

Agency publishes whistleblowing policy

The FSA has published its policy on handling disclosures made under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. This Act protects workers from detrimental treatment or victimisation from their employer if, in the public interest, they blow the whistle on wrongdoing.

Steve Wearne, Head of the Agency's Strategy and Regulation Division, said: 'The FSA takes the issue of whistleblowing very seriously and understands how challenging it can be for workers to speak out. The law is in place to protect not only the public interest but also the individual and we are wholly committed to working to safeguard both parties.'

Workers who are aware of wrongdoing within the food industry can contact the Agency confidentially in person, by telephone, in writing or by email.

For a disclosure to be protected by the Act's provisions, the worker must believe that at least one of the following has happened in the past, is happening now or is likely to happen in the future:

- a criminal offence
- breach of legal obligation
- miscarriage of justice
- danger to the health and safety of the individual
- damage to the environment
- deliberate concealment of information tending to show any of the above

Once information has been received, the FSA will communicate with the appropriate enforcement body, generally local authorities or the Meat Hygiene Service, and will urge them to investigate any qualifying disclosures.

Throughout the process, the



Workers will be protected if they blow the whistle on an employer's wrongdoing

FSA will make every effort to protect the identity of the whistleblower, and any information that might lead to their identity being guessed.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Read the Agency's policy at: food.gov.uk/foodindustry/whistleblowing

Public's understanding of marketing terms on labels varies

Although some of the marketing terms on food labels are easy to understand, others are not as readily understood by consumers, according to a study by the FSA. The survey, published in January, investigated consumer understanding of widely used marketing terms such as 'traditional' and 'home made'.

In July 2002, the Agency issued advice on the use of eight marketing terms currently used on food labels in the UK: fresh, pure, natural, traditional,

original, authentic/real, home made and farmhouse. This guidance described when and how these terms should be used to avoid misleading consumers.

The latest FSA study examines consumer understanding of five of the eight terms covered in the 2002 guidance (original, traditional, traditional style, home made, real) and eight additional terms (style, farmhouse pâté, handmade, premium, finest, best, quality, selected).

Of the 13 terms that were

investigated, consumers considered four were easy to understand in the context of food labelling: quality, finest, handmade and original.

However, the research revealed a much lower degree of common understanding of the words 'style' and 'selected'. It also found that many consumers demonstrated a degree of scepticism concerning the use of all marketing terms on food labels.

The Agency will be using the latest research to inform its

review of the 2002 guidance. Following consideration by the Agency, a new draft of the guidance will be subject to a full public consultation.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Read the report at: food.gov.uk/foodlabelling/researchandreports/labelresearch0106

For details, contact Dr John Dixon, tel: 020 7276 8060; email: john.dixon@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

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Jon Bell paid tribute to the FSA's staff

Agency Chief Executive to leave post

Dr Jon Bell, Chief Executive of the Food Standards Agency, will be leaving the Agency when his contract finishes at the end of March.

FSA Chair Deirdre Hutton said: 'Jon has made an enormous contribution to the setting up and development of the Agency over nearly six years. I am very grateful to him for that contribution, as I know are colleagues and many stakeholders.'

Dr Bell said that he felt 'extremely privileged to have been able to help establish the FSA and to have been asked to lead it through its second phase of development'. He also paid tribute to the support and dedication of the Agency's staff.

Cooking Bus

Over the next month, the FSA Cooking Bus will be stopping off at Cheshunt, Birmingham, Hereford and Sutton, where pupils and teachers at selected schools will be invited on board to take part in interactive cooking sessions in the bus's state-of-the-art mobile kitchen.

FURTHER INFORMATION

food.gov.uk/bus



The bus opens up to reveal its kitchen

A spoonful of Sugar...

The FSA has been working with teen magazine *Sugar*, examining the attitudes of teenage girls towards food, with the aim of advising them about eating a healthy diet.

Agency advice will be issued as part of an eight-page supplement in the March issue of *Sugar* and will be included in later issues of the magazine throughout the year. It will include practical and relevant tips on eating well and being healthy.

