



Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations

HACCP – STEPS 2 AND 3

PRODUCT DESCRIPTION AND INTENDED USE

FAO Good Hygiene Practices (GHP) and
Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point
(HACCP) Toolbox for Food Safety

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Technical note for readers

This PDF file has been designed for use of handheld mobile devices in horizontal view.

This PDF file includes interactive options and links to better browse the document. Clicking on the title icon on the top right corner of each page will bring you either the Content page or the Mind map within the PDF file.

PRODUCT DESCRIPTION AND INTENDED USE

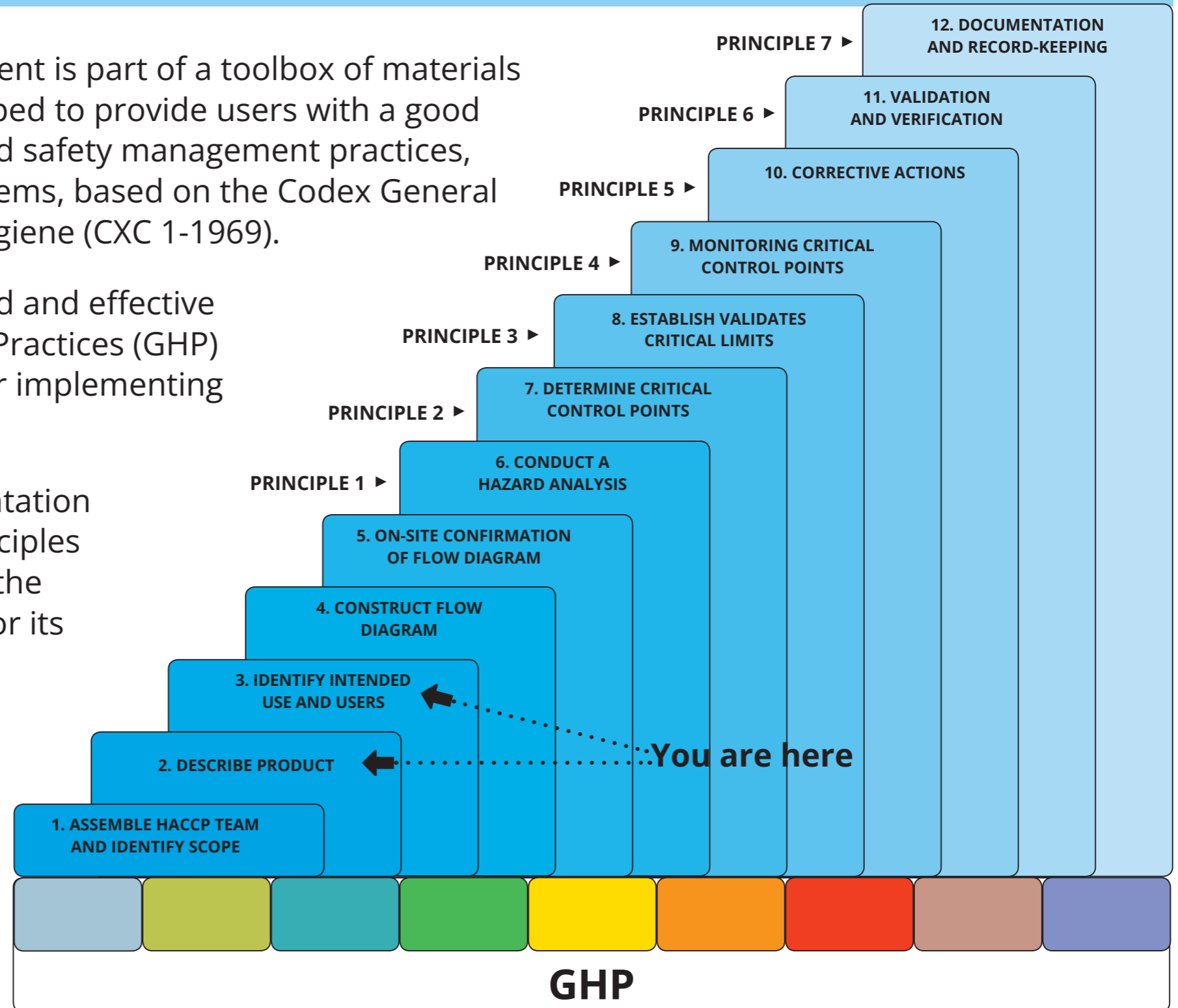
INTRODUCTION

This guidance document is part of a toolbox of materials and has been developed to provide users with a good understanding of food safety management practices, including HACCP systems, based on the Codex General Principles of Food Hygiene (CXC 1-1969).



