



Section 5, Own-check plan

In this section, you will be introduced to the own-check plan.

- ▶ What is it and why is it necessary?
- ▶ How is it drawn up?
- ▶ What do you need to take into account in the plan?
- ▶ How is its implementation monitored?

You must draw up an own-check plan before starting operations.

The purpose of the own-check plan is to help you describe your operations and manage the food hygiene risks associated with them.

What is the own-check system and what is it needed for?

As an operator in the food industry, you are responsible for the safety of your food. In addition, you must ensure that accurate and sufficient information is provided on your food.

In practice, you will ensure this through own-check activities. The own-check system is your own system. In it, you plan in advance how to manage the risks posed by your operations and how to correct any mistakes if necessary.

Through own-check activities, you can ensure, for example, that the storage, heating and cooling temperatures and times of foodstuffs are in order. In addition, you can ensure that food is processed hygienically at every stage.

Through own-check activities, you can also ensure that your customers obtain the required information on meal ingredients that can cause allergies or intolerances.

Own-check activities are mandatory, but a well-designed own-check system will also provide direct benefits to you:

- It reduces the likelihood of food poisoning.
- It helps keep customers happy.
- It reduces the need for costly official supervision.
- It will reduce waste and errors.

What must the own-check plan include?

The own-check plan covers all work stages essential to food safety.

You must also indicate how and through what measures you will manage risks.

Work stages essential to food safety can include:

- the purchase and acceptance of foodstuffs;
- storage;

- cooking and heating;
- cooling; and
- presentation and serving.

Risks include everything that can compromise product safety and the management of conditions.

Once you have identified the risks, you can think about means and measures for their management.

Where can I get help drawing up the own-check plan?

Contact your municipal food control authority or advisory organisations.

You can ask them for more detailed instructions or templates for drawing up the own-check plan.

You can also order the best practice and own-check guidelines for restaurants published by the Finnish Hospitality Association MaRa (titled “Omavalvonta ravintoloissa - elintarvikkeet”, only available in Finnish). The association charges a fee for the guidelines from non-members. Drawing up the own-check plan is easy with the guidelines. In addition, you can find material for drawing up the own-check plan in this guide.

What do you need to take into account in the own-check plan?

The contents of the own-check plan are always dependent on the extent and nature of operations. The most challenging preparation methods in terms of food hygiene (such as sous vide) require a more detailed description in the own-check plan.

In some cases, the plans can be very simple, such as work instructions. In such cases, it is not always necessary to present the plans in written format.

In companies with one or two employees, for example, all parts of the own-check plan do not need to be drawn up in writing. It will suffice if you can describe your procedures verbally.

Companies whose operations entail few risks can also present the own-check plan verbally. Such companies can be termed low-risk companies.

These companies do not serve many varieties of food and only process small quantities of foodstuffs.

A company that prepares food by taking it out of the freezer and heating it in the microwave is a low-risk company, for example.

The own-check plan may be drawn up partially or entirely in electronic format.

You can sign an agreement with another company for parts of the own-check plan

Some sections of the own-check plan, such as “Pest Control”, can be managed through an agreement with another company.

Even in such cases, however, the responsibility for compliance with the law remains with you.

Lightening/reducing own-check activities

In some cases, own-check activities can be lightened/reduced. Examples:

- The temperatures of the supplier’s products have consistently complied with regulations. In this case, you can decide to measure the temperature of this supplier’s products less frequently.
- The results of purity samples taken from surfaces have been good for a long time. In this case, you can reduce the sampling frequency.

When you have drawn up the own-check plan:

- Keep the own-check plan up to date.
- Update the own-check plan after significant changes in your operations.

How will the realisation of the own-check plan be monitored?

The implementation of own-check activities should be monitored and recorded. In some cases, it may be to your benefit if you can demonstrate through own-check records that you have acted correctly. Such situations include, for example, suspected cases of food poisoning and customer complaints. You will be able to demonstrate that the products have been prepared and stored in compliance with requirements.

In your own-check plan, you will specify the frequency of recording the various aspects. For some parts, it can be quite sufficient to only record deviations and the measures taken to correct the situations.

Examples of record-keeping

For example, you need to check the cleanliness of the premises and surfaces each day. In terms of recording these cleanliness inspections, it is usually enough to note any dirty surfaces and the fact that they were washed again.

