

Testing Chinese milk products



Milk products being taken off supermarket shelves in China

New checks on food containing milk or milk products imported from China are now in operation across the European Union and the Food Standards Agency has written to all port health authorities and local authorities in the country alerting them to the change.

The import of infant formula containing milk or milk products from China is already prohibited.

The Agency is also issuing regular updates online about any products found to be affected.

The new tests apply to all Chinese food products containing more than 15% milk, milk products or products where the percentage of milk content cannot be established.

Such products are subject to documentary, identity and physical checks, including laboratory analysis, to make

sure that any level of melamine present in the product does not exceed 2.5mg/kg. Any products that do exceed this limit are being destroyed.

The strict new controls issued by the European Commission follow reports of at least three infant deaths and several thousand cases of kidney stones in babies in China linked to infant formula contaminated with melamine.

As news of the extent of the contaminated milk broke, the Agency's Chief Scientist Andrew Wadge appeared on BBC 4's *Today programme* and BBC Scotland to talk about food industry regulations.

He said: 'The scale of the problem in China caused by adulteration of baby milk with melamine is appalling. I struggle to comprehend how people can knowingly put the lives of so

many babies at risk by adding this substance to milk.'

He said it would be naïve to assume that criminals will not attempt to target the food industry here. However the regulation of food safety in the UK is of a high standard. 'The incident clearly highlights, once again, the importance of food businesses here checking the provenance of their supplies from around the world,' he added.

To date certain batches of melamine-contaminated White Rabbit Creamy Candies and Koala brand biscuits on sale in the UK have been withdrawn and destroyed.

Melamine

Melamine is an industrial chemical widely used in plastics, which should not be present in food. However, at the levels found in the sweets, independent experts advise that the risk to health is likely to be very low. People who have bought the affected sweets do not need to take any action. But anyone who is concerned should email the Agency at melamine.enquiries@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk or ring the Agency helpline on 020 7276 8829.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more on the withdrawal of White Rabbit Creamy Candies and Koala brand biscuits go to: food.gov.uk/enforcement/alerts/2008/oct/whiterabbitsweets and food.gov.uk/enforcement/alerts/2008/oct/koala

For a Chinese translation of Agency information go to: food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2008/sep/melaminemilk

Examining nutrition food labels

A large independent study evaluating the three main types of front-of-pack (FoP) nutrition food labels used in the UK has started the next phase of its research.

The study has already explored, and recently reported on, how people use FoP labels, and work is now underway testing how well consumers understand each of the different label types.

This next phase will identify which elements of the labels are most effective in helping people make healthier choices.

Ultimately, the aim is that the final research report will provide robust evidence to inform future UK Government policy on FoP nutrition food labelling.

Three schemes

At present the three main FoP food labels used are:

- monochrome schemes that provide information on the percentage of Guideline Daily Amount (GDA) in a recommended portion of food
- the traffic light colour coded scheme which indicate nutrient levels per 100g and in a portion of food
- hybrid schemes, which provide both a traffic light colour code per 100g and the percentage (GDA) in a portion of food

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panel managing the study, last month published its initial series of papers that were welcomed by the Agency.

The papers describe the scientific basis for the quantitative phase of the research, which tested people's understanding of food labels using 3,000 UK shoppers. They also gave the initial insights from the qualitative work already undertaken to understand how consumers use the labels.

Findings

From the research so far it is clear that consumers want, and welcome, front-of-pack food labels that tell them about the nutritional content of food, and which they use to help them decide what foods to buy.

The research has already been discussed at an initial meeting with stakeholders and other interested parties, held on 13 October, to consider how it might be translated into policy recommendations to ministers.

This discussion and the final research report, which will be published next year following peer-review, will inform a formal public consultation on front-of-pack labelling policy to be held in spring 2009.

FURTHER INFORMATION

To read the report on the development of the quantitative phase of the study, go to: food.gov.uk/foodlabelling/signposting/signpostevaluation/pmpanel/evaluation/quant/

3 Main Front of Pack Signposting Approaches



% Guideline Daily Amount



Traffic Lights



Hybrid

Listeria bug rarely a danger in smoked fish



A new survey of ready-to-eat smoked fish has shown that listeria is rarely found to be above the legal limits.

The survey, published by the Agency, ran between July and November 2006. It examined more than 3,000 samples of smoked fish from over 1,000 supermarkets, fishmongers and grocers across the UK.

Listeria monocytogenes, the main type of listeria that causes people to get ill, was found in just 302 of the samples and 99% of these were found to be within the legal limit for ready-to-eat foods. Only three samples in the whole survey were found to be above the legal limit.

Since 2000, the reported number of illnesses from listeria in the UK has doubled,

particularly in people over 60 years old.

In 2005 there were an estimated 400 cases which saw 130 die and 380 people hospitalised, making listeria the biggest cause of death from food poisoning.

Dr Andrew Wadge, the Agency's Chief Scientist, said: 'Although this is only a snapshot of one type of food, this survey adds another piece to the listeria puzzle.

'We know cases are on the increase in the over-60s, but we don't know why. These findings suggest that, listeria isn't generally a problem in ready-to-eat smoked fish at the point of sale – but it doesn't tell us what happens when people get it home.

'Are they preparing and storing food correctly and eating it within its 'use by' date?

'These and other questions are at the heart of further work we're doing with our expert scientific committees to get to the bottom of this increase in listeria.'

The listeria bug is found naturally in the environment and can be present in a wide range of foods such as smoked fish, pates, soft ripened cheeses and cooked sliced meats.

These and other questions are at the heart of further work we're doing with our expert scientific committees

To help minimise the risk of listeria food poisoning, the Agency has published guidance for those preparing and supplying chilled ready-to-eat foods.

FURTHER INFORMATION

To find out more about the survey on smoked fish go to: food.gov.uk/science/surveillance/fsisbranch2008/fsis0508
For more about listeria go to: food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2008/jul/listeriosisfacts

The FSA's new veterinary director

The Agency has appointed Liz Redmond as the new Veterinary Director.

Currently Director of Animal Health and Welfare Policy at the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) in Northern Ireland, Ms Redmond takes up her new post in December.

She said: 'As a significant amount of our food comes from animals, I can see an important role for the veterinary profession in shaping and delivering FSA policy, and I am keen to explore this further.'

Ms Redmond started her career as a vet working in rural

practices in Australia and the UK, later working in Botswana in the national veterinary diagnostic laboratory.

