmental Foods and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) standards of Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) and Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) have been introduced within Saudi Arabia, the implementation of such standards is slow. Hygiene requisites are conducted on a random basis through visual inspection of domestic products. More often than not, food inspection officials can be pacified with the presentation of health certificates and facility licenses (Al-Kandari and Jukes, 2009).

As mentioned above, Saudi Arabia and the entire GCC region is highly reliant on imported foods. This reliance has brought about the need for increased control and inspection of such foods; however, there has been little increase in the workforce available for such inspections. This results in a large amount of imports going uninspected. Within Saudi Arabia there is also a lack of concise standards around food sampling procedures. This means that food inspection officials are unclear on when to take samples, how many samples to take, and exactly what types of foods need to be sampled. Each of these issues has led to inadequate food inspection and audit systems within Saudi Arabia.

Official Food Control Laboratories

Official food control laboratories have the responsibility of identifying food contaminants and their sources, whether human or food. These laboratories also provide support for law enforcement, food safety and quality policies and standards (FAO, 2006).

Whilst food control laboratories in Saudi Arabia are well equipped and supplied, there exist three main issues concerning such laboratories: inadequately trained analysts, inadequate quality assurance systems, and an overall lack of international laboratory accreditation bodies (Schillhorn van Veen, 2005). The country has done much to address the issue of laboratory analyst training. It has embarked upon a rigorous training program for analysts focusing on imported foods. This will help to improve the knowledge and skills of analysts working in laboratories within Saudi Arabia.

Whilst inadequate quality assurance systems and lack of accreditation continues to be a problem in Saudi Arabia, the county is trying to learn from its UAE neighbours. The UAE has already received ISO accreditation for three of its food control laboratories and continues to implement quality assurance systems across the whole of the country. Saudi Arabia is looking to follow the UAE's lead in this area and is seeking ISO accreditation of its own.

In an effort to improve its laboratory food control systems and standards, Saudi Arabia, along with five other countries located in the Middle East and Northern Africa, formed an alliance with the United States Pharmacopeial Convention (USP) with the intention of improving food and drug laboratory standards and testing systems (Ammari, 2010). Through this alliance the

SFDA has agreed to work closely with the USP in improving its food control laboratories. This agreement means that laboratories located in Saudi Arabia will send test results and details to the USP in order to receive feedback and recommendations for improvement.

## **Food Safety and Quality Information**

As the general economic landscape of Saudi Arabia is changing, so is its foodculture. An increase in gross income per capita means that more Saudis are eating out. This has led to an increase in the consumption of processed foods, which in turn leads to an increase in illness due to contaminated foods. As mentioned above, over 30% of food workers in the GCC region are of foreign decent (Al-Kandari and Jukes, 2009). Many of these workers neither read nor speak Arabic or English. This has caused a major problem regarding food handling and preparation. Therefore, there exists a great need for information, education, and communication regarding food safety and quality. To this end, the SFDA has created a website to help educate and provide information to Saudis concerning food safety and quality. The website provides up-to-date, reliable information that is easily accessible to all of Saudi Arabia.

## **Saudi Arabia Food Control Diagram**

### Conclusion

Saudi Arabia is a quickly developing nation, however, with this development has also come problems. The food control systems within the Kingdom can be described as substandard and inadequate. Whilst many improvements

have been made, Saudi Arabia still has a long way to go in this particular area. The Kingdom's recent efforts to implement and improve food safety and quality standards, unify all involved parties, and form alliances with other more successful countries is commendable. These efforts need to continue and increase within the Kingdom in order for it to receive accreditation for its food control systems and to ensure the safety of its citizens.

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