Well established and effective Good Hygiene Practices (GHP) set the foundation for implementing a HACCP system.

This graphic representation shows the seven principles of HACCP along with the 12 successive steps for its application.



CONTEXT

Complete **product descriptions** are a fundamental requirement for developing a HACCP plan. Product information will include all relevant safety information including the product's composition, processing, packaging, shelf life and storage requirements. Once the nature and characteristics of the product have been identified clearly, products with similar characteristics and processing steps can be grouped and included within a common HACCP plan.

The **intended use** of the product, along with its description, must be identified and well understood. While the food business might argue that the responsibility for a product that has left the processing facility lies with the next food personnel in the value chain or with the consumer, it still has to ensure that the next business or person has all the information necessary to minimize the risk of foodborne illnesses.

Learning objectives

This document provides guidance on how to:

- develop a full description of food products, including all relevant safety information;
- describe the intended use and the users (i.e. other food business operators or consumers, including vulnerable population groups) of the food products; and



- **document these steps as part of the HACCP plan.**

HACCP STEP 2

Product description

Gaining a complete understanding of the food production process, the final product and its intended use will require some effort. However, a complete description of each food product will assist in the identification of all possible hazards associated with the product.

In businesses with multiple products, it may be effective to group products with similar characteristics and processing steps when developing the HACCP plan. Any existing limits relevant to hazards of the food product should be considered and accounted for in the HACCP plan, including, for example, limits for food additives, regulatory microbiological criteria, maximum allowed residues of veterinary medicines and times and temperatures of heat treatments prescribed by competent authorities.

HACCP STEP 2

Who can contribute do the development of the product description?

The HACCP team needs to have as complete an understanding of the product as possible.

- HACCP team members and employees familiar with the production process. ➡ They understand the technical and scientific product parameters.
- HACCP team members and employees familiar with how the product is sold and used by consumers and customers. ➡ They understand the product's intended use.

Remember

Once this information has been collected, all team members, regardless of their role, should become familiar with it.

HACCP STEP 2



Things to consider

Before arriving at the specific details of the product description to be included in the forms, the HACCP team should consider:

- What raw materials or ingredients are used?
- Are microorganisms or chemicals (including allergens) of concern likely to be present in or on these materials, and if so what are they?
- If food additives or preservatives are used, are they used at acceptable levels, and at those levels do they accomplish their technical objective?
- Will characteristics of the product (e.g. pH, A_w , oxidation/reduction potential (Eh)) of the product prevent microbial growth or inactivate particular pathogens?

HACCP STEP 2

Product Description

Develop a complete **description** of the food products being produced, processed and handled, including information about:

1. Product name (common name) or group of product names (the grouping of like products is acceptable as long as all hazards are addressed).
2. Important end-product characteristics: properties or characteristics of the food under review that are required to ensure its safety (e.g. Aw, pH/preservatives).
3. How the product is to be used (i.e. ready-to-eat, heated prior to consumption).
4. Type of package, including packaging material and packaging conditions (e.g. modified atmosphere).
5. Shelf-life, including storage temperature and humidity if applicable.
6. Where the product will be sold (e.g. retail, institutions, further processing).
7. Labelling instructions (e.g. handling and usage instructions).
8. Special distribution control (e.g. shipping conditions) The product description should be documented (see Supporting documents for templates and examples).

HACCP STEP 2

Product ingredients and incoming materials

Describe all product ingredients and incoming materials used in the manufacturing process, including:

- product ingredients (any food allergens should be noted)
- other ingredients, such as water, steam and gases
- packaging materials

This exhaustive listing is required for proper identification of all potential hazards that could apply.



The product description, ingredients and incoming materials should be documented.