You should monitor and record the storage temperatures of foodstuffs on a regular basis.

Own-check records must be archived

You must archive the records of your own-check activities so that the inspector can inspect them.

The records may be kept entirely or partially on a computer, or you can note the records down on paper.

The records must be stored for at least one year from the date of processing the foodstuffs.

In the case of food marked with a date of minimum durability, you must store the records longer.

In such cases, the own-check records must be stored for a minimum of one year from the date of minimum durability.

Responsibilities

Employees must be familiar with the instructions and methods related to their own tasks and with an impact on food safety. These instructions and methods must also be complied with. Every employee is responsible for the safety of food.

You must appoint a person responsible for the own-check system. The person must have the knowledge and skills required by the task. This person must be familiar with the operations of your business and with the own-check system.

The own-check plan and the authorities

An inspector will check the restaurant's own-check plan. This is usually done during the first inspection visit.

Later on, the inspector will assess during regular inspections whether your own-check system is functional and well implemented.

The restaurant must ensure that the inspector will be able to inspect the own-check plan and the restaurant's bookkeeping in connection with the inspection.

If this is not possible during the inspection, the own-check plan and books must be delivered to the inspector within a reasonable time after the visit.

More information on official supervision is available via the links on our website.

Summary

- ▶ You are responsible for the safety of food that you produce and serve.
- ▶ You are also responsible for ensuring that customers receive accurate information about your products, such as with regard to ingredients that can cause allergies.
- ▶ The own-check system is a way of ensuring the safety of food.
- ▶ In the own-check plan, you will consider and plan in advance how to manage the risks in your operations and rectify any mistakes.
- ▶ The inspectors will also monitor the functioning and implementation of your own-check activities.

5.1 Contents of the own-check plan

Observe these minimum considerations that need to be taken into account in the own-check plan.

Monitoring the health of employees

At the start of employment and whenever required after that, you need to ensure that employees who process food are free of salmonella infection. The necessity of a test is determined on a case-by-case basis for each employee.

The own-check plan must specify how records of tested personnel are kept and where those records are stored.

The actual health information of the personnel does not have to be stored at the workplace. The information can be managed by, for example, the occupational health care provider.

Orientation, guidance and training

Employees require orientation in subjects such as work hygiene and the requirements for protective clothing and own-check activities.

Plan the following:

- How to introduce employees to hygienic working methods and own-check activities?
- How to record orientation and training?
- Who will be in charge of orientation?
- What kind of protective clothing will the employees wear?
- Where will the protective clothing be stored and how will it be washed?

Ensuring the hygiene competence of personnel

The employer must ensure that personnel who process unpackaged, perishable food hold hygiene passports.

How and where are records kept of hygiene passports?

The records can consist of:

- copies of the hygiene passports; or
- a list of persons who have presented original hygiene passports.

In small restaurants, it can suffice for the employees to present their original hygiene passports to the inspector.

Purchasing ingredients

Plan how you will handle the purchase of ingredients subject to special restrictions. The purchase of such ingredients should be addressed in the own-check plan.

Acceptance inspections of ingredients

Plan the following:

- How frequently will you carry out acceptance inspections on items delivered to your restaurant?
- How will you monitor the temperatures of refrigerated and frozen deliveries? They should be monitored.

Food production methods

If you adopt them, how will you manage methods that are challenging with regard to food hygiene risks, such as *sous vide*?

Any special arrangements for the use of premises

Separation in time means that different operations are performed in the same premises, but at different times. The premises must be washed carefully between different operations.

Make plans for the careful management of separation in time and washing the facilities and appliances.

Separation

Where necessary, ensure the isolation of different foodstuffs or ingredients during all work stages.

Plan how to avoid contamination when purchasing, accepting, labelling, storing and processing foodstuffs and ingredients.

Examples of segregation

- How can you avoid contaminating cooked and other ready-to-serve foods with raw or soil-covered foodstuffs?
- How will you keep substances and products that can cause allergic and intolerance reactions separate from each other and from food for which they are not intended?

A list of substances and products that can cause allergies or intolerances is provided in the “Food Information Management” section.

Also take into account the order of work and cleanliness of premises, appliances and utensils.

Plan the following:

- Will the processing premises have dedicated work stations and tools for foodstuffs that must be separated completely? Or will you use the same utensils and work stations and clean them between different applications?
- Will you also prevent contamination through the division of duties and work instructions?

