

Training for Food Handlers in Italian Regions

Subjects: **Public, Environmental & Occupational Health**

Contributor: Daniele Pattono , Matteo Petey , Anna Maria Covarino , Marta Gea , Tiziana Schilirò

Food safety has always been a public health challenge. Globally, food safety control is supported by laws and preventive measures, such as inspections conducted from primary production to market, “from farm to fork” as emphasized by the European Union and training of Food Handlers (FHs). This latter preventive measure plays a very important role, and for this reason a review of training courses regulations provided in the different Italian regions was conducted.

training

food policy

food safety

food regulation

1. Stakeholders of the Training

To define the relevant stakeholders, regions or autonomous provinces took into consideration the following factors: role in the plant, activity, risk assessment for FHs in the production plants, handling of foods in the plant and kind of food handled in the plant, and six different classes were identified:

- (1) FHs in food production plant without specifications (one region) ^[1];
- (2) FHs with a specific role in food production plant (e.g., pastry chef) (three regions) ^{[2][3][4]};
- (3) Risk assessment for FHs in the production plants (six regions and Bolzano autonomous province) ^{[5][6][7][8][9][10][11]};
- (4) Risk assessment for FHs in the production plants and FHs as defined by European Community laws (two regions) ^{[12][13]};
- (5) Risk assessment for FHs in the production plants and the FHs role in the food production plant (one region) ^[14];
- (6) Kind of plant and manager staff (e.g., production, selling, catering) (one region) ^[15].

The risk assessment level, high or low, for FHs of companies was based by public health service on type of products, range of commercialization, number of workers on the line, direct or indirect contact with food and FHs activity work.

A specific training course was stipulated by six regions for FHs working at temporary events, such as fairs, local festivals or cultural and sporting events, and only one region mandated a specific form of training for newly hired

staff.

2. Topics Covered in the Training

Based on the classes discussed above, the regions implemented different programs, taking into account the risk assessment for FHs in the production plants. It is important to underscore that no Italian region provides indications or guidelines concerning training methods.

The topics of the training courses in each class and their frequencies in relation to the stakeholders of the training courses in the classes are shown in **Table 1** (a few topics not present in all classes, e.g., architectural needs of food plants, were present in class n°1, so they have not been taken into account in the table).

Table 1. Frequency of topic coverage by training courses for each profile (green: 100% to 76%, yellow: between 75% and 51%, orange: between 50% and 26%, red: between 25% and 0%).

Classes	Stakeholders	Topics										
		GMP	FHs Hygiene	Environmental Hygiene	HACCP	Food Hazards	FBDs	Traceability	Gluten	Allergens	Food Laws	FH Duties
1 (1 Region)		100%	100%	0%	100%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
2 (3 Regions)	FHs	100%	100%	100%	66%	66%	66%	33%	33%	33%	33%	33%
3 (6 Regions and Bolzano autonomous province)	High-risk plant FHs	85%	85%	85%	85%	71%	42%	42%	28%	14%	57%	42%
	Low-risk plant FHs	85%	85%	71%	42%	57%	42%	14%	28%	0%	71%	42%
	High-risk plant FHs	100%	100%	100%	100%	0%	50%	0%	0%	0%	100%	50%
4 (2 Regions)	Low-risk plant FHs	100%	50%	100%	100%	0%	50%	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%
	FHs as defined by EU Reg*	100%	100%	100%	100%	50%	50%	0%	0%	0%	100%	50%
5 (1 Region)	High risk plant FHs	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	Low-risk plant FHs	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	Simple	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Most frequently, topics were about practical tasks, such as FH hygiene, the environment or the handling of food and HACCP programs regardless of the trainee’s role in the plant (high-risk profile, low-risk profile or management). FBDs were emphasized less frequently, being included in only 50% of the programs regardless of

Classes	Stakeholders	Topics										
		GMP	FHs Hygiene	Environmental Hygiene	HACCP	Food Hazards	FBDs	Traceability	Gluten	Allergens	Food Laws	FH Duties
6 (1 Region)	activity FHs											
	Complex activity FHs	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	High-risk plant FHs	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	Manager	100%	0%	0%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%

Only 1 region mandated 10 h of training for FHs (class N.1) without any other specification (handling, production, catering), which did not take into account the complexity of the activity. Other regions used different criteria to make decisions regarding the duration of training. The most frequently considered criterion pertaining to the duration of training was based on risk assessment: 10 regions ranging from 3 to 8 h (for FHs with low-risk profiles) and from 9 to 12 h (for FHs with high-risk profiles) and 3 regions (Abruzzo, Puglia and Sicily), ranging from 4 to 12 h (complex activity, e.g. production and preparation of food). Tuscany required training with durations ranging from 12 (low complexity) to 16 h (high complexity) as defined in **Table 1**, and the Friuli Venezia Giulia region considered whether training was delivered to catering and production FHs (8 h), to sales operators (4 h) or included a general assessment of “risk” (3 h).