(see Supporting documents for templates and examples).

TIP

A precise description of all raw materials includes ingredients and processing aids that are present in the final product, as well as trace ingredients such as additives, starter cultures, preservatives, etc.



HACCP STEP 3

Identifying intended use and users

The intended use of the product refers to its normal use by end-users or consumers.

Why it is necessary to understand the intended use of the product?

While the food business might argue that the responsibility of a product that has left the premises lies with the next actor in the value chain, the food business must nevertheless ensure that this next actor, be it a consumer or a customer, has all the information necessary to minimize the risk of foodborne illness.

Often, producers sell to distributors who, in turn, distribute further or sell to consumers. As such, the customer range of a business might include:

- consumers, who directly consume the product; and/or
- middle parties, such as processors, distributors or retailers who further process or repackage the product.

The entire range of possible users must be considered when thinking about the food safety of a product.

HACCP STEP 3

Product use and users

Considerations when understanding the intended use or users of the food product:

- How will the product be used or consumed?
- Who will the product be distributed to?
- How will the product be displayed?
- How will the product be stored?
- Will other products be mixed with the product?
- Can users or consumers misunderstand the intended use of the product?
- Which precautionary safety measures might prevent mishandling or unintended use of the product?
- How can downstream users and consumers be better informed about the safety of a food product?

HACCP STEP 3

Vulnerable groups

It is important to consider vulnerable groups that may use or consume the food product. These groups are especially susceptible to food safety hazards. They include:

- infants, the elderly, pregnant women
- immunocompromised individuals
- under- or malnourished individuals
- individuals with allergies
- people who cannot understand the language on the packaging or are unfamiliar with the type of food



For additional information, please consult the **Further reading** section accessible from the [SECTION LANDING PAGE](#).

HACCP STEP 3

Considerations regarding vulnerable groups

- How could the final product pose a risk to the health and safety of these consumers?
- What controls or preventive measures should be implemented to eliminate such risk? (Consider existing regulatory requirements.)

If foods are being produced specifically for a vulnerable population, it may be necessary to enhance process controls, monitor control measures more frequently, verify that controls are effective by testing products or conduct other activities to provide a high level of assurance that the food is safe for the vulnerable population.




The best way to store the compiled data and share it among team members is to document it in the HACCP plan (see Supporting documents for templates and examples).

TIP

Keep the descriptions of HACCP Steps 2 and 3 short and concise.



EXERCISE: FOOD SAFETY FOR THOUGHT

<p>This is the little “game” we created. This will apply to all HACCP steps, except the intro.</p>	<p>GHP PROGRAMMES </p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTROL OF FOOD HAZARDS <input type="checkbox"/> <li>2. PRIMARY PRODUCTION <input type="checkbox"/> <li>3. ESTABLISHMENT - DESIGN OF FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT <input type="checkbox"/> <li>4. TRAINING AND COMPETENCE <input type="checkbox"/> <li>5. ESTABLISHMENT MAINTENANCE, DISINFECTION, AND PEST CONTROL <input type="checkbox"/> <li>6. PERSONAL HYGIENE <input type="checkbox"/> <li>7. CONTROL OF OPERATION <input type="checkbox"/> <li>8. PRODUCT INFORMATION AND CONSUMER AWARENESS <input type="checkbox"/> <li>9. TRANSPORTATION <input type="checkbox"/> 	<p>Please explain your choices.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. DESCRIBE PRODUCT <li>3. IDENTIFY INTENDED USE AND USERS 		
<p>GHP are fundamental to the successful application of HACCP.</p> <p>Think of a food operation that you are familiar with, and select those GHP elements that you feel are most relevant for the application of HACCP steps 2 and 3.</p>		