In 2003, after completing a degree in agricultural economics in the UK, she became an assistant secretary at DARD. In her current role she has been leading on all aspects of animal health and welfare policy development in Northern Ireland.

Ms Redmond replaces Alick Simmons who has become Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer at the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).



New Veterinary Director, Liz Redmond



Meat hygiene charges to rise next year

Certain charges concerning meat hygiene are to go up from January 2009 to make sure the UK continues to comply with European Union (EU) legislation.

The increases are needed because of a fall in the value of pound sterling against the Euro since last year.

The EU sets the minimum rates of charge across all Member States and these rates are set in Euros per animal slaughtered or tonne of meat cut up. Once a

year, every September, these Euro rates are converted into sterling, which then become the UK's minimum rates of charge.

But due to the significant reduction in the value of the pound over the last 12 months however, the sterling minimum must now be increased for a number of categories if the charges in the UK are not to fall below what is the legal minimum.

The likelihood of having to

increase charges was flagged up in the FSA's published proposals on charging in July ahead of the Agency's open Board meeting. The precise details of which charges would be affected were not available until the European Commission published, at the beginning of September, the new exchange rate that applies to sterling.

The FSA has now written to all approved meat business operators telling them of the situation and is preparing to consult with them later in the year on a number of other changes to meat hygiene charges.

As part of this consultation, the FSA wants to hear the comments of the industry on how the charging proposals for the next financial year, 2009-2010, might take account of unavoidable increases such as these.

FSA Chief Executive Tim Smith, said: 'This is an established system of ensuring that charging across Europe does not fall below the required minimum rates. The weakness of sterling means that these increases to charges are, on this occasion, higher than in previous years.'

'This is why we are actively seeking industry's views on how we might modify our charging proposals for 2009-2010 to take account of these increases.'

'The FSA remains committed to modernising the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) and working with industry to deliver an efficient and fair system of regulation.'

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more about meat hygiene charges go to: food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2008/jul/mhscharge

Workshop on specified risk material controls in cattle

The Agency will be holding a workshop looking at the supervision levels of specified risk material (SRM) controls in cattle over 30 months (OTM) old.

The purpose is to explore the idea of adopting a more risk-based approach to official controls.

Agenda

The workshop will include a presentation on the background to the policy and assess the risks associated with changing the official supervision of SRM controls for cattle in this age group. It will also explain the practical options available and look at how any change considered might work.

Delegates will be able to discuss the issues involved so a full range of views can be collected while at the same time addressing any potential impacts.

Any interested parties are welcome but particularly those with an interest in BSE who have not taken part in one of these workshop events before.

How to attend

The workshop takes place on 21 November from 10am to 4pm in rooms 4/5 at The Food Standards Agency's headquarters: Aviation House, 125 Kingsway, London WC2B 6NH.

If you would like the opportunity to attend contact Hilary Porter by 7 November on tel: 020 7276 8048 or email: hilary.porter@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more on the workshop agenda or about BSE go to: food.gov.uk/bse/

BSE testing could be scaled back

The FSA Board is considering a proposal to raise the age at which cattle are tested for BSE from 30 months to 48 months.

The European Commission recommended the change provided that each Member State can demonstrate that it has a low risk of BSE and that the disease has been effectively controlled for at least six years.

The European Food Safety Authority estimated that raising the age for testing cattle slaughtered for food to

48 months is unlikely to result in any positive cases of BSE being missed.

European legislation requires that all Member States carry out a programme of testing for BSE, commonly known as 'mad cow disease'.

The tests not only keep a check on the level of the disease in cattle but can also detect animals that are infected with BSE but not yet showing any outward signs of it.

However, the most important measure to protect the public

is to remove the brain and spinal cord from every animal slaughtered, which removes all BSE infection if any is present.

The incidence of BSE has been falling rapidly throughout Europe over a number of years and in 2005 this led the European Commission to adopt the TSE Roadmap which looks at whether BSE controls can be safely scaled back.

Reducing the amount of BSE testing is just one of the goals of the Roadmap.



New online tool about waste

A new online learning tool has been created to help food and drink manufacturers better understand the laws for getting rid of their waste.

The food and drink sector is the second highest producer of waste in England and Wales, generating about three million tonnes of waste in 2007.

The tool is a one-stop-shop for information on storing, transporting, disposing, reusing and recovering waste, hazardous waste and animal by-products.

The aim is to save manufacturers time in having to sift through a raft of legislative detail. Instead they can keep up-to-speed with the very latest legislation and so introduce new procedures in advance.

The tool is a joint initiative between the Environment Agency in England and Wales (EA and EAW), the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA).

It currently offers specific guidelines for 112 industry sectors in the UK and free guidance to small and medium-sized enterprises in the UK, and is available without the need to register.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Find the learning tool at: www.netregs.gov.uk



Putting sustainable development at the heart of the Agency

The FSA Board has agreed that the Agency's policies should be sustainable, except in the most exceptional of circumstances.

The aim is that ultimately consumers and others will benefit from more sustainable policies, underpinned by sound science, which will not compromise the interests of future generations.

What this means in practice is that when the Agency develops policies:

- it will consider the full range of potential impacts – environmental, economic and social
- where there are environmental, economic and social impacts, greater significance will be attached to the social impacts on food safety and nutrition, while action will be taken to minimise any negative affects in all areas of sustainability
- greater responsibility will be given for any remaining negative impacts of policy – either directly or indirectly – through working with other government departments and organisations
- there will be better partnership working with government departments and others

In the exceptional circumstances, when the Agency

cannot choose the most sustainable policy option, the reasons for this decision will be clearly communicated and every effort made to reduce what negative impacts there are.

This approach to policy making was developed following extensive consultation with staff and stakeholders and its endorsement by the Board is just the start of putting this approach into action.

At the open Board meeting, last month, members emphasised the need for sustainable development to become part of the Agency's culture.

Agency Chair Deirdre Hutton, said: 'We welcome this approach, which, while complex in nature, will

contribute to ensuring that Agency policy making continues to be of the highest quality.'

Alison Spalding, Head of the Sustainability Team, said: 'Sustainable development is often spoken of in terms of it being a challenge that somehow gets in the way of delivering of departmental remits. The Agency's approach turns this around and sees sustainability as part of the solution not the problem.'

