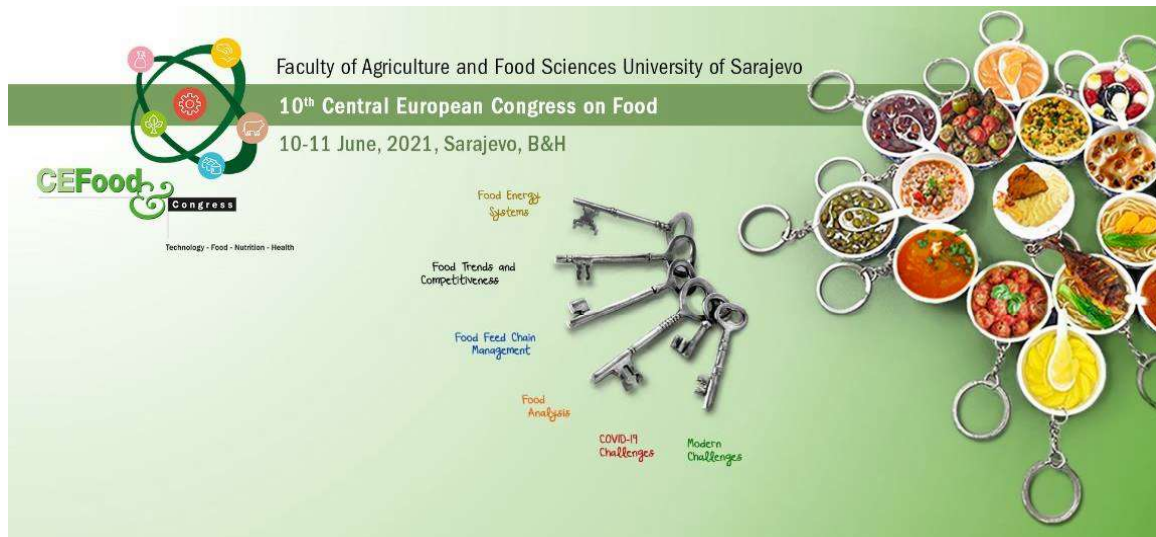


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FOOD SAFETY IN PORTUGUESE COMPANIES IN COVID-19 PANDEMIC CONTEXT

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Summary

The Food Safety Management System (FSMS) seeks to ensure the quality of food products in the whole food supply chain. In Portugal, like in all European Union Countries, enterprises working in the food sector have to fulfil several regulations of food safety and quality to assure those food products can't compromise consumers' health. The COVID-19 pandemic brought additional challenges for companies and their food safety systems. Governments also have decreed new (additional) hygiene measures to be implemented by companies and applied to workers when handling products, such as: use of masks, more frequent hand sanitization, the distance between workers, more frequent cleaning of surfaces, etc. A research study was conducted in a multi-country survey, including 825 food companies from 16 countries. The present study presents a detailed analysis to the data collected from the questionnaires to the 58 Portuguese companies acting in the food sector, and intends to assess the most important aspects/challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The results showed that the HACCP is the most implemented FSMS in Portuguese Companies (in above 50% of the companies included in the study). Also, 20% have (IFS) certification and 16% declare have implemented the ISO 22000 standard. The results showed that, among different attributes available, to Portuguese companies the attribute selected as most influential (most scored) to affect the integrity of the companies' FSMS was the "Temperature checking of workers", and the least influential was the "Staff awareness". The results also revealed that, to a great majority of the Portuguese companies, the FSMS include documents associated to response/incidents affecting food safety; that COVID-19 pandemic was identified as originating potential emergencies in the FSMS; and that the food safety teams were trained how to react in case of a pandemic. Globally, companies' respondents also admit that their FSMS allowed reacting to the pandemic of Covid-19, providing additional training to their staff in order to implement more restrictive personal hygiene procedures (handwashing, physical distance, ...), reinforce the use of personal protective equipment (such as masks), or adjust the sanitation/cleaning practices associated with hygiene of the objects. According to the results, the market/retail was the sector of the food supply chain

most affected due to pandemic Covid-19, and the Primary sector the least affected. In conclusion, the companies are, in general, committed to implement and reinforce the measures related with the FSMS, even under difficult circumstances like those resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key words: Food Safety Management Systems, COVID-19 Pandemic, Questionnaire, Portuguese Companies