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Abstract

This paper outlines the origins of a hybridized and globalized food safety system in the early 21st century, through a focus on HACCP (pronounced ha-ssip), or Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points. Under HACCP, firms conduct a “hazard analysis” to identify potential food safety risks, and then choose the “critical control points” where they can effectively limit or respond to those hazards. Today, HACCP comprises the foundation of basic food safety principles for domestic, international, and private regulatory regimes. This chapter assesses how that came to be, and offers preliminary assessments for the meat and poultry industry. One prevailing explanation is that a series of food scares and highly publicized illnesses and deaths in the late 1980s and early 1990s prompted regulators and retailers to respond by ramping up food safety. However, while this series of transatlantic food scares of the early 1990s may explain the timing of private and international initiatives in food safety, they do not necessarily explain why decision-makers chose HACCP as the preferred food safety protocol across these various standard-setting institutions. This chapter argues that the use of HACCP to enforce standards that exceed the requirements of states or international bodies may also offer a new element to the concept of countervailing power, in which retailers are able to extract not just price concessions, but safety and quality concessions from their suppliers. However, a growing reliance on the technocratic tools of process controls and risk assessment in both public and private standard-setting raise important questions about the appropriate role of democratic institutions and public participation in the formation, monitoring, and enforcement of health and safety standards in the early 21st century.

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