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more on the Agency and sustainable development go to: food.gov.uk/aboutus/how_we_work/sustainability/



Sustainability low on shoppers' priorities

Shoppers are more likely to consider cost, quality and health when buying their food than environmental issues. But 53% of consumers did admit to thinking of at least one environmental issue when grocery shopping.

The research, commissioned by the Agency, looked at whether people's food choices take sustainability issues into account. At the same time, the FSA decided to make sustainable development a high priority when developing its policies.

The survey showed that only 10% of shoppers put environmental issues first when shopping, compared to 66% whose first concern was price and quality, and 23% who prioritise the affect of the food

they eat on their health.

Many consumers have been influenced by environmental concerns having bought foods such as free range eggs or a Fairtrade product at least once in a two month period.

However, sustainability remains a confusing concept to some with two-fifths of those surveyed unable to explain what it means. The survey also found a wide range of views and differing priorities about sustainable food policy in general.

Research participants were questioned earlier in the year on topics that included general attitudes to food, the factors influencing choices while shopping and whether they were willing to pay more for products

produced in a sustainable way.

Sustainability covered environmental, social and economic considerations.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more on the research go to: food.gov.uk/science/socsci/surveys/sustainability



Food fraud database leads to seizure of counterfeit vodka

Intelligence gathered through the Agency's national food fraud database led to the seizure of hundreds of bottles of potentially dangerous counterfeit vodka.

Police, customs, trading standards and environmental health officers raided four premises in the London Borough of Haringey in September.

They found scores of boxes of counterfeit Imperial Vodka and Glen's Vodka, also suspected of being counterfeit, quantities of beer, wine and other spirits, and five articulated lorry loads of alcohol, all of which were seized.

Police also arrested two men at the scene under the Trade Marks Act 1994.

It was the Agency's national food fraud database, which uses powerful specialist intelligence software, also used by enforcement organisations and police forces around the world, that was the key to tracking down the illegal goods. This type of operation is exactly why the database was set up in the first place – to help local authorities investigate and prevent

food fraud.

The Agency first became aware of the counterfeit Imperial Vodka, sold in the UK exclusively in Spar stores, when public analysis tests showed that it contained potentially harmful levels of methanol.

The food fraud database uses powerful specialist intelligence software used by police forces around the world

The levels recorded could cause serious harm, including blindness, if consumed in large quantities.

The Agency immediately alerted local authorities to the dangers whose officers seized the counterfeit alcohol when found

on sale and forwarded their detailed intelligence reports to the FSA for inclusion on its food fraud database.

The database was able to sift through the huge number of intelligence reports that were generated and instantly identify a wholesale warehouse in Haringey as a possible source of the vodka.

Haringey councillor Nilgun Canver, said: 'It's worrying that this vodka is on the streets at all when it can cause serious illness. I am delighted that our officers have been able to track it down and prevent anyone drinking it.'

'As soon as the Food Standards Agency alerted us to this problem we took immediate action as this vodka is very dangerous. We are always on the look out for these things but clever counterfeits can be difficult to spot.'

Sarah Appleby, Head of Enforcement at the FSA, said: 'The Agency plays an important role in gathering intelligence on food fraud from across the country and sharing it with local



authorities to allow them to carry out their vital enforcement role effectively.

'Haringey Council's investigation is on-going and we are continuing to warn the public and other local authorities to be on the lookout for this potentially dangerous counterfeit vodka.'

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more on the Food Fraud Database and other Agency resources tackling food fraud go to: food.gov.uk/foodfraud

Students get a fresh look at food

The FSA team in the East Midlands attended University of Nottingham's 'freshers week' in a bid to encourage new students to think about the food they buy and how to eat safely and healthily.

Joining forces with Nottingham City Council's trading standards services, they displayed traffic light labelled food packaging, information on understanding labels and gave out fridge magnets that the team produced showing basic food safety messages from the Agency's Germ Watch campaign.

As an enticement the team gave away fresh fruit and gave each student a quick food quiz before entering them into a prize draw for book vouchers.

Also on offer was a booklet designed by FSA Northern Ireland that encourages students in their first year away from home to make healthier eating choices and

follow good hygiene practices.

Jennifer Norman, NHS management trainee on placement with the team, said: 'We spoke to hundreds of

students and most felt they really needed some support in helping to budget, plan and prepare tasty but healthy recipes from scratch.

'Many were worried about

food poisoning and the fridge magnets were very popular. Hopefully they'll now be fixed to clean fridges set to the right temperature in student's kitchens.'

Kate Blackman, a Nottingham trading standards officer, added: 'I can remember being a student and as well as the exciting promotions for clubs and nights out, it's refreshing to have such useful information given in a way that was designed with students in mind.'

'It's also great to have the chance to work in partnership with the FSA to deliver these important messages,' she said.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Fresher Food, the student survival guide to food, is available from food.gov.uk/northernireland/nutritionni/nutritionstudents/fresherfood/



Jennifer Norman, NHS management trainee on placement with FSA East Midlands (left) and Kate Blackman, trading standards officer with Nottingham City Council

Improving MHS efficiency

The final report on how to help improve Meat Hygiene Service efficiency in slaughterhouses has now been published.

Issued by a joint project team made up of the MHS, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and the meat industry, the report looks at how changes in working methods can make better use of MHS resources.

Nineteen slaughterhouses across England, Scotland and Wales were visited to examine how MHS resources were used in different premises.

The report, *The Optimisation of MHS Resources in Slaughterhouses*, concludes that

efficiencies can be achieved by improving the working practices of the MHS, the individual slaughter business or a combination of both.

Most improvements, said the report, can be made in the area of checks on animal identification and BSE-related controls.

Duplication

Many of these checks, which the MHS carries out under the instructions of the Agency and Rural Affairs departments, duplicate some of the checks already carried out by slaughterhouse operators.

The report says: 'The duplication of these checks by MHS may confuse lines of responsibility.' As the checking system is currently under review, the report also proposes that this work 'is given priority'.

More potential improvements in MHS efficiency were identified through changing the working patterns of individual slaughterhouses.

Those food business operators that 'work short days or have an erratic working pattern present particular difficulties for MHS to provide official controls efficiently', says the report.

While there is an element of unpredictability due to market fluctuations, operators have to

take 'a commercial decision' between achieving 'a relatively constant demand for inspection resources' or 'to operate in a more flexible manner and accept additional costs', it states.

Other improvements

The report identifies areas where the Agency can take action to make official controls more efficient, such as influencing changes in European legislation towards a more risk-based approach.