More than half the girls who responded to an online survey organised by *Sugar* and the FSA said they had been on a diet at least once, and one in 10 said they were 'always on a diet'.

Of those who had dieted at some time, 37% admitted to feeling depressed at the time of the survey, almost half felt stressed and nearly 40% were tired. In the group that had never dieted, these figures were almost halved.

A quarter of respondents said they tried to eat as little as possible and 15% admitted they would consider making themselves sick or using laxatives in a bid to lose weight.

The survey of *Sugar* readers also revealed that:

- half talked about losing weight or dieting at least once a week
- more than 40% regularly missed breakfast
- 'to look thin' was cited as one of the main motivators for teens changing their diets

Agency takes a new look at folate intakes

The FSA is considering how intakes of folate might be improved in the UK, particularly among women of childbearing age. This follows the publication in November 2005 of the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition's (SACN's) draft report on folate and health.

While SACN is finalising its report, the FSA will look at ways to increase folate intake, including the mandatory fortification of flour with folic acid (the synthetic form of folate). Issues being considered will include:

- an analysis of the risks and the benefits of the dose of folic acid that could be recommended for fortification



FSA suggests healthy meals and snacks to help *Sugar* readers feel their best

- nearly half said they consumed fizzy drinks on a daily basis,
 - one in ten admitted to eating fast food (burgers, chips, pizza) at least once a day
- FSA nutritionist, Sam Montel, said: 'Teenagers lead busy lives and it's vital they eat regular and balanced meals, including

breakfast. Taking small and easy steps such as swapping fizzy drinks for water, snacking on fruit or dried fruit instead of crisps, and eating lots of fruit and veg, will make a big difference.'

FURTHER INFORMATION

eatwell.gov.uk/teens

- a consideration of technical issues that millers and bakers might face, including the potential costs
- a consideration of consumer issues, including attitudes to mandatory fortification and provision of information that will facilitate informed choice

The draft SACN report endorses the current advice to women who may become pregnant to take 400 mcg a day of folic acid. This is because increasing folate intake during pregnancy reduces the risk of babies developing neural tube defects, such as spina bifida. The draft report also recommends mandatory fortification of flour with folic acid.

It also recommends addressing the poor vitamin B-12 status in older adults because of concern that high dietary intakes of folate may mask early clinical signs of vitamin B-12 deficiency, which potentially leads to an irreversible neurological condition.

SACN's final report is expected to be submitted to Government by April 2006. The Agency plans to consult fully on options this summer, which will inform advice to Ministers in the autumn.

FURTHER INFORMATION

food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2005/nov/folatedraftreport

Calendar inspires healthy eating among over 60s

The Food Standards Agency Northern Ireland (FSANI) recently launched the 2006 Eat Well calendar, which has been produced to provide advice on healthy eating for the over 60s.

So far, 35,000 of the Eat Well calendars have been distributed from a range of local centres, including surgeries, post offices and libraries.

Speaking at the event launch in Belfast, FSANI's Head of Consumer Choice and Dietary Health Maria Jennings said: 'We decided to produce a calendar as it provides an excellent way of communicating healthy eating messages to older people.'

'Each month provides tips for

healthy eating together with a tasty, nutritious recipe to try and makes a nice addition to any kitchen wall.

'The importance of healthy eating for the over 60s cannot be stressed enough. Research shows that a healthy diet plays an important role in the health of older people. It can reduce the risk of coronary heart disease and certain cancers, aid recovery from illness, lead to a better quality of life and help maintain independence.

'During the winter months, older people may be at their most vulnerable to illness and eating well is particularly important.'



At the calendar launch, left to right: Maria Jennings from FSANI, Age Concern Day Centre client Sylvia Watson and Age Concern NI Chief Executive Anne O'Reilly



Andrea Davidson (above) of Cookstown High School, Cookstown, County Tyrone, has

Cookstown A-level student scoops up food-safety award

been presented with the FSA Northern Ireland Michael Cole Award, for having achieved Northern Ireland's highest grade in the Food Preservation Production and Safety module in A-level Home Economics.

