New federal law affects food manufacturers — Compliance requires rigorous hazard control plan, specialized training

By LYNNETTE HINTZE/Daily Inter Lake | Posted: Sunday, August 21, 2016 10:45 am

New food-safety rules being imposed by the federal government will require even the smallest food-product manufacturers to develop hazard analysis plans and have an employee who has completed preventive controls for human food certification.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s Food Safety Modernization Act takes effect for the country’s largest food manufacturers next month and rolls out for smaller manufacturers over the next two years.

Montana manufacturing officials are scrambling to get the word out about the federal mandates.

“The law says if you’re required to register with the FDA, then you’re required to follow the Food Safety Modernization Act,” said Claude Smith, the food and process specialist for the Montana Manufacturing Extension Center.

The new rules are the most sweeping reform of food-safety laws in more than 70 years, Smith said. Much of the attention is focused on risk and risk management. The law aims to help farmers, manufacturers, transportation companies and food importers take steps to prevent food-safety problems before they occur, he said.

Businesses such as meat-processing plants have been required for years to have a hazard analysis and critical control points plan that is a food-safety management system built through the analysis and control of biological, chemical and physical hazards through the process, from receipt of raw materials to shipping the final product.

The new federal legislation, however, is much more in-depth than simply having a hazard plan. “This is like HACCP on steroids,” Smith said. “The Food Safety Modernization Act is HACCP times a hundred.

Montana Coffee Traders

Meagan Arseneau, the production manager and hazard analysis critical control point coordinator for Montana Coffee Traders, unloads beans from the roaster into a cooling tray at the Montana Coffee Traders Roastery on Thursday. (Aaric Bryan/Daily Inter Lake)
“It’s not like the good old days and it would be nice if businesses had HACCP plans,” he continued. “This is the law and the FDA has the legal authority to shut down” businesses that don’t comply.

The Montana Manufacturing Extension Center is recommending a two-step process for food processors to ensure they meet the compliance deadlines. The first step is developing the hazard plan.

The second step is getting an employee or manager trained in preventive controls for human food. Even the smallest food processors will be required to have a “Preventive Controls Qualified Individual” on staff, Smith noted.

The training is a three-day course taught by a certified preventive controls lead trainer. Smith is the only trainer in Montana, and he will be doing training in neighboring states as well.

Smith was in the Flathead Valley last week to touch base with local manufacturing industry leaders. While he was here he met with Montana Coffee Traders to talk about how that business will adapt to the new federal law.

Montana Coffee Traders has already been working toward compliance with the legislation for three years, General Manager Heather Vrentas said.

The company, which roasts coffee at its U.S. 93 facility near Whitefish, sent its production manager to a two-day seminar at Pasta Montana in Great Falls three years ago.

“We started looking at what it will take for our manufacturing to be compliant,” Vrentas said, adding that the intent of the federal legislation is for food-product manufacturers to keep track of the process from start to finish.

“It’s complete verification of the whole supply chain,” she said. “It’s a lot of tracking, with a lot more scrutiny.”

Montana Coffee Traders is fortunate, Vrentas said, because making coffee is a fairly simple process: “You grind the beans and put them with hot water.”

The fact that coffee is paired with near-boiling water “is another blessing” for the company, she said, as it develops its hazard analysis plan.

The company’s coffee beans already have been sent out for independent testing as part of the process, and Smith was able to put Coffee Traders in touch with the right resources to get it done.

The overall goal of the new federal rules is laudable, she said.

“In general it’s all really good things,” she said. “They’re definitely safety practices you’d hope all would abide by.”
Vrentas said Montana Coffee Traders likely will be required to comply with the federal mandate sometime between 2017 and 2018.

The rollout of the Food Safety Modernization Act begins in September for food-product manufacturers with 500 or more employees. Next year smaller companies with less than $10 million in annual sales will need to comply, and by 2018, “everyone else” will need to comply, he said.

Al Withall of Shelly’s Jellys, a local manufacturer of jams and jellies, said he hadn’t heard about the federal legislation.

“I don’t know a thing about it,” Withall said. “No one has contacted me.”

Smith said he’s working to get the word out, and it’s challenging to reach everyone with a territory as big as Montana.

“This is part of what I run into,” he said. “The compliance is a lot of work and I’m concerned people with wait and wait. You need to have a HACCP plan first, and it’s almost impossible to write preventive controls if you have nothing. [These smaller manufacturers] need to get the HACCP training soon and write a plan soon, and then get the preventative controls training.”

For more information visit Food Safety Modernization Act online or call Smith at 406-868-9574.

Features editor Lynnette Hintze may be reached at 758-4421 or by email at lhintze@dailyinterlake.com.