

Quality and safety in the French dairy sector

• Strict regulations and frequent checks : the quality chain from stable to table

Today, the texts fixing the specific sanitary rules applicable to the production and marketing of milk and dairy products are European directives. They have taken over from previously existing national regulations and are applicable to all member states of the European Community.

• Directives and their scope

Specific provisions for the dairy sector

- 89/362 : milking hygiene
- 92/46 : milk and dairy products as they leave the farm to be placed on the market

Other general provisions applicable to the dairy sector

- 64/432 : animal health (tuberculosis, brucellosis)
- 93/43 : transport, storage, distribution, marketing and group catering

• Animal husbandry : European legislation defines the requirements for :

■ *milk quality* : strict standards have been fixed with respect to the number of germs (less than 100,000/ml) and the number of somatic cells (less than 400,000/ml) contained in cow's milk at 30° C.

■ *health of the herds* : the milk must come from herds exempt from tuberculosis and brucellosis. The monitoring of these diseases falls within the ambit of the Bovine Sanitary Network set up by DGAL (General Directorate for Food) of the French Ministry of Agriculture in

partnership with FNGDS (National Federation of Sanitary Defence Groups) and SNGTV (National Association of Technical Veterinary Groups).

On account of France's excellent status with respect to these diseases, the primary objective of the network is to prevent re-infection, for instance when new animals are introduced in the herd. If a confirmed case of an animal affected by an alleged contagious disease is detected in a herd, the entire herd is slaughtered and the breeder receives compensation. Moreover, sanitary policing procedures are implemented.

Dairy cows must not have any apparent disorders (diseases of

207 milk analyses per farm and per year

In 1998, the laboratories of the interprofessional dairy organisation – co-financed by producers and processors – carried out 26.7 million analyses on cow's milk for the quality-related payment of milk. Moreover, 60 million analyses were carried out by the dairy inspection agencies, which advise breeders in their quest to optimise the yield and quality of milk production. This adds up to an average of 207 analyses per year and per dairy farm !

the genital tract, enteritis with diarrhoea accompanied by fever, inflammation or injury of the udder) nor any symptoms of a contagious disease transmissible to humans through the milk. They must not be treated with substances that are harmful to human health and that can be transmitted through the milk. Sick or suspect animals must be separated from the herd and their milk must not be collected. Moreover, the milk must not have any anomalous organoleptic characteristics.

The Charter of Good Breeding Practice : the breeder's commitment

Milk quality is closely related to breeding and production conditions, which are well controlled today. To this purpose, the National Federation of Milk Producers (FNPL) and the National Federation of Bovine Breeders (FNB) have drafted a Charter of Good Breeding Practice which goes even further than the regulatory requirements. This Charter commits the breeders to comply with a number of rules on the monitoring of the sanitary state and cleanliness of the herds and their stables, milking hygiene and feed quality.

■ *hygiene of farm, equipment and staff* : the regulation fixes the temperature at which the milk must be stored until it is collected. It also sets out the rules for the equipment and utensils that come into contact with the milk as well as the hygiene rules (tidiness, cleaning, disinfection) applicable to the staff, the premises, the milking and milk storage equipment...

The milk must come from animals and farms whose sanitary status is controlled by the DSV (Departmental Veterinary Service), who must check compliance with all relevant hygiene requirements.

At the dairy, the regulations cover :

■ *processing, packaging and storage conditions of dairy products* : the regulations define the requirements for the manufacturing of various types of liquid milk and milk-based products. They also define the microbiological criteria applicable to all dairy products with respect to four categories of germs causing disorders in humans (*Listeria monocytogenes*, *Salmonella spp*, *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Escherichia coli*) as well as the hygiene rules and physical resistance required for the packaging, wrapping, storage and transport of dairy products.