The presentation was made at the school by Patricia McCusker from the Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee.

In addition to being presented with her award, Andrea, who has since left the school, received an iPod mini and a prize of home economics equipment for the school.

Patricia McCusker said: 'We were delighted to present Andrea with the 2005 Award, and I am pleased to see food hygiene and safety forming an important part of the A-level course.'

The Michael Cole Award was established as a permanent tribute to Michael Cole, who was an Environmental Health Officer with the Food Standards Agency. Michael Cole came to the Agency with an impressive record in local government environmental health work and died unexpectedly after a brief illness.

Agency celebrates e-learning degree

A ceremony has been held to mark the second graduation from the European Regulatory Affairs M.Sc. course at Trinity College, Dublin – an e-learning degree created by the Irish Universities Alliance to establish an all-Ireland centre of excellence in nutrition.

Daniela Muchna and Lynda Noddings jointly received the highest overall mark in the M.Sc. and were awarded the Irish Universities Nutrition Alliance prize, which is sponsored by the Food Standards Agency Northern Ireland (FSANI) and Food Safety Authority of Ireland.

The prize was presented by Maureen Edmondson, Chair of the FSANI Food Advisory Committee. She said: 'I am delighted to present this prize to such deserving recipients.'

'Nutrition is really coming to the fore as an academic discipline throughout the island of Ireland and this M.Sc. is really helping to increase the growth of interest and knowledge in this area, helping to make the island of Ireland a centre of excellence in the field of nutrition.'

Joint seminar held on animal feed legislation

FSA Northern Ireland (FSANI) and the Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) hosted a joint seminar in Belfast in December to publicise new animal feed legislation that came into force at the start of 2006.

The new requirements, which affect animal feed businesses, include the need to be registered or approved by DARD and have systems in place to enable the full traceability of products.

The seminar was opened by DARD Permanent Secretary Pat Toal and FSANI Head of Primary Production Dr Kirsten Dunbar.

Pat Toal said the aim of the new legislation was to further reduce the risk of food-related scares. The new legislation provisions are 'major changes that will affect all those who grow, manufacture or use animal feed materials'.

Kirsten Dunbar said that the

regulations had been introduced 'to ensure that feed provided for animals is safe and that, in the event of a feed safety incident, its source can be traced promptly, so protecting both animal and public health. This event has provided an excellent opportunity to raise awareness of the regulations.'

A number of other speakers from the FSA, DARD and the Veterinary Medicines Directorate also contributed.

FSA publishes new guide on food hygiene

The Agency has produced a booklet, *Food hygiene – a guide for businesses* for restaurants, cafés and other catering businesses, as well as shops selling food. It replaces two previously published titles: *Food safety regulations* and *Guide to food hygiene*.



It explains the key requirements of the new food hygiene regulations,

which have been in force since 1 January 2006, including food safety management procedures based on the principles of HACCP (hazard analysis critical control point).

This booklet will be available in a number of languages later in the year. If you are ordering FSA publications, or recommending them to businesses, please quote the exact title.

FURTHER INFORMATION

To order a copy of this booklet, call 0845 606 0667 or email: foodstandards@ecgroup.uk.com

For more information on the regulations see: food.gov.uk/foodindustry/hygiene

New food safety management diary for meat producers

The Agency has produced a *2006 Food Safety Management Diary for Meat Producers*, which operators can use to record food safety management activities and other information.

It has been designed to help smaller meat plant operators, such as slaughterhouses, cutting plants, game handling and other meat handling establishments. Use of the diary is voluntary.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The diary can be downloaded from: food.gov.uk/foodindustry/meat/haccpmeatplants

Alternatively, you can order a hard copy of the diary by calling: 020 7276 8384

Stakeholders across the UK help to develop '4 Cs' food hygiene strategy

The Agency held a series of seven workshops around the UK during November and December 2005, focusing on food hygiene. The workshops were organised to seek stakeholders' views on the development of a new strategy to promote the '4 Cs' in the home, in schools and through local initiatives.