It also highlights that changing the physical layout of the slaughterline and equipment can improve efficiency.

Kenneth Clarke, the Agency's Veterinary Adviser who co-authored the report, said: 'We have seen many examples where joint working can result in significant efficiencies and this has to be good news for everyone. We are confident this should be the basis of a partnership approach between the regulator and the industry.'

'Now that we have carried out this work, we must look forward to working together to make these efficiencies a reality. We hope the findings of the report will be taken into account during the upcoming discussions on Business Agreements between the MHS and individual food business operators.'

The duplication of these checks may confuse lines of responsibility

FSA South West sharing good practice

FSA South West held a special event for local authorities in the region to share good practice on how best to develop a local healthy eating award.

More than 40 officers attended from environmental health, trading standards, primary care trusts (PCT) and public health.

The event showcased the Healthy Options Wales award with Shelia Dooley, who piloted the award, and Sarah Rowles from FSA Wales explaining the purpose behind creating it. Allyson Jones from Cardiff City Council and Simon Rolfs from Staffordshire environmental health then shared their

experiences of implementing it.

The event also looked at the Cornwall Healthier Eating and Food Safety award (CHEFS). Carol Thorogood from Carrick District Council and Sophia Aston from Cornwall PCT gave an overview of the award which has been running since 2004.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more on Healthy Options Wales go to: www.cieh-cymruwales.org

For more on CHEFS go to: www.foodvision.gov.uk/pages/chefs-award-scheme

Working in partnership to improve food safety

FSA North West hosted a day-long conference for agencies and organisations involved in the wider food and health agenda to improve their ways of working in partnership together.

Over 80 delegates attended representing 15 local authorities, five primary care trusts and voluntary and

community organisations. The day was chaired by Will Cockbain, the NW's regional champion for sustainable farming and food.

There were presentations of case studies from across the region including a number of projects supported by Agency food hygiene and nutrition

grants, and workshops exploring the opportunities for more joint working in the short and long term.

Feedback showed the day was an extremely useful occasion for delegates to meet their counterparts in other organisations and network.

Angela Towers, Regional

Coordinator for FSA North West, said: 'We were delighted to hold this event, the first of its kind for Lancashire. The level of networking and sharing of good practice has been excellent and we look forward to working with all stakeholders across Lancashire to improve safe food and healthy eating.'

Science down under

How the UK and New Zealand hope to close the gap in food science

I was invited to deliver the keynote address at the annual science conference of the New Zealand Food Safety Authority (NZFSA), writes Agency Chief Scientist Andrew Wadge in his monthly column, but sadly this clashed with the September Board meeting.

So David Atkins and Julie Norman, joint heads of the Chief Scientist team, spoke in my place and here's what Dr Atkins had to report.

'This was a fantastic opportunity for the Agency and it was the perfect time to launch the Chief Scientist's second annual report down under.

'The NZFSA were great hosts. They arranged a series of meetings in Wellington prior to the conference so we could make contact with their teams, learn about their work and discuss shared problems and future collaborations.

'Campylobacter contamination of chicken, and the public health implications, is a serious challenge for both countries and we already have good regular contacts between our teams to share experience and learning.

'Food safety is an increasingly global business and we are

committed to international scientific co-operation to strengthen our performance.

'And we had very positive discussions about opportunities for future cooperation in other areas of shared interest. We will be looking to set up more formal secondment and exchange arrangements for our experts in the future.

'As FSA job-sharers (and real-life husband and wife) we clearly got the attention of the audience, but it was our presentation on the Agency's work and scientific evidence that generated the most interest.

'Copies of the annual report went like hot cakes and it's clear from the questions and comments on the Chief Scientist's blog, which has had an international impact, it is a powerful tool for communicating the Agency's science.

'Being "poms" we had to put up with the usual stick from the Australians about our chances of regaining the Ashes.

'However, they and the other international experts had to acknowledge the strength of the Agency's scientific work and the effectiveness of our communications. Especially

encouraging when the Agency's science is under scrutiny by the Government's Chief Scientist who is due to report later in the year.'

Further information

For more on the conference presentations go to: www.nzfsa.govt.nz and for more on the science review by the Government's Chief Scientist go to: www.berr.gov.uk/dius/science/science-reviews/page24572.html and food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2008/apr/sciencerev



Julie Norman, joint head of the Chief Scientist team, speaking at the annual science conference of the New Zealand FSA

The Agency puts on an

Well in excess of 500 people viewed the live webcast of the Agency's first appearance at the BA Festival of Science last month, with almost 1,400 people watching the event in the following two weeks.

The session, which had more than 80 people in the audience, was a lively mix of food facts, history, comic sketches and audience participation – featuring the Agency's very own carrot-o-meter.

FSA Communications Director, Terrence

Collis, chaired the session which focused on the issues of healthy eating, food safety and innovations in food technology, and Chief Scientist Andrew Wadge

provided a scientific perspective with information from his second annual report.

He described the report as 'a state of the nation update



Andrew Wadge presenting the annual report at the BA Festival

on UK nutrition, diet and health', and said the big picture, though not perfect, 'is surprisingly good'.

'A fundamental reason why we live so long nowadays is that we're taking on a better quality of fuel,' he said.

'Not everyone of course – we still see 70,000 people a year dying early because of poor diets. Yet most of us benefit from a wealth of choice, selecting from a cornucopia of complex and exotic foods. And science has played a significant role in these improvements.'

Healthy eating

The audience got the chance to show their knowledge during the healthy eating part of the session, holding up cards of green peppers or red tomatoes if they thought a statement true or false.

Agency nutritionist Louis Levy was there to dispel some of the most commonly held myths, such as dried fruit doesn't count towards your 5-a-day – it does – or most salt in our diet is added at the table – it's not.

Alongside the fun and games, Dr Wadge talked about the latest findings of the Agency's annual Consumer Attitudes to Food survey. Nine out of ten people, he said, say



Communications Director Terrence Collis and the Agency's carrot-o-meter

eating healthily is important to them but only half the population actually check food labels.

However, three quarters of people realise they should be eating at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day, which, he said, was most

encouraging.

He also spoke about the FSA's work in drawing up a

Healthy Food Code, which will introduce a single, simple approach to food labelling for the entire food industry.

