

The Meat Inspection Code of the Philippines: Securing Meat and Meat Products' Safety from Farm to Table¹

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INTRODUCTION

Protection and promotion of the right to health of the people (Section 15, Article II) and protection of consumers from trade malpractices from substandard or hazardous products (Section 9, Article XVI) are State's obligations stipulated in the Philippine Constitution of 1987. In July 2003, Republic Act No. 9296 ordained the 'Meat Inspection Code of the Philippines' to strengthen the country's meat inspection system to assure safety and quality of meat and meat products for human consumption both in the domestic and international markets (Philippine Star, 2003).

Under this law, it is the State's policy to, among others, (a) promulgate specific policies and procedures governing the flow of food animals; (b) ensure food security and provide safety and quality standards to assure the protection of public against risks of injury and hazard; and (c) support the livestock and poultry industry development and promote animal health by preventing the entry of disease-carrying animals in meat establishments.

The Meat Inspection Code of the Philippines laid guidelines on the following area: institutional mechanisms, scope of meat inspection, ante- and post-mortem inspection, inspection of imported meat and meat products, sanitation, product quality and safety, product information and consumer awareness, fees and charges, and prohibited acts and sanctions.

Institutional mechanism

National Meat Inspection Services or NMIS³, an attached agency of the Department of Agriculture, is tasked to serve as the national controlling authority on all matters pertaining to meat and meat product inspection and hygiene. It is mandated to formulate and implement policies, programs, rules and regulations in relation to meat inspection and hygiene to ensure safety and quality from farm to table. As well, the agency was tasked to undertake functions including but not limited to policy formulation and program implementation, supervision and control of meat inspection and meat hygiene, regulation, information, training and capability building. NMIS operates with twelve divisions⁴ namely: (1) Plant Operation and Inspection, (2) Accreditation and Registration, (3) Enforcement and Food Defense, (4) Meat Import and Export Assistance and Inspection, (5) Meat Science and Technology, (6) Laboratory Services, (7) Consumer Information, Education and Assistance, (8) Legal Affairs, (9) Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation, (10) Engineering and Climate Change, (11) Administrative, and (12) Finance

¹ A short policy paper submitted to the Food and Fertilizer Technology Center (FFTC) for the project titled "Asia-Pacific Information Platform in Agricultural Policy". Short policy papers, as corollary outputs of the project, describe pertinent Philippine laws and regulations on agriculture, aquatic and natural resources.

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³ In 1972, Presidential Decree No. 7 established the National Meat Inspection Commission (NMIC) which was tasked to promulgate specific policies and procedures governing the flow of livestock and livestock products through the various stages of marketing and the proper preservation and inspection of such products. In 2003, it was renamed into National Meat Inspection Service (NMIS) thru the enactment of RA 9296.

⁴ Amendments to RA 9296 are embodied in RA 10536 (enacted on 2012) which among others specify the composition of the NMIS and the penalties for the prohibited acts.

Division. NMIS operates in the regions through its Regional Technical Operation Centers located in the 16 regions of the country.

The Meat Inspection Board was formed to assist NMIS in formulation of policies and guidelines on all matters pertaining to agencies' mandates. The board is composed of (1) Secretary of Department of Agriculture as Chairperson; (2) Executive Director of National Meat Inspection Services; (3) Director of Bureau of Animal Industry; (4) Executive Director of Bureau of Foods and Drugs; (5) Director of Bureau of Local Government Development; (6) Representative from a consumer organization duly commended by the National Consumers Affairs Council; and (7) Director of the Bureau of Agriculture and Fisheries Products Standards.

Certain powers and functions of the NMIS are devolved to Local Government Units (LGUs) (Provincial, City and Municipal Meat Inspection Service) as embodied in the Executive Order (EO) No. 137⁵ in pursuant with the Local Government Code of the country. The EO delineates the responsibilities of the national and local meat inspection services. Devolved powers and functions include (a) construction, improvement, expansion, and operation of slaughterhouses; (b) classification and accreditation of slaughterhouses; (c) meat inspection; (d) meat transport and post-abattoir control; (e) monitoring and evaluation; (f) training and information; and (g) collection of fees and charges.