The 4 Cs are the main things to remember when practising good food hygiene – cleaning, cooking, chilling, cross-contamination – and are already used successfully in publications for caterers, including the new food safety management pack *Safer food, better business*. Development of the strategy forms one of the targets in the Agency's Strategic Plan 2005–2010.

The events were held at locations around the UK (Taunton, Manchester, Leicester, Cardiff, Newcastle, Belfast and Edinburgh) and attracted more than 350 stakeholders from a wide range of backgrounds including local authorities, public



Stakeholders share experiences, identify best practice and generate new ideas in informal discussion groups at the Agency's 4 Cs event in Edinburgh



James Brandon, Head of Marketing at the Food Standards Agency, outlines elements of the Agency's Food Hygiene Campaign at the 4 Cs meeting in Newcastle

health, education, consumer and community organisations.

Each workshop included morning presentations by Agency staff from London and the devolved administrations on UK-wide Food Hygiene Campaign activities to date.

Initiatives highlighted included a 30-second cinema advertisement, Christmas card and poster competitions, a travelling educational trailer/display platform, attendance at food and agricultural shows and events, and use of life-size replica farmyard animals as part of an interactive display to promote handwashing.

Invited speakers from each region then illustrated some local initiatives and their key achievements. Examples

included a board game for schools ('The Food Poisoning Whodunit!'), cooking experience courses, major events with other safety services, formal food hygiene training and qualifications, schemes to promote handwashing, food hygiene plays and pantomimes and information booklets for young people.

In the afternoon sessions, facilitated informal discussions took place. These sessions provided stakeholders with the opportunity to discuss their own ideas and experiences and identify best practice. Discussion groups were lively and generated valuable feedback, which is now being used to shape the Agency's new 4 Cs strategy for the next five years.

FSA hosts two European events in London

On 24 and 25 November 2005, the Agency hosted the meetings of the Heads of Agencies and the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) Advisory Forum at Aviation House.

A total of 57 participants from 22 Member States

attended and discussed, among other things, collaboration at European Union level. As a result, the Agency is hoping to see increased contact between Member States on issues such as health claims and food crisis management.



Participants came from 22 countries



Deirdre Hutton (right) and Jon Bell

The Agency held an Open Board Meeting in York on Thursday 8 December 2005. It was attended by stakeholders and members of the public and viewed on a live webcast by more than 300 people.

The Agency's Chair Deirdre Hutton updated the Board on developments with regard to Ofcom (Office of Communications) and the Agency's nutrient profiling model, meetings on nutrition held with some representatives of the food industry, visits to FSA Wales and Scotland, a visit to the Human Nutrition Research Foundation in Cambridge, round-table discussions with a range of non-governmental organisations, and the retirement of Board Members Ann Hemingway and Michael Gibson.

FSA Chief Executive Jon Bell updated the Board on developments in relation to an investigation into Euro Freeze (Ireland) Ltd (a full report is available via the link below), avian flu, the E. coli outbreak in Wales, and meetings held on behalf of the Agency.

Chair of the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) Board Chrissie Dunn reported on the work of the MHS Board between July 2005 and November 2005.

Honours for FSA Board Members

FSA Board Members and former Board Members have been honoured in the new year honours list.

Michael Gibson, who retired from the Board at its December meeting after five years in post, three as Chair of the Scottish Food Advisory Committee (SFAC), was awarded a CBE (Commander of the British Empire) for services to food safety in Scotland.

Graeme Millar, who has been on the FSA Board for a year and has just been appointed Chair of the SFAC, was awarded a CBE for services to

December Board update

Board paper: Consumer engagement

This paper summarised the conclusions of discussions on the future of the Consumer Committee and proposed a way forward.

