

FSA PROGRESS UPDATE ON SFAC WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS ARISING FROM THE SCOTTISH CONSUMER COUNCIL REPORT 'YOUNG PEOPLE & FOOD SAFETY - FIVE YEARS ON'

Executive Summary

Following publication of the then Scottish Consumer Council (SCC) report entitled 'Young People & Food Safety – Five Years On' (now amalgamated into Consumer Focus Scotland (CFS)); SFAC formed a Working Group to consider the report and Agency food hygiene advice.

This paper provides the progress update which FSA were tasked with providing in 6-12 months, following ratification of the Working Group recommendations by SFAC on 6 March 2008.

The Committee is invited to:

- note the attached progress update

Contaminants, Hygiene, Additives & Shellfish Branch

Contacts: Sandy McDougall
sandy.mcdougall@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk
01224 285134

Will Munro
will.munro@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk
01224 285161

FSA PROGRESS UPDATE ON SFAC WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS ARISING FROM THE SCOTTISH CONSUMER COUNCIL REPORT 'YOUNG PEOPLE & FOOD SAFETY - FIVE YEARS ON'

BACKGROUND

1. This SFAC Working Group was formed following the SFAC meeting of 29 Aug 2007 which discussed the findings of the then Scottish Consumer Council (SCC - now amalgamated into Consumer Focus Scotland) report entitled 'Young People & Food Safety – Five Years On' ¹
2. The five recommendations were ratified by SFAC on 6 March 2008:

- 1 SFAC indicate to FSA that messages and advice given on food safety need to be consistent and soundly based.
- 2 SFAC advise FSA that the use of the term 'piping hot' is not fit for purpose as nobody appears to be able to give a satisfactory definition for the term. SFAC recommends that this area is reviewed and measures taken to clarify. For example a term such as 'boiling hot' should be considered.
- 3 SFAC recommends that FSA undertakes to review guidance for storage of shell eggs taking into consideration the differences between kitchen and retail situations, and where necessary issue new advice.
- 4 SFAC recommends that FSA undertakes to review guidance for re-heating of food taking into consideration the differences between domestic, commercial and retail situations and where necessary issue new advice.
- 5 SFAC advise FSA that the Agency in its role as the 'guardian' of food safety should continue to ensure that the enforcement officers on the ground be trained and encouraged to provide accurate and consistent advice to food business operators and/or the public.

3. The Working Group indicated support for the continuing work of FSAS & SCC (now CFS) with the Curriculum for Excellence to help teachers ensure food safety messages continue throughout schools.

¹ Young People and Food Safety – Five Years On; Scottish Consumer Council; May 2007

4. FSAS were tasked with providing SFAC with a progress update on the Working Group recommendations in 6 to 12 months.

FSA RESPONSE

5. The SFAC recommendations relate primarily to the communication of food hygiene advice to consumers by the Agency as a whole, therefore FSAS engaged with FSA colleagues during 2008 to consider the Agency's food hygiene advice and met with food hygiene colleagues at FSA HQ on 2 Oct 2008.

Recommendation 1 - Consistency and sound basis of advice

6. Within the Agency's Foodborne Disease Strategy, the Food Hygiene Campaign aims to promote good food hygiene practises to the public. This is underpinned by research into microbiological risks and communication, as well as evaluation of ongoing projects.
7. The Agency receives advice from the Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food (ACMSF). This statutory, expert committee informs the Agency about matters relating to the risk to humans of micro-organisms which are used, or occur, in or on food.
8. The Agency's food hygiene advice activities are based around its '4 Cs Strategy' published in April 2006² (www.foodstandards.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/4cstrategydoc.pdf). This five year communication strategy builds on the established concept of the 'Four Cs' – Cleaning, Cooking, Chilling and Cross-contamination - to promote the safe handling of food in the home.
9. The 'Eatwell' website is the Agency's primary source of food hygiene advice for consumers. This and other Agency sources of hygiene advice such as leaflets and initiatives are kept under review to ensure consistent and effective communication of food hygiene advice to consumers.
10. The Agency's fundamental objectives in relation to its work with schools & communities across the UK are outlined in the Agency's Food Competency Framework (www.food.gov.uk/healthiereating/nutrition/schools/competencies) which is integral to the Agency's core principles. The framework identifies different food skill themes, including food safety, for young people in different age groupings.

