

Report to the federal Parliament:

Self-checking systems of food chain operators – Supervision by the Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain (Afsca-FAVV)



The Belgian Court of Audit has examined in its report to the Federal Parliament whether the Afsca-FAVV supervises the food chain operators efficiently while they implement the compulsory self-checking systems. The Court has recommended a series of measures in order to enhance the supervision of the food chain operators by way of verifications of their self-checking systems and to improve the inspections intrinsically. Furthermore, the Court of Audit has advised to complete the information registered during the self-checking operations and improve the supervision of the certification bodies in charge of these systems validation.

Since 1st January 2005, the food chain operators have been obliged to have their own self-checking system to guarantee their products safety. This obligation reflects the accountability principles promoted by the European Union.

The self-checking systems consist of a series of measures that the operators must take to ensure that their products comply with the regulatory provisions as to the safety of the food chain at every stage of production, processing and distribution. Moreover, the operators must see to it that these regulations are complied with.

The Afsca-FAVV supervises the introduction and implementation of the systems.

Although the operators can have their self-checking systems validated by certification bodies recognised by the Afsca-FAVV, merely 14% of them actually did so. It is important that the Afsca-FAVV inspections at the operators without a validated self-checking system should tackle verification issue.

The Court has noted that many operators have undergone controls about various aspects related to food safety, but none of these controls have addressed their self-checking system on the long run. The Afsca-FAVV has not set any deadline for this kind of controls to be performed at these operators premises.

Verifying the compliance with the hygiene requirements or the monitoring measures are two different themes and the controls in these matters are not performed at the same time. An integrated approach of both aspects would continue to ensure the food safety of the operators' activities in the future.

Besides, the Afscfa-FAVV should improve the wording of the questions about the self-checking systems used during the inspections in order to assess the monitoring measures thoroughly.

As to the operators who have not had their self-checking system validated, the Afscfa-FAVV databases do not content any indicator of their control level of the supervision process on their activities.

The European Union has set criteria for the inspection frequency of the operators. Yet, the Afscfa-FAVV does not apply all of these criteria systematically to every sector of the food chain. In the distribution and primary production sectors, for instance, the inspections leading to poor results have no impact on the frequency calculation of the future inspections at the operators premises concerned.

Finally, the Court has observed that the transmission of the inspections information to the service in charge of supervising the certification bodies shows weaknesses. Since the audit, the Afscfa-FAVV has adapted its approach in order to improve the quality of the certification bodies work.