The Board:

- agreed that the current Consumer Committee should be discontinued
- commented on the proposed conceptual model for consumer engagement and decided that this should be further developed to ensure that the FSA was able to get a sense of what the 'consumer pulse' is and establish the social values at any particular time
- commented on the ideas for developing different aspects of consumer engagement
- agreed that a changed vision and culture of consumer involvement should be linked back to the Agency's strategic plan
- agreed that the Executive should develop these approaches further and report back to the Board by June 2006

Board paper: Progress reports on Food Incidents Task Force

Following the incident involving chilli powder adulterated with Sudan I earlier in 2005, the Agency established a task force to look at ways of strengthening controls in the food chain to reduce the likelihood of such incidents occurring and to manage them better if they do.

The task force had met five times, and this paper summarised the issues covered, progress made and future plans for the task force and its working groups.

The Board:

- noted and commented on these developments

Board paper: progress report on chemical contaminants in food

This paper provided an update on developments in the area of chemical contaminants since the Board considered this area in 2004. It reported the outcome of the review of the contaminant research programmes, provided details of the Committee on Toxicity's advice on the cocktail effect and described developments on horizon scanning activities in respect of chemical contaminants.

The Board:

- noted and
- commented on these developments

Board report: Prior approval – update on the action plan

In response to the Board's request at its October meeting, this paper provided an initial progress report on research designed to assess the benefits of a 'prior approval' scheme to enhance the existing registration requirements for new food businesses.

The Board:

- noted the emerging position on prior approval; and that it

will review the way forward when the next phase of the research has been completed and fully assessed

Board paper: BSE Controls – changing the Over Thirty Months (OTM) Rule – further progress report

This paper provided the Board with a further progress report on the steps being taken to change the over thirty months (OTM) rule and introduce BSE testing.

The Board:

- noted these developments

FURTHER INFORMATION

A fuller summary of the Board Meeting is at: food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2005/dec/boarddec05
Jon Bell's statement on the Euro Freeze (Ireland) Ltd investigation is at: food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2005/dec/coldstorebupdate

FSA Board holds open meeting

The Agency's Board was due to meet in public in London on 9 February 2006, at The Congress Centre, 28 Great Russell Street, London, WC1B 3LS.

The meeting, due to take place as *FSA News* went to press, was due to discuss items including: local authority performance, an action plan for the UK-wide review of audit arrangements for local authorities, the Agency's science strategy, and scientific governance.

The meeting can be watched on a live webcast on the Agency's website, or viewed later. A summary of the meeting and the decisions made by the Board will also be available on the site.

FURTHER INFORMATION

To view the webcast go to food.gov.uk To register for future Board meetings email: fsaboardmeetings@glasgows.co.uk
tel: 01772 767730;
fax: 01772 767555.



Former Board Member Michael Gibson

consumers in Scotland.

Former FSA Board Member Suzi Leather, who was the founding Deputy Chair of the FSA and is now Chair of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, was



New SFAC Chair Graeme Millar

made a Dame of the British Empire for services to the Regulation of Infertility Treatment and Embryo Research. Former Board Member Robert Rees was awarded an MBE (Member of the British Empire).

COT holds one-day workshop on male reproductive system

The Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COT) is holding a one-day workshop in York on Wednesday 15 February 2006, on 'The development and function in adulthood of the male reproductive system: potential chemical-induced effects'.

Internationally distinguished speakers will present the latest hypotheses with experimental and epidemiological data on potential chemical-induced effects on the development and subsequent function of the male reproductive system.

FURTHER INFORMATION

food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2005/dec/workrepro

Research seminar on food authenticity

The Agency is hosting a seminar in London on 23 February 2006 to disseminate the results of various food authenticity research projects to key stakeholders, in particular public analysts.

The Agency's Food Authenticity Programme has funded a series of projects that aim to authenticate meat and fish products. Issues to be discussed include:

- detection of blood proteins in meat products
- origin verification of meat
- quantitation of meat and fish

FURTHER INFORMATION

food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2006/jan/authenticityseminar

All-clear for allotment veg

A Food Standards Agency survey of a selection of metals and arsenic in fruit and vegetables grown in allotments has found that they present no risk to consumers' health.