Scope of meat inspection

The provisions of the Act applies to all meat establishments such as slaughterhouses, poultry dressing plants, meat cutting plants, meat processing plants, cold storages, meat shops, meat markets and other outlets engaged in domestic and international trade. Only meat control and inspector officers duly appointed and designated by the NMIS or local government units are authorized to conduct meat inspection work. NMIS has the responsibility to ensure, and to enforce, that meat establishments operate in accordance with humane slaughter and hygienic requirements.

Ante-mortem inspection

A systematic ante-mortem inspection, as prescribed by NMIS, is made by authorized inspector to the food animals before animals are slaughtered. The inspection is done in a holding pen located within the premises of the establishment at the time of slaughter and when the animals are delivered to the establishment. Any animals found to be infected by diseases or defect that would render the meat unfit for human consumption are marked 'condemned', isolated immediately and disposed properly. Ante-mortem inspection also includes inspection of method by which food animals are slaughtered and handled in meat establishments in accordance with RA 8485 or otherwise known as Animal Welfare Act.

Post-mortem inspection

The following are the country's guidelines and activities for post-mortem inspection:

- Systematic post-mortem inspection is carried out to the carcasses and parts of all food animals at any meat establishments. Any carcasses and parts of food animals found to be hazardous are condemned for human consumption. The condemned meats are remained under the custody of inspector until the required treatment and method of disposal has been applied in a safe and secure manner. The disposal of condemned meat conforms to all pollution control and environmental laws and regulations of the country (Section 21);

⁵ Executive Order No. 137 was promulgated in November 1993 titled, 'Providing for the Implementing Rules and Regulations Governing the Devolution of certain powers and functions of the National Meat Inspection Commission to the local Government units pursuant to RA 7160, otherwise known as the Local Government Code of 1991'. (<http://nmis.gov.ph/attachments/article/566/EO.137.1991.pdf>).

- Carcasses and parts of food animals found not to be adulterated are marked by stamping, labeling, or tagging 'Inspected and Passed.' The ink mark assures consumers the safety and wholesomeness of the meat. Re-inspection is done to determine whether the meat has become adulterated after the first inspection (Section 22, 23, and 27);
- The NMIS has the power to limit entry of carcasses, meat and meat products, and other materials into any meat establishment. By rule, only slaughtered food animals, inspected and passed by inspectors from NMIS accredited slaughterhouses shall be utilized in NMIS accredited meat processing plant for meat processing, meat canning and packing (Section 25);
- Examination and inspection of all meat and meat products prepared for commerce in any slaughtering, meat canning, salting, packing, rendering, or similar establishment at all times (whether in operation or not) are conducted by inspectors (Section 26);
- All meat and meat product exporters shall be licensed, registered, and accredited by the NMIS. By rule, only HACCP certified meat and meat products from accredited 'AAA' meat establishments shall be allowed for export. Veterinary Quarantine Clearance is issued by National Veterinary Quarantine Services (NVQS) to vessels cleared to export meat and meat products from the country. (Section 28); and
- The inspectors has the power to seize, confiscate, condemn or dispose carcasses or parts of food animals that is sold, transported, distributed, offered or received for distribution in commerce that have not passed through ante-mortem inspection (Section 31).

Inspection of imported meat and meat food products

All meat and meat products brought into the country shall be subjected to safety and quality inspection by NMIS. Samples are collected and submitted to the NMIS laboratory for analysis to determine the presence of disease and whether the level of drug residue, harmful substances, additives, contaminants, toxins and microbes conform to the standards and requirements of the Philippines. By rule, all meat and meat products exported into the country shall be sourced from foreign meat establishments accredited only by the DA.