² 4C's strategy – Promoting food hygiene in the home with a particular focus on working with schools and promoting local initiatives

11. The food competences set out the essential building blocks so that schools and community-based organisations can provide young people with a consistent set of food skills and knowledge. They are designed to be progressive and cumulative from one age stage to the next. They are also designed to apply to all learning experiences so can be met in home, school or other activity setting; examples include the 'What's Cooking' programme, the Cooking Bus, Cook kits etc.
12. The Agency replaced Foodlink as lead sponsor of Food Safety Week in 2008 and launched its 'Germwatch' campaign and the 'Grubeye' character. In line with the 4Cs strategy, new publicity materials (posters, leaflets, stickers, balloons etc) and a TV advert featuring the Grubeye character were produced.
13. In the lead-up to Food Safety Week 2009, which will target the over 60s, the Agency has commissioned research to refine our understanding of risk factors for the over 60s. Its findings are being used to develop effective ways to communicate food hygiene advice on storage & handling in the home for FSW09 and beyond.
14. The Agency's Social Science Research Unit recently completed a survey on Public Attitudes to Food Issues³ (www.food.gov.uk/science/socsci/surveys/publicattitudesfoodissues); part of an ongoing research programme examining behavioural and social aspects of food issues including food safety.

Recommendation 2 - Use of the term 'Piping hot'

15. The Agency is currently reviewing its use of the term 'piping hot' and how best to communicate the underlying cooking advice. Whilst the Agency recognises that the term 'piping hot' is not ideal, the term is generally well used and recognised, whereas alternative terms such as 'boiling hot' are less familiar & have the similar drawback of potential ambiguity.
16. The Agency therefore considers that the term 'piping hot' should not be used in isolation; rather further explanation should be provided as appropriate to the foodstuff and situation to indicate that food must be thoroughly cooked. Colour changes to food and/or juices may be an unreliable indicator and direct temperature measurement unlikely in a domestic setting, therefore it is impractical to offer generic advice.
17. For Food Safety Week 2008, the Agency created its 'Germwatch' brand to promote food hygiene. General advice in the Germwatch materials states that germs can be

³ Public Attitudes to Food Issues; GfK NOP Social Research; 30 Jan 2009

'killed by thorough cooking' and to 'always check your food is piping hot in the middle – there should be steam coming out'. Specific advice is given for different meat products: poultry, pork, burgers and sausages must be 'cooked all the way through. If there's any pink meat or the juices have any pink or red in them, germs could be lurking'; whereas steak and joints of beef or lamb 'can be served rare as long as the outside has been properly cooked'.

18. Germwatch resources also use 'Killer Facts', combining a food hygiene fact with relevant advice such as 'Food poisoning cases double during the summer months. Cook your burgers and sausages until there is no pink meat left and they are piping hot throughout.'
19. The Agency's Eatwell website also contains detailed information to complement the term 'piping hot' such as:

'Making sure food is hot enough: To test if food has been properly cooked, check that it is 'piping hot' all the way through. This means that it is hot enough for steam to come out. Cut open the food with a small knife so that you can check that it is piping hot in the middle. Generally, if food is piping hot in the middle, then it will be piping hot all the way through. But if you're cooking a very large dish, you might need to check it in more than one place, because some parts of the dish may be less hot than others.'

specific advice is given in relation to particular products such as:

'Rare meat: It's fine to eat steaks and other whole cuts of beef and lamb rare, as long as they have been properly 'sealed'. Steaks are usually sealed in a frying pan over a high heat. It's important to seal meat to kill any bacteria that might be on the outside. You can tell that a piece of meat has been properly sealed because all the outside will have changed colour. It's OK to serve beef and lamb joints rare too, as long as the joint is a single piece of meat, not a rolled joint (made from different pieces of meat rolled together). But pork joints and rolled joints shouldn't be served rare. To check these types of joint are properly cooked, put a skewer into the centre of the joint. The juices shouldn't have any pink or red in them.'