The aim is that the code will lead to smaller portion sizes, lower levels of saturated fats, salt and sugar in foods, a single set of healthy eating messages promoted by both businesses and Government, and nutritional information on foods in a wider range of settings, including restaurants, takeaways and even theme parks.

Food safety

During the food safety part of the session, the audience and those watching online were given a quick lesson on the five main food poisoning bacteria and their toxins found in foods, and the difference between 'use by' and 'best before' information on food labels.

The work of the Agency, said Dr Wadge, was twofold – informing the public on how

Science: the foundation of food policy

How science influences food and health advice was another of the expert-led panel discussions held at the BA Festival. Gill Fine, FSA Director of Consumer Choice and Dietary Health, represented the Agency in the debate.

She explained that when it comes to making food policy it's the Government that has the final say after consultation with consumers and other interested parties, such as food businesses, health professionals and others.

Robust evidence

The Agency, she said, recognised the importance of having a robust evidence basis for its recommendations. 'We understand that science is always evolving and so when new scientific evidence arises the Agency is committed to revisiting its policies to make sure it is still up to date,' she said.

Ms Fine outlined the Agency's approach to healthier eating and described some of the activities, including the approach of using traffic light colours to show the public the nutritional content of food.

Different front of pack nutritional labelling is currently being reviewed by independent experts to identify what is best for consumers.

Health claims

She also answered questions about the health claims of some foods and drinks and explained that the European Union is taking action in this area. Some products, she said, do have genuine health benefits backed by evidence that has gone through the validation process and peer review, including spreads, yoghurts and drinks that reduce cholesterol.

Her key message was that everyone has a role to play in helping to improve dietary health in the UK and the Agency is keen to ensure that consumers benefit from sound science and evidence-based policy making.

Consumers, she said, do have a lot of power to influence food policy but they also need to be informed and educated about the science that underpins it.

The GM story ..

Tim Smith, the Agency's Chief Executive, attended the genetically modified (GM) food debate to explain the FSA's position.

GM food, he said, was not the most important issue to consumers at the moment rather, it is the amount of salt, fat and sugar in food and food poisoning. Though he did explore how GM foods might change the weekly food shopping trip in future.

He said: 'Food won't look any different. But in the future there could be advantages for both your health and your purse from foods with a higher vitamin content to crops with higher yields. But this isn't yet a reality.'

The few ingredients that are genetically modified, such as maize flour and oil from oilseed rape, he said, have been shown to be as safe as their non-GM counterparts, according to detailed analysis by an independent panel.



Tim Smith

n impressive show

they can keep their food safe, and setting food standards and safety levels and making sure manufacturers stick to the regulations.

He said: 'Local authorities and public analysts don't want to hear guesswork. They look for hard facts and expert advice.'

'We constantly review food safety evidence, so that we can give informed guidance about safety limits. And we only give clear advice when we have clear answers – because food safety is, literally, a matter of life and death.'

The audience again got involved and cast their votes on food safety matters while Agency microbiologist Gael O'Neill answered questions such as 'should you wash raw meat and poultry before cooking?' – no. And 'how many times can you reheat food?' – just once.

Technical innovations

The session, which lasted for more than an hour, ended with a look at how technology has revolutionised our food.

Dr Sian Thomas, from the Chief Scientist team, said people have always been distrustful of changes in their food, an attitude that has sometimes proved costly.

She said: 'During the 25 years when [milk] pasteurisation was feasible but not implemented, 65,000 people died unnecessarily.'

'That's a dramatic example but it's far from unique. We

'We are still irrationally prejudiced against changes that are likely to help us.'

are still irrationally prejudiced against changes that are likely to help us.'

Food irradiation, she said, was a good example of this. This is a technique to eradicate the bacteria found in 70% of raw poultry without adversely affecting the meat. But consumer research shows people are very much against it, so the technique is not used in the UK.

The same controversy is seen with genetically

modified foods and cloned meats. Even foods fortified with vitamins and minerals.

She said: 'We're not saying all innovations are good – we have to check,

test and prove their safety and benefits.'

'If new foods are introduced using new technologies we will make sure they are safe, now and in the future, so people will know exactly what they are buying.'

Further information

For more on the FSA go to: food.gov.uk and for more on healthy eating visit: eatwell.gov.uk

The BA Festival audience casting their votes



so far

Food prices, he said, may be where GM food gets ahead. 'As the proportion of GM crops increases, non-GM will become an increasingly expensive option for manufacturers and retailers, and ultimately us as shoppers.'

'GM will not provide all the solutions now but it could help in the future.'

On safety, he said, approved GM ingredients and animal feedstuffs are as safe as the conventional ingredients according to the European Food Safety Authority, and this remains the view of the Food Standards Agency. However, he recognised that other people hold opposing views and emphasised that the consumer will always come first with the Agency.

'I'm Mr Consumer,' he said. 'The FSA is interested in two things about GM food: safety and consumer choice. If GM products find a place in the UK market then they will be as safe as other foods.'

'But ultimately, it is up to each of us to decide what we want to eat.'

Fat is an Agency issue

The Agency was also part of the panel debate on obesity where Gill Fine, Director of Consumer Choice and Dietary Health, explained the FSA's approach to helping people eat more healthily.

Influencing what people eat is complex, she said. Behavioural change does not occur in a vacuum and so the FSA uses an integrated approach that looks to influence products, people and the wider environment.

She said: 'We have been encouraging businesses to review their products and reduce the amount of salt they add to food, and we are seeking reductions in saturated fat content and portion sizes. Our aim is to help the mainstream products become healthier, as well as encouraging businesses to develop and promote healthier options.'

'The second strand of our approach is around influencing people. We aim to raise consumer awareness, knowledge and skills to help them know how to choose a

healthier diet. This helps drive demand for products that make healthier eating easier, which in turn drives the market.'

She used the Agency's salt campaign to illustrate how this approach works in practice.

The first phase of the campaign explained why too much salt can be bad for the heart. The second focused on promoting the 'eat no more than 6g salt a day' message. The last phase helped educate consumers about food labels so they can more easily choose products that contain less salt.

Finally, she said, the Agency aims to influence the wider shopping and promotional environment to make it easier for people to identify the healthier and less healthy choices as they shop.

She stressed that all of the Agency's work is underpinned by evidence and that it 'undertakes research to understand the issues, investigate solutions, monitor progress and assess the impact of our policies'.