■ *self-checks performed by companies* : in order to ensure compliance with regulatory requirements, companies must carry out self-checks based on the principles of the HACCP method (Hazard Analyses Critical Control Points) : identification, monitoring and

control of critical points, by taking samples for conformity checks in laboratories approved by the competent authority, keeping written or electronically stored records of the analysis results, introducing corrective action if needed and managing non-compliant products.

■ *mandatory approval of dairies* : milk processing establishments that place products on the market are subject to an approval procedure and receive a registration number certifying that they comply with all relevant regulations.

■ *approval control* : carried out by the official inspection agencies (DSV and DGCCRF) who must have access to the cold storage rooms and to all processing premises at any time. This inspection aims at checking the compliance with regulatory requirements. During these visits, microbiological checks can be carried out on the products. In case of non-compliance with the criteria fixed to ensure the quality and hygiene of the products at any stage of the process, the approval can be suspended or withdrawn from the dairy.

SVDs

In each of the 95 "départements", the main territorial and administrative divisions of France, there are departmental veterinary services (SVD) placed under the authority of the "Prefect", the top local State representative. Each SVD, a State agency, has a food hygiene department in charge of monitoring the healthiness of animal foodstuffs for human consumption – including milk and dairy products - and a department for animal health and protection in charge of monitoring the health of the herd.

■ **health mark** :dairy products produced by an approved establishment must carry a visible,readable and indelible health mark on the product,or on the packaging (or on the accompanying documents).This health mark indicates the community origin of the product (EEC), the country of origin (F for France) and the approval number of the processing establishment. These three pieces of information are indicated inside an oval. This information, the batch registration system and the durability date ensure the traceability of

French products, which makes it possible to recall batches in case a problem is detected in the course of an inspection.

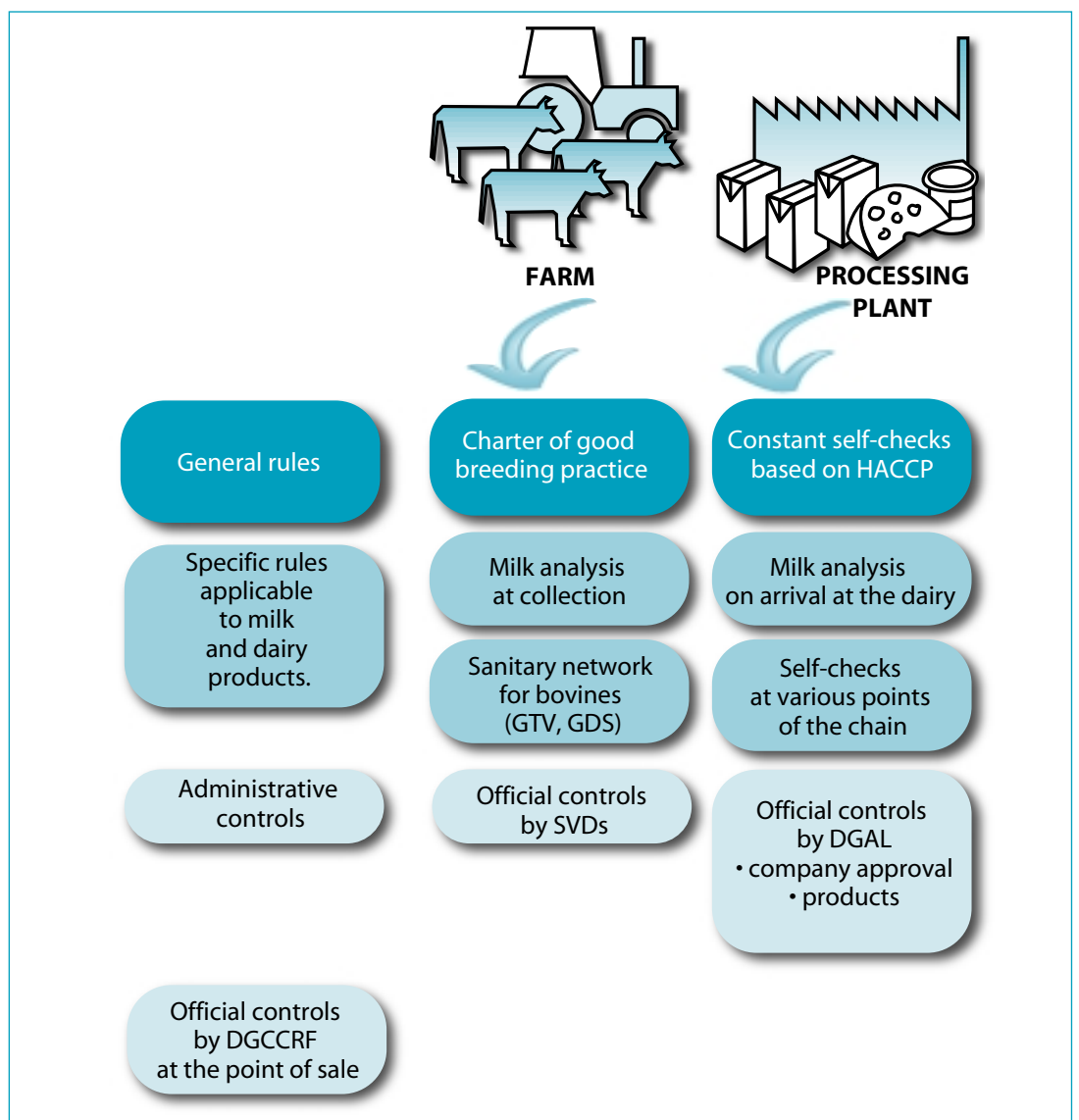
■ **emergency procedure** :

