

FOOD SAFETY, CHOICE AND NUTRITION ISSUES OF ETHNIC MINORITY COMMUNITIES

Executive Summary

The Board is asked to **note** existing information on the food safety, choice and nutrition issues of ethnic minority communities and the work currently under way in the Agency relevant to these issues.

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FOOD SAFETY, CHOICE AND NUTRITION ISSUES OF ETHNIC MINORITY COMMUNITIES

ISSUE

1. This paper reviews existing information on the food safety, choice and nutrition issues of ethnic minority communities and the Agency's current work to ensure that these issues are taken into account when developing Agency policies.

BACKGROUND

2. The food safety, choice and nutrition issues of ethnic minority communities may differ from the wider population due to different diets, food preparation and shopping habits, which may be influenced by different cultures and/or religious beliefs.

3. The 1991 UK census recorded that 5.5% of the UK population are of Non White Ethnic origin. The majority of which are south Asian (2.7%), with a significant number of people of Afro-Caribbean (0.9%), and Chinese (1.2%) descent. Ethnic diets for these populations may differ from those of the average UK diet in terms of the proportion of major food groups eaten and the consumption of imported specialist foods.

4. The Health Development Agency has pointed to the need for more work on **inequalities in health**, in ethnic minority communities. The major concerns are high salt intakes, lactose intolerance, vitamin D deficiency diseases, iron deficiency in Asian women and higher incidence of diabetes, coronary heart disease and hyper-tension amongst the Afro-Caribbean and Asian communities.

5. The Social Exclusion Unit's Policy Action Team 18 (Better Information) showed that much of the information the Government collects does not record

whether people are from ethnic minority backgrounds or not. Where such information is collected, a distinction between different ethnic minority groups is not always made, making it difficult to diagnose problems, target actions or monitor impact. This can also apply to information collected by the FSA. In relation to Foodborne Diseases and Contaminants, for example, there is insufficient data to enable analysis according to different ethnic groups and consideration is being given to working up new procedures for future surveys.

Analysis of existing information

6. The most comprehensive report on food safety and nutrition issues for ethnic minority communities is *'More than Brown Rice and Peas: guidelines to improve food provision for black and ethnic minorities in Britain'*, published by the Food Commission in 1990. Other important texts include: *Food and Diet in a Multiracial Society* – a photographic resource produced by the National Extension College for Training in Health and Race which aims to challenge negative and racist stereotypes about the foods and diets of Britain's ethnic populations; *Effectiveness of interventions to promote healthy eating in people from minority ethnic groups*, HEA 1998; *Needs Assessment Research to Investigate the Current and Future Food & Nutrition Information and Resource Needs for Black and Ethnic Minority Groups*, April 2000, prepared for the HEA by Research Works; and *Black and Minority Ethnic Groups in England: the second health and lifestyle survey*, HEA 2000. There are a number of other relatively small surveys looking at the diets of specific groups.

7. Other surveys to date looking at the dietary habits of specific groups include:

- Study sponsored by Aga Khan Foundation together with DH and MAFF looking at the diets of Bangladeshi Muslims, Pakistani Muslims, Ismaili Muslims, Punjabi Sikhs, and Gujerati Hindus. The project also generated a book on the composition and nutrient content of foods commonly consumed by South Asians in the UK.
- MAFF has commissioned the following specific research/ dietary surveys which are connected with ethnic diets: Vegetarian survey 1996 (of the 415 participants approx. 8% were of non white ethnic origin – it would not be possible to analyse ethnic minority consumption or intake from this survey but the diary

and food composition methods might prove useful). Dietary Survey of African-Caribbean People (200 participants).

- London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine Action Research Project looking at nutritional vulnerability of young refugee and asylum-seeking children in London in order to identify those at risk.

Preliminary review of work on ethnic minorities in the Agency

8. A disproportionately high number of people from ethnic minority communities are on a low income. Over half live in 29 local authority areas all of which are among the 44 most deprived areas. The needs of these groups are therefore being taken account of in the development of the Agency's work **to improve the diets of disadvantaged groups.**

9. The **Consumer Affairs Analyst** is working with the **Consumer Unit**, to consider how the Agency can involve hard to reach and potentially vulnerable groups, including people from ethnic minority communities, in consultations and to ensure that their views are reflected in Agency policies.