Research published and available from the FSA

For the following research reports published by the Food Standards Agency, go to: foodbase.org.uk

Further information

Contact Dr Sian Thomas in the Chief Scientist's Team, Food Standards Agency, 125 Kingsway, London WC2B 6NH, tel: 020 7276 8761; email: sian.thomas@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

Programme Q01 – Food Authenticity

Transfer of the real-time PCR method to detect and quantify common wheat adulteration of pasta to the Agilent 2100 BioAnalyser capillary electrophoresis system (Q01106)

In order for pasta to have the correct eating characteristics, it should be made from durum wheat (*Triticum durum*). Durum wheat normally attracts a higher price, as growing conditions are more restrictive than common wheat (*Triticum aestivum*).

A real-time polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) method for detecting and quantifying adulteration of durum wheat with common wheat was developed and validated for the Agency. This is a powerful technique which amplifies specific DNA fragments in proportion to the amount present and allows for accurate detection and quantification of the target species.

The genetics of common wheat and durum wheat differ as common wheat has three sets of genomes (hexaploid) while durum wheat has only two sets of genomes (tetraploid). The RT-PCR method amplifies and measures common wheat adulteration in durum wheat pasta by comparing the number of copies of two specific DNA sequences, one which is unique to common wheat (from the D-genome), and the other which is common to all wheat genomes, known as a

normalisation sequence. The aim of this project was to transfer the RT-PCR method to the lab-on-a-chip system.

A semi-quantitative method has been developed which detects if more than 3% common wheat has been used in durum wheat pasta. A standard operating procedure has been written detailing this method.

Final optimisation and evaluation of DNA-based methods for the authentication and quantification of meat species (Q01084/87/88/89/90)

The Food Labelling Regulations 1996 require a Quantitative Ingredient Declaration (QUID) for all ingredients mentioned in the name of the food.

Therefore, products specifying a type of meat have to stipulate the amount of that meat in the product. A validated method to detect and quantify meat content in meat products was therefore required.

This collaborative project aimed to optimise and evaluate DNA methods developed from previously funded FSA projects based on real-time polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) for meat species identification and measurement.

A qualitative species-specific RT-PCR assay was optimised in the initial portion of this project. A single DNA extraction technique was found to be suitable for all meat matrices tested. The proficiency test of the RT-PCR assays used by the collaborating laboratories showed that all the assays were able to correctly identify the species present within the samples. Based on these studies, a comprehensive set of standard operating procedures (SOPs) were developed for the identification of meat species in complex foods using RT-PCR.

Several different methods for the quantification of meat species in a mixed sample were examined, however none of the calibrated methods proved robust enough to be considered suitable for reliable meat content quantification.

Programme B18 – Microbiological Surveillance

Development of standardised protocols for preparation of artificially contaminated infant formula and cereal-based weaning foods (B18008)

Programme B09 – Detection and Separation of Food Pathogens

Accelerated detection of salmonella and verocytogenic *Escherichia coli* (B09008)

Programme A04 – Chemical Contaminants from Food Contact Materials

A four-year rolling programme of surveys on migrants from food contact materials and articles. First year, survey 1: formaldehyde from melamine (A04016)

Other reports available on foodbase.org.uk

Programme B11 – Verocytotoxin-producing *E. coli* O157 (VTEC)

Review of past and current research on verocytotoxin-producing *Escherichia coli* (VTEC) in relation to public health protection (B11010)

Programme B01 – Assessing Microbiological Hazards and Risks

Development of a risk assessment model for the different pathways of infection by *E. coli* O157 (B01019)

FSA-funded research published and available in the FSA Information Centre

A03 – Chemical Contaminants from Food Contact Materials

Chaudhry, Q., Scotter, M., Blackburn, J., Ross, B., Boxall, A., Castle, L., Aitken, R. and Watkins, R. (2008) Applications and implications of nanotechnologies for the food sector. *Food Additives and Contaminants* 25(3): 241-258.

This relates to the Agency-funded research project A03063

Bradley, EL., Read, W. and Castle, L. (2007) Investigation into the migration potential of coating materials from cookware products. *Food Additives and Contaminants*, 24: 326-335.

This relates to the Agency-funded research project A03028

S14 – Research, Surveillance and Monitoring – Scotland

Dallas, JF., Forbes, KJ., Gormley, FJ., Macrae, M., Maiden, MC., McGuigan, C., Ogden, ID., Reay, KW., Rotariu, O., Sheppard, SK., Strachan, NJC., Williams, A. (2007) Local outbreaks of campylobacteriosis in Scotland involving more than one strain: a CaMPS study. *Zoonoses and Public Health* 54: 43-43.

Forbes, KJ., Dallas, JF., Gormley, FJ., Macrae, M., Maiden, MC., Ogden, ID., Reay, K., Rotariu, O., Sheppard, SK., Sproston, EL., Strachan, NJC., Williams, A. (2007) CaMPS: The campylobacter MLST project in Scotland. *Zoonoses and Public Health* 54: 43-44.

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This supplement was published by the Food Standards Agency in October 2008. For more about the Agency's newsletter, *FSA News*, contact:

fsanews@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

To subscribe to the newsletter, and receive printed or electronic copies, contact Celia Dunphy, tel: 020 7276 8829, email: celia.dunphy@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

For more on the Agency go to: food.gov.uk or: eatwell.gov.uk

To contact the Agency's Chief Scientist team, telephone: 020 7276 8762; or email the team at:

CST@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

Keep on cooking

Aberdeen had its first visit from the new Scottish healthy cooking bus last month when it made a stop at the St Machar Academy.

Teachers, pupils and FSA Scotland staff had the chance to

make a variety of healthy, delicious dishes and learn more about healthy eating.

All those who attended said they found the sessions extremely helpful and other

schools and communities across Scotland are already showing huge interest in getting a visit from the healthy cooking bus in the future.

As well as teaching cooking skills, the work carried out on the bus also reinforces other key messages about food, including teaching food safety and using sustainable local produce wherever possible. This means that most of the time the ingredients used on the cooking bus come from within a 30-mile radius of the host school or community.

The healthy cooking bus also makes sure that everything that can be recycled is recycled in its own recycling bins for food, metal, plastic and paper.

Recycling is considered an important part of its work to help establish eco-schools and eco-centres, for instance, by using carrier take-home bags that have been made from cornstarch.