• when a sanitary risk is discovered (e.g. contamination by *Listeria monocytogenes*),the company must alert the Veterinary Service. The Veterinary Service makes a first analysis of the situation and,if necessary,informs the relevant administrations : DGAL (General Directorate for Food),

DGCCRF (General Directorate for Competition, Consumption and the Repression of Fraud) and DGS (General Directorate for Health).

• In case of an immediate risk for human health,the company must withdraw from the market all products obtained under similar technological conditions and likely to cause the same risk as the incriminated sample. If a risk is detected in an exported product,the official authorities of the country of destination are immediately informed by the French authorities .

Organisation of regulatory provisions :
directives, official inspections, self-checks, from the farm to the shelf



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Public inspection programmes : In parallel to the system of self-checks performed by the professionals and under their own responsibility, the competent public authorities carry out official inspections to verify the credibility of in-company self-checks. These official inspections check the bacteriological quality, the presence of residues and the composition of

the products.

France uses two types of detection programmes :

■ *annual surveillance programmes*, carried out by means of random samples and designed to assess consumer exposure and contamination background levels. The targets are residues of pesticides, antibiotics, heavy metals, aflatoxins, PCBs, radionuclides...

■ *routine controls*, carried out on the basis of targeted samples, designed to detect possible violations and to take appropriate preventive or corrective action.

The truthfulness of the labelling and the composition of the products fall within the competence of DGCCRF, which organises regular inspection programmes.

Abbreviations

ATLA : French Dairy Processors' Association

CNIEL : National Interprofessional Centre of the Dairy Economy.

DGAL : General Directorate for Food.

DGCCRF : General Directorate for Competition, Consumption and the Repression of Fraud.

DGS : General Directorate for Health.

DSV : Director of the Veterinary Services.

EEC : European Economic Community.

EU : European Union.

FNB : National Federation of Bovine Breeders.

FNCL : National Federation of Dairy Co-operatives.

FNGDS : National Federation of Sanitary Defence Groups.

FNIL : National Dairy Industry Federation.

FNPL : National Federation of Milk Producers.

HACCP : Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points.

PCB : polychlorinated biphenyl.

SNGTV : National Association of Technical Veterinary Groups.

SVD : Departmental Veterinary Service.

T.O.M. : French overseas territories