A total of 251 samples of

allotment-grown fruit and vegetables and 52 samples of allotment soil were taken from urban areas, areas near industrial sites and rural areas of England, Scotland and Wales. All were analysed for arsenic,

cadmium, chromium, copper, lead, manganese, mercury, nickel, platinum, tin, titanium and zinc.

Metals and other elements, such as arsenic, are present in food either naturally, or, for example, as a result of agricultural practices, industrial emissions and from car exhausts, from contamination during manufacturing or processing and storage, or through being added during processing.

Fruit and vegetables surveyed included 36 soft fruits, 37 legumes, 37 leafy greens, 32 brassicas, 72 potatoes and 37 onions. The survey found that produce grown on urban allotments has slightly elevated levels of titanium, copper, zinc, cadmium and lead, but the levels found for all allotment produce are low and are not a concern for consumer health.

The Agency advises people to wash fruit and vegetables before eating them.

FURTHER INFORMATION

food.gov.uk/science/surveillance/fsisbranch2006/fsis0106



Allotment-grown fruit and vegetables present no risk to consumers' health

Provisional commercial designation of 'otter shell clam' granted for shellfish species

A provisional commercial designation of 'otter shell clam' has been granted for the species *Lutraria lutraria*. This may be used until further notice, or until the date of the Regulation containing an amended designations list coming into force, whichever is earlier. The definitive designation published

in the amended list will not necessarily be the same as the provisional designation.

European Commission regulations require that certain fish/shellfish and fish products are labelled with the commercial designation of the species. Newly commercialised species, for which an agreed designation

does not exist, may be marketed under a provisional commercial designation granted by the Agency.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For details contact Pendi Najran, tel: 020 7276 8157; email: pendi.najran@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

Survey on metals in food supplements published

A survey of metals in food supplements was published by the FSA in December. Out of the 200 supplements surveyed, levels of most metals tested for were within safety guidelines. But eight products were found to contain amounts of iron, manganese or zinc above levels recommended by experts. Excessive doses of these could be harmful to some people.

Metals can be included deliberately as nutrients in food

supplements, but others such as arsenic and cadmium can be present as a result of environmental pollution.

The food supplements were purchased from a variety of supermarkets, pharmacies and health stores across the UK, as well as from mail order and Internet companies, including those overseas. The survey measured levels of aluminium, arsenic, cadmium, chromium, copper, iron, lead, manganese,

mercury, nickel, selenium, thallium and zinc.

There is currently no legislation in place controlling the maximum levels of nutrients in food supplements although the Food Supplements Directive will allow for maximum levels to be set in the future.

The Agency has met with industry to agree a series of advisory statements for high-dose products. These statements will protect

consumers by alerting them to the potential for harmful effects and help them make informed choices.

The Agency will be conducting a survey this year to establish how much advisory statements



New Contaminants in Food Regulations come into force, implementing European Directives

The Contaminants in Food (England) Regulations 2005 apply in England from 1 January 2005. The new Statutory Instrument (3251/2005) brings into force the following EC Regulations in England. These amend Commission Regulation 466/2001 and implement the allied sampling and analysis Directives:

- Commission Regulation (EC) No 78/2005, which amends the lists of fish species and sets revised limits for lead in tuna and cadmium in swordfish
- Commission Regulation (EC) No 208/2005, which sets maximum limits for Benzo(a)pyrene (BaP) in certain foodstuffs and is supported by Commission Directive 2005/10/EC, which lays down the sampling and analysis methods for the official control of the levels of BaP in foodstuffs
- Commission Regulation (EC) No 123/2005, which sets maximum limits for ochratoxin A in wine, coffee

and grape juices and is supported by Commission Directive 2005/5/EC, which lays down the sampling and analysis methods for the official control of levels of ochratoxin A in these foods