Temperature management

Plan the following:

- How will you monitor the temperatures of food and its storage facilities?
- What will you do in the event of problems with temperature management?
- From where will you measure the temperatures?
- How often will you take the measurements?
- How often will you record the results?
- What will you do if the temperature is not within the limits specified by law?

At a minimum, confirm the temperatures during these work stages

- When accepting food deliveries
- During cold storage and other storage
- When heating food
- When cooling heated food
- During display

Traceability

How will you demonstrate the traceability of food and its ingredients

- from where and when was it acquired; and
- to where and when was it delivered?

How will traceability information, such as delivery lists and purchase receipts, be stored?

Please remember that traceability also applies to materials and supplies such as dishes, utensils and packaging materials.

How will you ensure that the customer gets the right information?

How can you ensure the accuracy of the information you provide to customers about meals?

You must be familiar with the ingredients used to prepare the food.

You are not required to disclose the precise recipes, but you must be able to provide product information if necessary.

Describe how the following information on meals will be provided to customers:

- name of the food,
- ingredients and products that cause allergic or intolerance reactions, and,
- if necessary, the country of origin.

If you sell prepacked food, how can you ensure sufficient and accurate labelling?

Withdrawals

Withdrawal means that food products that are found not to comply with the requirements for the safety of foodstuffs shall be withdrawn from the market.

Your own-check plan should include a plan for the possibility of withdrawals:

- Stop serving and selling the food in question.
- Act according to Evira's withdrawal instructions and contact the food inspector.

Suspected cases of food poisoning

If you receive customer complaints of food poisoning from food you have prepared, you must notify the local food control authority of them.

For the possibility of suspected food poisonings or other complaints, you should freeze samples of food you have served. Store such samples for at least three weeks.

Record the contact information of the food inspector in the own-check plan.

Management of packaging and contact materials

Plan the following:

- From where will you acquire your materials?
- How will you confirm the materials' suitability for use with food?
- Is the purpose of the materials and articles indicated by the names or packages of the products?
- If necessary, how will you confirm the purpose or conditions of use of materials from the supplier?
- Where will you store certificates of suitability for use with food or declarations of compliance?

Cleaning of premises and appliances

Plan the following:

- How will you ensure the cleanliness of premises, appliances and utensils?
- How often will each area, appliance or utensil be cleaned?
- Who will do it?
- What tools and materials will be used for cleaning?
- Where will the cleaning equipment be stored?

If the cleaning is handled by an external company, ask it to provide this information.

Water quality

Plan how you will manage the quality of water if you draw it from your own well or through filters.

Sampling plan

Plan the following:

- How will you monitor the microbiological purity of surfaces that come into contact with food?
At a minimum, you should carry out quick tests.

- How will you manage microbiological analyses?

If you keep food or convenience foods for several days, you will also have to evaluate the need for the microbiological analysis of food samples.

Maintenance of premises and appliances

Plan the following:

- How will you take care of the functionality and maintenance of premises, appliances and utensils?
- Who will be responsible for it?
- What scheduled maintenance or inspections will be performed?
- What will you do in case of problems?

Foreign object risk management

Plan the following:

- What kind of light bulbs will you choose for the facility? Will you choose lamps and bulbs that will not spoil the food if they break?
- What will you do if a glass container breaks during food processing?
- How will you prevent humidity and the flaking of paint in order to avoid flakes of paint ending up in the food?

Pest control

Plan the following:

- How will you prevent pests such as rats, birds and cockroaches from entering the premises?
- What will you do if pests do find their way into the premises?

Waste management

Append the following reports to your own-check plan:

- How will you handle waste?
- Where will you collect different types of waste?
- How often will you empty and wash the bins?
- Who will do it?

Food transport

If you transport food yourself, plan the following:

- How will you ensure the safety of foodstuffs during transport?
- What means of transport will be used?
- How will the food be packaged for transport?
- How long will the deliveries take?
- How will temperatures be managed during transport?
- What will you do in case of problems?

If another company is responsible for your deliveries, the above-mentioned points can be addressed in that company's own-check plan.

Organic products and import

If your selection includes organic products, your own-check activities will entail special requirements with regard to organic production. If you import animal products such as meat or cheese, it will entail special requirements on your own-check activities.