FURTHER INFORMATION

For more about the healthy cooking bus go to: www.focusonfood.org/home.html or for an application form for a healthy cooking bus visit go to: www.focusonfood.org/03_TABS/requestacookingb.html



Scotland's diet still needs improvement

The results of the recent Scottish dietary surveillance programme showed that adults and children in Scotland are a long way from meeting the recommendations for a healthy diet.

FSA Scotland (FSAS) explained its latest findings at a specially arranged event attended by over 50 delegates.

The day-long meeting, held at the Our Dynamic Earth centre in

Edinburgh, looked at the work that monitors the progress of Scottish dietary targets and at the patterns and quality of people's diet in relation to their economic status and lifestyles.

There were presentations on the diet of children from the FSAS survey on sugar intake of children in Scotland and a look at the contribution of meals and snacks to the overall diet of children

both at home and at school.

The delegates came from a variety of organisations representing a wide range of food interests including officers from various Scottish government departments, food manufacturers, the Scottish Consumer Council, the Scottish Centre for Social Research, the Scottish Food Advisory Council, academics and fellow Agency representatives

from London and Cardiff.

The day generated considerable debate, which the FSAS said will be valuable in informing future work on the Scottish diet.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more on the FSAS dietary surveillance programme contact Anne Milne on 01224 288377.

Food fun at the Dundee festival

FSA Scotland served up a mix of advice, education and fun at the Dundee Food and Flower Festival in September where Ainsley Harriott was the star guest chef.

Visitors had the opportunity to win prizes playing the 'football food goal' game and to test their knowledge of food safety, hygiene and nutrition. Ainsley Harriott also hosted several live demonstrations showing how easy it is to cook up quick and nutritious meals.

The three-day event attended by over 26,000 people and the FSAS was able to highlight a lot of its work on food safety and nutrition.



NI Food Advisory Committee welcomes new members

The Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee (NIFAC) welcomed two new members after its summer break. Dorothy Black and David Mark took up their posts on 3 September.

Ms Black lectures in the school of education at the University of Ulster and is Course Director of the post graduate certificate in education

for home economics.

She has a particular interest in how adolescents perceive food risk and is working with primary schools north and south of the border to develop a food education programme.

David Mark is a food technologist who has worked closely with most of the major UK retailers. His early career was in the dairy

industry and after a short time as a McDonald's restaurant franchisee he moved back into the food processing industry in the egg and poultry sectors.

He is currently Commercial Director of Countryside Services Ltd, a subsidiary of the Ulster Farmers Union, which provides commercial services to farmers, primary producers and the agri-food sector.

The NIFAC advises the Agency on safety and standard issues affecting Northern Ireland and has experts in the fields of nutrition, agriculture, food-related science and consumer interests.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more about the NIFAC go to: www.food.gov.uk/northernireland/aboutfsani/advisorycommittee

Nominations for AFAL awards

Individuals or organisations in Wales working to improve the diet or eating habits of people in their communities could receive an FSA Wales AFAL award in recognition of their work.

The AFAL scheme – Awards for Food Action Locally – has run for the past five years and FSAW is now inviting applications for its 2009 awards.

The awards are open to individuals and teams working in the community and voluntary sectors, education, catering, retail or food production, as well as local authorities and health boards looking to make an impact community-wide.

For this round of awards there are three nomination categories:

- initiatives working with primary and/or secondary schools that contribute to the Appetite for Life action plan
- initiatives targeting older people especially vulnerable older people
- initiatives targeting other priority groups such as those on low incomes, from black or ethnic minorities or any other vulnerable consumers

Five awards of £2,000 each are available for projects which have made the most significant contributions and there are also five runner-up awards of £1,000 available. All 10 initiatives will also get an engraved prize and a certificate.

Teresa Owen, public health nutritionist and a member of the 2007-08 judging panel, said: 'We are particularly keen to see nominations relating to activities in more disadvantaged communities in Wales where schemes to improve diet are greatly needed.'

'We would also like to receive nominations from projects demonstrating partnership working, innovation or high levels of achievement with limited funds.'

Nomination forms must be completed and returned by 12 December. An independent panel will review entries and finalists will be notified at the end of January 2009.

The 'Appetite for Life' action plan was published in February by the Welsh Assembly and sets out the strategic direction and actions required to improve the nutritional standards of food and drink provided in schools in Wales.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more about AFAL or to receive nomination forms contact Anna Coote on tel: 029 2067 8912, email: nutritionstrategywales@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk or go to: food.gov.uk/wales



Winner of an AFAL award 2008: The Grow Your Grub project run by the Vale of Glamorgan Healthy Schools team at Cogan Primary School, Penarth

Eat Well, Keep Well

A grant from the Food Standards Agency for healthy eating and food hygiene initiatives helped fund an event teaching healthy eating and food hygiene to older people.

Hosted by Cardiff Council's health improvement team and Age Concern (Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan) the event aimed to give older people the skills and knowledge to adapt

their diets in a fun, nutritious and hygienically safe way.

There were food preparation and cooking demonstrations, talks from healthcare professionals and a number of information stands.

Those who attended could even sign up for cooking workshops with some of the workshops held in schools to involve school children in helping and learning from older people.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more on the Agency's grant scheme go to: food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2008/jan/hygggrant and food.gov.uk/enforcement/laresource/lahngrants/grantwinners0809



Cardiff residents enjoying the food demonstration at the Eat Well, Keep Well event

Putting the consumer first

The third wave of citizens' forums begins this month with discussions around what should be the priorities for food policy over the next few years.

The information gathered will help inform the new Strategic Plan for 2010-2015, which is currently being drawn up.

It follows on from the first two series of forum discussions that looked at the issues of healthy eating and eating out, and will bring to an end the first year of the Agency using this kind of set-up to engage with the public.

Citizens' forums began in February as a way for the Agency to have a continuous and meaningful dialogue with consumers and are key to finding how the science of food fits with people's behaviours and preferences.

It came out of a decision by the FSA Board back in December 2005 that the Agency should be more creative and experimental in the way it engages directly with individual consumers.

Now there are ten citizens' forums across the UK made up of ten people each. Each group broadly reflects the mix of people in their respective areas.

The forums were set up so that the Agency can:

- understand what are the most important concerns of UK consumers on food issues
- develop a deeper understanding about these particular concerns

- test Agency policy and make sure that the views of consumers are taken into account at every stage of the policy making process

Healthy eating

The first round of citizens' forums explored the roles and responsibilities of the individual, government and the food industry in relation to healthy eating.