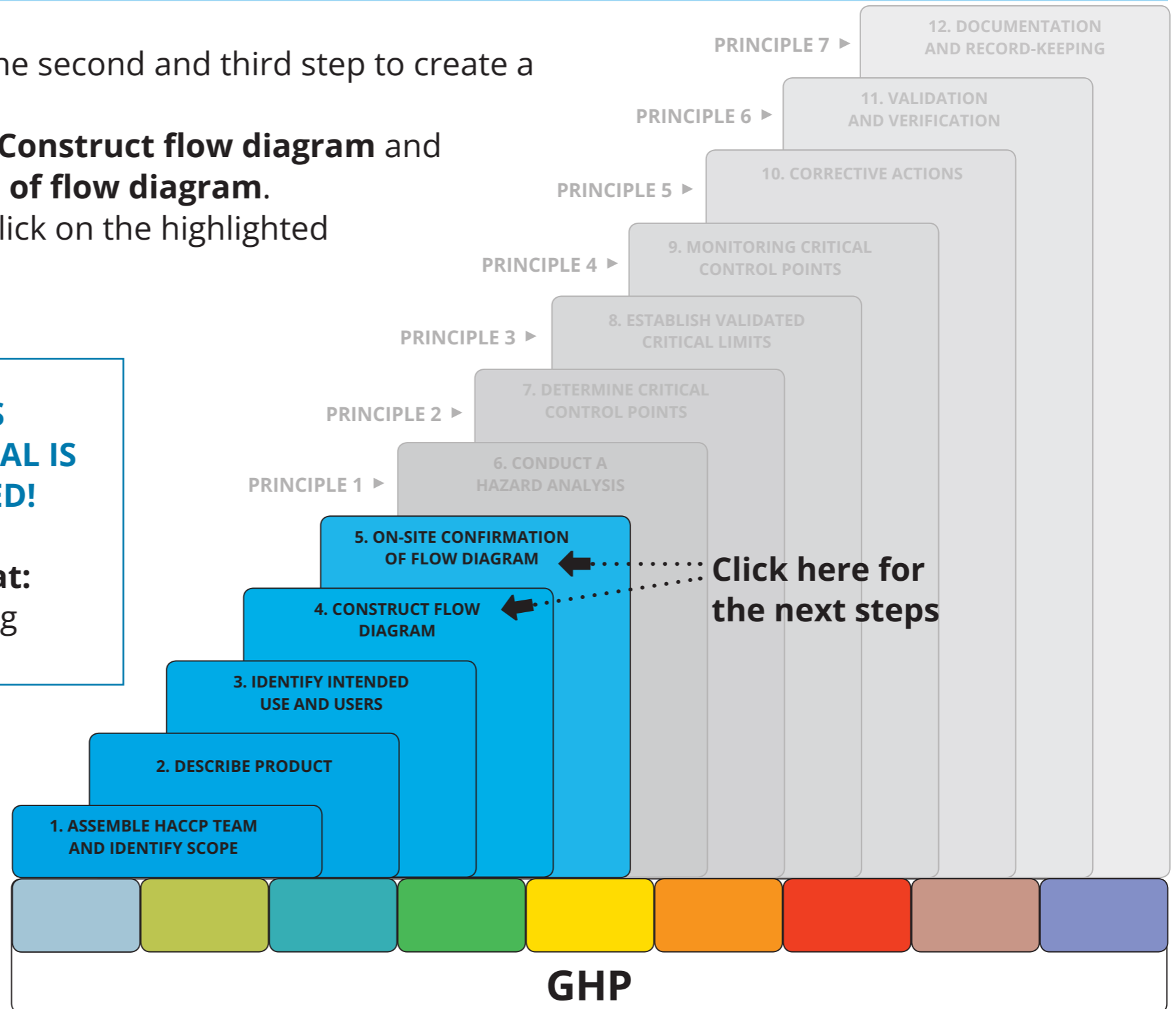
PRODUCT DESCRIPTION AND INTENDED USE

KEEP READING

You have completed the second and third step to create a HACCP system.
The next steps will be **Construct flow diagram** and **On-site confirmation of flow diagram**.
To continue reading, click on the highlighted cards below.

FEEDBACK ON THIS GUIDANCE MATERIAL IS ALWAYS WELCOMED!

Please contact us at:
food-quality@fao.org



KEEP READING

[GHP and HACCP Toolbox for Food Safety](http://www.fao.org/good-hygiene-practices-haccp-toolbox)

www.fao.org/good-hygiene-practices-haccp-toolbox

FOOD SYSTEMS AND FOOD SAFETY –
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