Product Specifications

Product descriptions should include product specifications. The specifications should fully describe the materials used in the product. It is a written statement of an item's required characteristics documented in a manner that facilitate its procurement or production and acceptance.

Safety-related information in raw material and ingredient specifications may include threshold levels for microbiological pathogens, factors affecting microbiological growth such as pH and water activity, threshold levels for potential chemical or physical contaminants and the presence or absence of known allergens. The extent to which these factors need to be included in the specifications will depend on the use of the material and the food safety risk to the finished product.

Quality related detail included in material specifications could include information such as color, grade, nutritional data, size, weight, type of packaging, etc. Customer specifications may also be included.

A list of all raw material and packaging specifications (including finished product labels) should be kept, including a version number and date so that there is proof that specifications are updated as needed.

All raw and packaging materials should be validated to ensure hazards and risks to finished product safety and quality are identified and controlled. Raw and packaging materials should be included in the HACCP Food Safety Plan.

Validation testing is over and above daily monitoring to ensure that established food safety and quality limits are effective, i.e., they achieve the desired results, so that the supplier can have confidence that the product and process are safe.

Validation methods will vary depending on the risk to finished product safety. Validation for low risk materials may include certificates of analysis or certificates of conformance, provided by an approved vendor.

For high-risk materials, testing and analysis is required for validation, and should be carried out at least annually. For food-contact packaging material, this may include testing or assurances for potential chemical migration to the food product.