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Evaluation of structural and functional conditions of regional Portuguese kitchens, their legal framing and influence on the quality of the final product

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Abstract

The region of the Northeast of Portugal is known for the production of traditional meat products. *Alheira* is one of these products which is usually prepared in "Regional kitchens". These are small units that cannot produce more than 2000 kg of dry sausages per year. Due to their regional importance, it was necessary to judicially protect the production of this kind of products. In fact, individual producers of regional kitchens have to follow European regulations, as well as a Portuguese normative, namely, the Law-Decree n° 209/2008 that approves the "State of Practice of the Industrial Activity" (REAI).

In order to obtain knowledge regarding the effectiveness of this normative, in the present work the structural and functional conditions of three regional Portuguese kitchens were evaluated and the way these points are considered in REAI is discussed. Moreover, the quality of the final product was also determined.

The structural and functional conditions of the studied regional kitchens were adequate. Machines and local areas were appropriate and no crossing on production lines was observed. In regards to workers, their number was quite low (≤ 3), they were older than 45 and had c. Most of these points are considered in REAI under the topic named "Business Plan". Finally, it was verified that *alheiras* did not represent any danger to public health, since no food borne microorganisms were detected.

Introduction

Trás-os-Montes is a Portuguese region known for the production of traditional, smoked, naturally-fermented meat products. This production is still made in a traditional form and these products being highly appreciated. However, it was necessary to judicially protect this kind of products. *Alheira* is one of the most important, being frequently described as a traditional, smoked, naturally-fermented meat sausage, prepared from pork meat or its mixture with poultry, bread and olive oil, spiced with salt, garlic and paprika. Generally, this kind of products is produced in "Regional kitchens" that include small scale producers. These small units cannot produce more than 2000 kg of meat yearly.

Nowadays these individual producers have to fulfill European regulations, such as EC Regulation n.º 852/2004, EC Regulation n.º 853/2004 and EC Regulation n.º 2074/2005, as well as Portuguese normatives, such as the Normative-Dispatch n.º 38/2008 and Law-Decree n° 209/2008 which approves the "State of Practice of the Industrial Activity", called REAI. The main aim of this Law-Decree is to prevent the risks associated with the exploration of these industrial establishments, in order to guarantee public health, security of persons and their belongings, hygiene and safety of the work places and quality of the environment, in addition to other points.

The present work intended to evaluate the structural and functional conditions of three "Regional kitchens" and discuss how these points are included in REAI. Moreover, the quality of the final product was also determined.