The scheduled periods for refresher courses varied between 2 and 5 years depending on the risk profile (refresher courses for those with high-risk profiles were usually stipulated after a period of 3 years, although in the Liguria region, this period was every 5 years, and in the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region it was every 2 years). For three regions (Calabria, Emilia Romagna and Liguria), the refresher courses for low-risk operators were not considered at all.

4. Training Providers

Both private and public companies were considered to be training providers. In particular, 11 regions listed both types of companies, while 3 regions listed only private companies. Only one autonomous province offered any choice in this context.

The following public providers were listed: the public health service (10 regions) and in 1 region, the National Network of Public Health Laboratories (Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale).

Private companies were classified into the categories of training institutions (12 regions), trade or professional associations (10 regions), internal quality assurance offices (8 regions) and private training companies (6 regions).

University degrees were required for training staff only in 7 of 15 regions. Each region considered more than 1 degree, but the number of degrees permitted in the regions ranged from 7 to 13 different sciences. Medical degrees (human medicine, veterinary science) or food sciences (food sciences and technologies, public health sciences and chemistry) were required in six regions. Other permitted degrees included pharmacy (five regions), biological science (five regions) and animal production or agronomy science (four regions). Some regions also

accepted other degrees that were not strictly related to food safety or food production and instead focused more closely on food quality or food management, such as dietary science, food engineering or herbal techniques.

5. Qualifying Degrees Associated with Exemption from Training

Similar to degrees required for training staff, the degree necessary to be exempted from the training courses was also highly variable according to the different regional plans/regulations.

In particular, 9 of 15 regions defined the degrees that could grant the degree holder an exemption from training courses. Degrees in medicine were the most common members of this category, alongside degrees in agricultural science and biology (nine regions). Eight regions granted exemptions from training courses to graduates in prevention sciences or dietary techniques.

It is interesting that secondary school diplomas such as those granted by hotel and catering management schools or agricultural experts were also included in this category by seven and six regions, respectively.

6. Training Verification by a Competent Authority

The majority of regions employed a system of document control based on the verification of certificates (eight regions) or the HACCP manual or related material (four regions). Direct observation or interviews with FHS were reported by six and four regions, respectively. Six regions made no mention of such verification processes.

References

1. Decision of the Regional Council No 2173 of December 10, 2002. Marche Official Regional Bulletins No 2 of January 8, 2003.
2. Decision of the Regional Council No 61 of January 30, 2006. Abruzzo Official Regional Bulletins No 51 of September 20, 2006.
3. Regional Regulation No 5 of May 15, 2008. Puglia Official Regional Bulletins No 78 of May 19, 2008.
4. Decree No 275 of February 19, 2018. Sicilia Official Regional Bulletins No 11 of March 9, 2018.
5. Decision of the Regional Council No 28 of February 2, 2012. Calabria Official Regional Bulletins No 4 of March 1, 2012.
6. Decision of the Regional Council No 342 of March 1, 2004. Emilia Romagna Official Regional Bulletins No 36 of March 17, 2004.

7. Decision of the Regional Council No 793 of June 29, 2012. Liguria Official Regional Bulletins No 30 of July 25, 2012.
8. Decision of the Regional Council No 372 of April 8, 2008. Molise Official Regional Bulletins No 11 of May 16, 2008.
9. Decision of the Provincial Council No 542 of May 13, 2014. Trentino-Alto Adige Official Regional Bulletins No 45 of November 11, 2014.
10. Decision of the Regional Council No 1849 of December 22, 2008. Umbria Official Regional Bulletins No 4 of January 28, 2009.
11. Decision of the Regional Council No 4197 of November 22, 2004. Valle d'Aosta Official Regional Bulletins No 53 of December 28, 2004.
12. Decree No 110 of May 24, 2018. Campania Official Regional Bulletins No 59 of August 13, 2018.
13. Decision of the Regional Council No 825 of November 3, 2009. Lazio Official Regional Bulletins No 44 of November 28, 2009.
14. Decision of the Regional Council No 559 of July 21, 2008. Toscana Official Regional Bulletins No 22 of July 21, 2008.
15. Regional Law No 21 of August 18, 2005. Friuli Venezia Giulia Official Bulletins No 17 of August 22, 2005.

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