NMIS confiscates imported meat and meat products on the following cases: (a) products are filthy, contaminated, adulterated or misbranded that poses risks to human and animal health; (b) NVQS seal is found broken or removed at the port of inspection; (c) products carry any disease-causing organism, toxic or deleterious substance which may render it injurious; (d) consist, in whole or in part, of any filthy, putrid, rotten, decomposed substance or foreign matter or otherwise unfit for human consumption; and (e) the container or packaging materials in direct contact with the meat and meat products are found to be composed, in whole or in part, of any poisonous or deleterious substance which render the contents injurious to health. Imported meat and meat products confiscated in view of any violation of this Act are returned to the country of origin or destroyed.

Labeling requirements

Any meat and meat products prepared for commerce and which has been inspected and marked 'Inspected and Passed' by NMIS are labeled, for local and international trade, to enable the consumer to obtain accurate information about the product and to ensure product traceability. False, misleading or deceptive or is likely to create an erroneous impression regarding to products' character, value, quantity, composition, merit or safety are considered unlawful and subject to appropriate sanctions.

Sanitation

NMIS and PMIS evaluate meat establishments for the adoption of Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) and Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures (SSOP) in the whole process of production, storage and distribution of meat and meat products. Meat establishments that operate below national standards for hygiene and sanitation are recommended for closure. Incentive scheme, on the other hand, are formulated for establishments that are performing exceptionally in their compliance to sanitation standards.

Product quality, safety, information and consumer awareness

HACCP-based meat inspection system and other internationally recognized standards, recommendations, set of procedures or guidelines are being practiced in the country. This is to further ensure the quality and safety of meat and meat products in the country.

The NMIS, in coordination with other concerned entities, provided information and assistance to the consuming public on the proper handling and preparation, storing, processing, preservation of meat and meat products to ensure that the meat they consume is safe and wholesome. One way is disclosing vital product information on their meat and meat products sold in the market and establishment for tracing and/or recall system of products.

Meat inspection service development trust fund

A fund was established to be used primarily to the improvement of meat inspections system of the country. The fund is utilized for the continued upgrading of laboratory equipment and facilities to conform with international standards, training facilities, capability development of technical personnel, research and development, indemnification of condemned animal during ante-mortem inspection, accreditation of foreign meat plants and other forms of assistance and support to the livestock sector. The trust fund accepts grants and donations from national and foreign entities and individuals interested in the meat inspection development.

Prohibited acts and sanctions

Any person, firm or corporation found directly or indirectly violating any provision of this Act, as enumerated below, shall be charged with penalties and sanctions prescribed and charged under applicable laws of the Philippines:

1. slaughter any food animal or prepare meat or meat product in any meat establishment except in compliance with the requirements of this Act;
2. slaughter or handle in connection with slaughter, any food animal in a manner not considered humane;
3. sell, transport, offer or receive for sale or transportation in commerce carcasses or parts thereof, meat and meat product required to be inspected under this Act unless they have been so inspected and passed;
4. do any act while products are being transported in commerce or held for sale, which is intended to cause or has the effect of causing such articles to be adulterated or misbranded;
5. printing and forging of official marks;
6. operation in absence of ante-mortem inspection;
7. interference (resist, harass, intimidate, assault, impede or interfere) in the conduct of inspection; and
8. unlawful trading and shipment.

Under the amendments of the Act as embodied in RA 10536, in general, any person who commits violation of any of the provisions of the Act shall be punished by imprisonment from six (6) to 12 years or a fine ranging from PhP 100,000 to PhP 1,000,000.

Conclusion

Meat and meat products goes through several stages along food chain – production/slaughter, marketing, storage, and distribution – before it reaches the final consumers for consumption. In these stages of food chain, the safety of public against hazards should always be considered. The Meat Inspection Code of the Philippines, as one among country's strict law on protecting the right to health of the people, defined meat and meat product's safety guidelines and procedures from production to consumption.

References

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