10. The joint **FSA/DH National Diet and Nutrition Surveys** provide detailed quantitative information on food consumption, nutrient intakes and nutritional status in nationally representative samples of the population. This information forms the basis of food chemical risk assessment and informs nutrition policy in the FSA. However, the design and sample size of these surveys means that they cannot provide detailed information on any sub-group of the population. For example, the NDNS of young people aged 4-18 years included 158 subjects from ethnic minorities (9% of the sample). The Low Income Diet and Nutrition Survey, currently at the planning stage, will provide further information on the diets of different ethnic minority groups. However, it is likely that numbers will still be too small to allow meaningful analysis of individual groups.

11. The Agency **Nutrition Strategy** is considering these groups. The **Nutrition Division** is currently funding a research project at the University of Leeds to review the most common food preparation methods and serving practices within UK ethnic minority groups and identify common practices, which are not compatible with standard dietary survey methods. Priorities for future

development of dietary survey methods to take account of food preparation and serving practices in ethnic minority groups will be critically assessed.

12. The **Contaminants Division's** 1994 survey of 'Ethnic Foods' for Mycotoxins investigated the occurrence of mycotoxins in diets of consumers of Indian and Chinese origin. Current work, due to be reported on in February, shows high levels of consumption of Soy Sauce and hence exposure to 3-MPCD (3-Monochloropropane-1, 2-diol) may be higher in those consuming a Chinese diet.

13. Food labelling and choice policies need, as far as possible, to take account of the aspirations of all population groups, including ethnic minorities. The Agency's **Food Labelling Action Plan** is strongly based on consumer research carried out in a representative sample of shoppers boosted to ensure that the views of people of Black Caribbean, Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin could be analysed separately. The results showed that these groups on the whole share the same concerns as other population groups, except that Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups, and particularly Sikhs and Muslims, are significantly more interested than the general population in ingredient lists. The importance to those following strict religious or other dietary regimes of comprehensive accurate ingredient lists which clearly differentiate animal and vegetable sources was emphasised both in the public consultation and open meeting held before the Action Plan was published and in the recent Food Labelling Forum.

14. The **Food Authenticity** surveillance programme, whose overall remit is to check the accuracy of the description of foods, underpins the labelling and compositional policy of the Agency. It has looked at issues which, directly or indirectly, affect ethnic minorities, in permitting them to receive full and accurate information on the products they purchase. This included examining whether it was possible to check the accuracy of claims that red meat was 'halal' or 'kosher' by measuring residual blood levels; determining meat species in meat products, for example to ascertain if a product contains pork; and checking for the adulteration of Basmati Rice, of which 80% of the retail market in the UK goes to Asians.

15. A representative of **Meat Hygiene Division** attends the **Muslim Working Group**, which is chaired by MAFF's Animal Welfare Division, and which meets regularly to discuss all food related issues in relation to the Muslim community.

This groups feels that food standards in halal retail trade are not sufficiently high and that this needs to be addressed through local authority enforcement policy.

16. Whilst there is no equivalent **Jewish** group, there is a regular on-going dialogue between the Meat Hygiene Division and the Jewish Community in relation to meat hygiene and labelling concerns relating to 'kosher' products.

17. The contribution of ethnic food business to **foodborne diseases** has been highlighted by a number of recent outbreaks. These include outbreaks of an unusual type of *Salmonella* in Scotland, associated with Chinese restaurants and an outbreak associated with a Halal slaughterhouse, where animals were kept on contaminated lairage prior to slaughter. This has implications for **Local Authority Enforcement Policy** and HACCP implementation.

18. The annual **Consumer Attitudes Survey** undertaken by the **Communications Division** classifies respondents in relation to ethnic minority status. It might be possible to analyse the data in terms of the different ethnic minorities to assess whether there are any significant trends.

BOARD ACTION REQUIRED

19. The Board is invited to take note of the information presented in this paper.