- Commission Regulation (EC) No 1822/2005, which amends the time periods during summer and winter to which maximum limits apply for nitrate in fresh spinach and extends the derogation period for certain Member States including the UK, whereby fresh spinach and fresh lettuce are exempt from the limits when produced and placed on the market in the country to which the derogation applies
 - Commission Directive 2005/4/EC, which amends Commission Directive 2001/22/EC laying down the sampling and analysis methods for the official control of lead, cadmium, mercury and 3-MCPD in foodstuffs
- The Regulations continue to

make provision for the enforcement of Regulation 466/2001, as amended, and implement the allied Directives on sampling and analysis.

The Regulations have been modified to make allowance for provisions included in the Official Feed and Food Control (England) Regulations 2005, including the inspection, procurement and analysis of food samples, defence in relation to exports and the re-export or destruction of food, specifically in relation to samples not already in free circulation.

Parallel legislation will apply in the other countries of the UK.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Read the regulations at: www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si200532.htm
Any queries regarding the regulations should be directed to Jonathan Briggs, tel: 020 7276 8716; email: jonathan.briggs@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

Updated report describes latest advances made in Salmonella research

There have been significant advances achieved through research into Salmonella, according to an updated report produced by the Microbiological Safety of Food Funders Group (MSFFG) in December 2005.

The report, on publicly funded research related to Salmonella, is one of a series providing an overview of publicly funded research relating to the microbiological safety of food.

The report updates the previous report published in April 2002 and covers research funded by the members of the MSFFG over the period 1999 to December 2004.

During recent years, there has been a major research effort in the UK, and internationally, relating to foodborne Salmonella and food poisoning, which is reflected in this report.

This research has led to an increased understanding of the causes and control of Salmonella infections in humans, which in turn has been applied to the food industry and consumer practice. The overall effect has been a decrease in the number of

cases of Salmonella food poisoning in humans in the last few years.

Salmonella is the second most commonly laboratory-confirmed cause of foodborne infections in the UK, after Campylobacter.

The majority of cases are sporadic incidents, but there are outbreaks affecting numbers of people. In particular, these tend to be associated with the consumption of raw or inadequately cooked food, or cooked food cross-contaminated from raw food.

The MSFFG is a cross-representational body involving bodies that fund microbiological research in the area of food safety.

Membership includes representatives from the FSA, FSA Scotland, Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs, Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, Department of Health, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development for Northern Ireland, Food Safety Promotion Board of Ireland,



Research has increased understanding

Health Protection Agency, Meat and Livestock Commission, Medical Research Council, the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department and the Scottish Executive Department of Health.

In the future, similar reports will be prepared on other foodborne pathogens including Clostridia, Bacillus and Brucella.

FURTHER INFORMATION

You can read the updated Salmonella report at: food.gov.uk/science/research/researchinfo/foodborneillness/microfunders/msffg/306761

MHS Manual goes online on FSA site

The Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) Manual for Official Controls is now available on the FSA website. It provides details of the tasks, responsibilities and duties MHS staff and veterinary contractors undertake in licensed establishments.

The manual covers issues such as inspection, verification and audit, sampling procedures, and monitoring and surveillance.

The MHS is an Executive Agency of the Food Standards Agency.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Download the manual at: food.gov.uk/enforcement/meathyg/mhservice/mhsmanual2006/

Survey on PAH levels in supplements

Levels of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) in food supplements are of low concern to consumer health, according to a survey published by the Agency in December 2005.

PAHs are a group of chemicals present in the environment as a result of burning fuel and other pollution. Experts recommend that exposure to PAHs from food should be kept as low as possible.

In the survey, 210 supplements were bought from a variety of supermarkets, pharmacies and health stores across the UK, as well as from mail order and Internet companies, including those overseas.

The highest levels of PAHs were found in plant-derived products, such as ginseng, but were found less often in multivitamin or single-vitamin products. Low levels were generally found in fish oils and plant oils.