Recommendation 3 - Guidance on the storage of shell eggs

20. The ACMSF has considered current Agency advice on eggs in light of three Agency egg surveys and recommended that the Agency's practical advice should remain the same, although the wording should be revised as the survey results indicated a low prevalence of *Salmonella* in eggs.

21. ACMSF opinion, as summarised in the 2007 ACMSF Annual report⁴, (www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/committee/acmsfar2007.pdf) was that current FSA advice was rather strongly worded and the tone of communication should be revisited to reflect the lower risk as well as including information on the different risks from vaccinated & unvaccinated flocks.
22. In January 2009, the European Food Safety Authority's (EFSA) Scientific Panel on Biological Hazards published its Opinion on measures to reduce the risk to consumers from table eggs (including cooling) ⁵ (www.efsa.europa.eu/).
23. The EFSA Opinion states that refrigeration has been suggested as one of many possible interventions along the food chain to reduce the incidence of *salmonellosis* in the human population. It goes on to say that cooling at farm level has the highest beneficial effect with regard to the control of the growth of *Salmonella* and cooling of table eggs is an additional control option which complements other measures.
24. However, the Opinion also states that problems have been associated with refrigeration, including an inability to maintain the cold chain and the consequential water condensation on the egg surface which facilitates the growth and penetration of micro-organisms into the egg.
25. The Opinion recommends that a quantitative approach should be initiated in order to assess the benefits of egg cooling as well as recommending additional research on the relevance of cross-contamination of eggs with *Salmonella*.
26. In light of the ACMSF and EFSA opinion, the Agency is currently reviewing its advice on the storage of shell eggs

Recommendation 4 - Guidance on the re-heating of food

27. Agency advice on re-heating is that food should only be re-heated once, however the Agency recognises that further guidance may be required depending on the product and situation. The Agency will therefore consider providing additional information appropriate to the target audience when reviewing and developing its food hygiene advice.
28. For instance, commercially produced ready-to-eat dishes can have a longer shelf-life due to the greater control possible in controlled factory conditions, and products such

⁴ ACMSF Annual report; 2007

⁵ Special measures to reduce the risk for consumers through *Salmonella* in table eggs – e.g. cooling of table eggs; The EFSA Journal (2009) 957, 2-29

as rice may be treated to extend shelf-life by such processes as acidification. This was recognised in the development of Germwatch materials for Food Safety Week 2008 with the inclusion of advice to 'always follow the instructions on the label'.

Recommendation 5 - Ensuring enforcement officers provide accurate and consistent food safety advice

29. As reported to the FSA Board meeting on 10 Feb 2009⁶ the Agency, through its Food Safety Group, works in partnership with key professional organisations such as the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH), Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services (LACORS), the Trading Standards Institute (TSI) and the Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland (REHIS) to achieve its aim of Safe Food and Healthy Eating for All. Aspects of this ongoing liaison include improving communications and changing behaviour.
30. Enforcement officers involved in food enforcement are required to meet stringent qualification, competency and ongoing training requirements. These requirements are contained within the Food Law Code of Practice (Scotland)⁷ (www.food.gov.uk/enforcement/enforcework/foodlawcop/copscotland), including the requirement for each officer to undertake on-going training with a minimum of 10 hours training per annum related to food. The Code is kept under review and a revised version is now going through the Ministerial approval process following public consultation which ended in January 2009.
31. FSA Scotland provides a range of training courses across Scotland every year in support of enforcement officers, with guidance from the Scottish Food Enforcement Liaison Committee (SFELC) to identify priorities. All courses relate to food law, particularly food safety aspects. Recent examples include: HACCP Auditing training, Food Standards Update Course (Glasgow), and our Low Cost Training Programme. Training funded by FSA Scotland supplements that provided by Local Authorities for their officers.
32. Additionally support and guidance is available to officers from a variety of sources including FSA Scotland's Local Authority Food Law Enforcement Branch of FSAS; our food.gov.uk and eatwell.gov.uk websites; various guidance documents; and SFELC.

⁶ FSA Board meeting FSA 09/02/04 Progress Report: Food Safety Group

⁷ Food Law Code of Practice (Scotland); Sept 2006

