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| **EFFECTIVE DATE: 04/05/2009** |

**Identifying Critical Processes**

**1. Introduction**

This document outlines the process for identifying critical processes within a food manufacturing facility (NIC Code 10101) to ensure product safety, quality, and regulatory compliance. Critical processes are defined as those steps in the production chain that directly impact the safety and quality attributes of the final product and whose failure could lead to significant consequences. This identification is crucial for effective process control and risk mitigation.

**2. Methodology for Identifying Critical Processes**

The identification of critical processes should be a systematic and documented exercise, involving cross-functional teams representing production, quality assurance, and regulatory affairs. The following steps should be followed:

* Step 1: Process Mapping: Develop a comprehensive process flow diagram illustrating all stages of food production, from raw material receipt to finished product packaging and distribution. This map should clearly delineate each individual process step.
* Step 2: Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) Principles: Apply HACCP principles to identify potential biological, chemical, and physical hazards associated with each process step. This involves considering the likelihood and severity of potential hazards.
* Step 3: Critical Control Point (CCP) Identification: Determine which process steps are Critical Control Points (CCPs). A CCP is a step in the process where control can be applied to prevent or eliminate a food safety hazard or reduce it to an acceptable level.
* Step 4: Impact Assessment: For each identified CCP, perform a detailed impact assessment to understand the potential consequences of process failure. Consider the impact on product safety, quality, legal compliance, and brand reputation.
* Step 5: Documentation: Thoroughly document all identified critical processes, including their location within the process flow, the associated hazards, the control measures in place, and the consequences of failure. This documentation forms the basis for ongoing monitoring and control.

**3. Compliance Notes**

* FSMA (Food Safety Modernization Act): This process aligns with the preventive controls for human food rule under the FSMA, emphasizing proactive hazard prevention rather than reactive corrective actions.
* ISO 22000: The identification of critical processes is a fundamental requirement for achieving ISO 22000 certification, demonstrating a robust food safety management system.
* Local Regulations: Ensure compliance with all relevant local and national food safety regulations regarding process control and documentation.

**4. Practical Guidelines**

* Teamwork: Involve personnel from all relevant departments to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the production process and potential hazards.
* Regular Review: The identified critical processes should be reviewed and updated regularly to reflect changes in production processes, raw materials, or regulatory requirements.
* Training: Provide appropriate training to all personnel involved in the critical processes on the procedures, monitoring techniques, and corrective actions.
* Clear Responsibilities: Assign clear responsibilities for monitoring and controlling each critical process.

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