Companies whose products contained the highest levels of PAHs were advised to investigate ways to reduce them.

FURTHER INFORMATION

food.gov.uk/science/surveillance/fsisbranch2005/fsis8605

Agency seeks comments on response to ACAF Review

The Food Standards Agency is seeking comments on its draft response to the Advisory Committee on Animal Feedings (ACAF) Review of Feed Law Enforcement, which was published in June 2005. Responses are requested by 21 April 2006.

ACAF was set up in June 1999 to advise the Agency and other Government departments on the safety and use of animal feeds and feeding practices.

The Agency's draft response to the ACAF review, which the Agency has issued in the form of an action plan, is available on the Agency website (see below). Ongoing and proposed action is listed alongside each of the Committee's recommendations.

Background

The regulatory regime for animal feed is harmonised throughout the European Union. European Commission legislation concerns the integrity of the feed chain and is primarily intended to safeguard animal and human health. Much of it covers feed hygiene, labelling and marketing, as well as aspects of feed composition, such as the

additives authorised for use in feed, the maximum permitted levels of certain contaminants, and the nutritional claims that may be made for certain types of feedings.

No review has previously covered the whole system of feed law controls in the UK

In December 2002, ACAF considered that the effectiveness of feed law enforcement in the UK was an important area that should be reviewed. At its 19th meeting on 15 April 2003, the committee embarked on a review of feed law enforcement with presentations by organisations responsible for ensuring compliance with feed law or feed quality standards.

The Agency has welcomed ACAF's wide-ranging review of feed law enforcement and notes that no review has previously covered the whole system of feed law controls in the UK.

In one of its recommendations, the committee says that further co-ordination of feed law activities is required and considers that the Food Standards Agency is well placed to take on this role.

The Agency agrees that there is a need for further co-ordination of feed law activities and that it is well placed to take on this role. Implementing rules of the EC Official Feed and Food Controls Regulation on multi-annual control plans also envisages co-ordination of activities between enforcement authorities. It is therefore proposed that the Agency will widen the remit and membership of the existing Feed Law Enforcement Liaison Group to meet this recommendation.

The Committee's report contains 13 recommendations in all.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The ACAF Review of Food Law Enforcement is at:

food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/acaffeedlaw.pdf

The Agency's response is at: food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/acafactionplan.pdf

ACMSF consults on report on botulism in cattle

The Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food (ACMSF) is seeking views on its draft report on botulism in cattle.

There has been a marked increase in the reported incidence of suspected cattle botulism in England and Wales and Ireland since 2003.

There is also some evidence to suggest that access to litter from deep-litter broiler houses containing carcasses of dead birds is a factor in the occurrence of the disease in a proportion of recent outbreaks.

In particular, this has been observed where poultry litter has been spread onto the land or adjacent fields, on which cattle have grazed, or where animals have gained access to a stack of stored litter.

Therefore the ACMSF has considered information and

heard evidence to establish the potential human health risk through the food chain as a result of botulism or suspected botulism in cattle, particularly in relation to the spreading of poultry litter on agricultural land.

The report reviews the molecular biology and structure of *C. botulinum* toxins and toxin types. The epidemiology and diagnosis of botulism, including the occurrence of botulism and clinical signs of the disease in cattle, are also examined.

Definitions, types and sources of poultry waste, including poultry litter and manure, are reviewed in the report. Sources of risk associated with botulism in cattle are evaluated. Risk assessment work conducted in France is also considered.

Scientific evidence to establish toxin availability in meat and

milk and the occurrence of human cases associated with meat and milk consumption are also reviewed.

The report also summarises measures to prevent outbreaks of botulism in animals, and management of outbreaks in the UK, including the availability of guidance to farmers.

The ACMSF will review its draft report in the light of any comments received, before publishing the final version of the report.

Responses to the consultation should be submitted no later than 18 April 2006.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Find more details at: food.gov.uk/foodindustry/Consultations/ukwideconsults/acmsfcattle

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