Healthy eating was associated with fresh produce and cooking 'from scratch' while processed food appealed to consumers because of its convenience, availability and low cost

Those who took part were found to have an intuitive understanding about food and an interest in nutritional information, which informs their choices on diet and health.

Healthy eating was associated

with fresh produce and cooking 'from scratch' while processed foods appealed to consumers because of its convenience, availability and low cost.

They placed the overwhelming responsibility for healthy eating on the individual. The principle role of government, they said, is to inform individuals so they can make better choices, rather than making the choices for them, and to regulate the food industry.

Food manufacturers were expected to provide accurate information about the content of their products, but interestingly participants only expected them to reduce the unhealthy ingredients in their products if consumers demanded it.

Finally, participants felt food retailers should recognise their powerful role in the marketplace and fairly promote healthy options.

The discussions showed that people are very cynical about the food industry in general especially when it comes to claims made about the health and ethical benefits of certain foods.

This suggests there may be a potential problem when it comes to encouraging people to change their behaviour and it also revealed some concern about who to trust to provide impartial and accurate information.

There was little awareness of government campaigns around healthy eating, and diet-related

health campaigns were considered less effective than health campaigns on giving up smoking and excessive drinking.

Eating Out

The second round of citizens' forums revealed quite complex definitions of what was understood to be 'eating out' and included distinctions made based on the degree of effort needed and the enjoyment gained.

The term included restaurant meals, dinner parties, quick lunches with friends, meals on holiday, pub grub, midweek sandwiches at work and children's school meals. Basically any eating that took place outside the home and which was not prepared or cooked by the individual.

However, for some, eating out was strongly viewed as a planned, formal affair that was a 'treat' which meant going to a restaurant where there was a menu, service and ambience.

While for others, eating out also included very informal eating such as lunchtime sandwiches and takeaways bought on impulse to save time or money and to avoid cooking or washing up.

In the week leading up to the forums, those taking part were asked to keep a diary of how often they ate out and to include the broader definition of this to include snacks and office lunches.

Many were surprised by how often and how much they ate outside the home and at the cost and health implications of this. From the Agency's point of view the most significant factor was the low importance of health when it came to people deciding what and where to eat.

Third wave

The next and third wave of citizens' forums discussing the strategic plan should provide some valuable information for the Agency as it begins to draw up the five-year strategy to take it to 2015.



Getting closer to business

The Agency has introduced a programme of secondments to industry so staff can gain a better understanding of how compliance might work in practice.

Staff will get an insight into how the Agency's policies are applied on the ground and learn about the particular capabilities and constraints that businesses face when it comes to food regulation and compliance.

They will also be able to help businesses negotiate and implement the regulations better.

This programme, which is still in the early stages, forms part of the FSA's World Class Regulator initiative, which focuses on continuous improvement.

The first batch of secondees are Linden Jack who will spend time at a John Lewis department store and Chrissie Tsampazi and

Glynis Griffiths who will both join Noon Products and Kerry Foods.

During their secondments they will have the opportunity to:

- meet a wide range of industry people including technical experts and company leaders
- visit production lines and discuss the sourcing and mixture of ingredients into products
- look at quality assurance operating stages, including allergen control and metal detection
- understand how new products are developed and marketed, taking into account existing and emerging food law
- consider how food producers are using Agency nutritional advice to influence their food production

It's hoped the information and

skills staff gain during their secondments will help the Agency develop better and smarter regulatory interventions.

Director General of the Food and Drink Federation, Melanie Leech, said she is delighted that the secondment programme is starting and stressed the need for 'those at the top of the regulatory pyramid to really understand the industries they seek to regulate'.

She said she has been a constant advocate of getting people out from behind their desks to see what it is really like to run a business.

She added: 'I understand the time pressures, but if you don't understand business pressures and the issues facing them every day how can you regulate intelligently?'

Larger firms may find it easier to accommodate Agency staff as secondees, but the Agency is keen to understand the particular pressures that small and medium-sized businesses face when it comes to complying with regulations

The FSA would, therefore, would like to hear from businesses small, medium and large that may be able to take on a candidate.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Food businesses interested in taking part in an FSA secondment should email: julie.monk@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk



Chrissie Tsampazi (top), Glynis Griffiths and Linden Jack



A million in grants to improve food safety

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has handed out grants totalling nearly a million pounds to help caterers and food retailers improve their food safety.

This is the third year the Agency has given out such grants as part of its ongoing commitment to helping food businesses comply with EU hygiene regulations.

Awards of up to £50,000 will help almost 5,000 businesses implement the Safer Food Better Business (SFBB) initiative, which gives businesses practical advice on how to put methods in place to keep food safe. Specific advice is available for different cuisines

and various businesses, such as care homes.



This year's grants are aimed at hard to reach businesses

This year the grants have been particularly aimed at those caterers and retailers considered hard to reach.

Sarah Appleby, Head of Enforcement Support Division at the FSA said: 'I am delighted that we received so many high quality applications.'

'The Agency is determined to ensure that eating out is as safe as possible for consumers and a vital part of that is engaging with harder to reach businesses. We will continue to work with partners to improve food safety for all.'

Applications for the grants were considered by an external

appraisal panel with representatives from local authorities, the Local Authorities Coordinator of Regulatory Services (LACORS), the British Hospitality Association and an academic from Birmingham University.

The Agency received 40 applications and 26 were successful. The grants will be administered by local authorities.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more on Safer Food, Better Business go to: food.gov.uk/foodindustry/regulation/hyglg/hyglgresources/sfbb

Looking to the future

The Food Standards Agency is currently drawing up new and clear directions that will take it forward into the next decade.

The Strategic Plan for 2010 to 2015 will look at how the Agency can best achieve its vision of creating 'safe food and healthy eating for all'.

Over the coming months the Agency will aim to draw up a set of priorities for taking action that will reflect not only the changing environment, but also the progress the Agency has already made in key areas of its work to date.

It will also explain where the Agency believes it can continue to make a real impact.

To that end, it aims to have continual discussions with people concerned with the food and drink industry across the UK, including businesses, delivery partners in local and regional communities, consumers and other interested parties.

Tim Smith, the Agency's Chief Executive, said: 'While focused on delivering the commitments in our Strategic Plan to 2010, we

must also continue to look ahead anticipate and plan for the future.

'We recognise the importance of working with partners and stakeholders who have a role and an interest in delivering food safety and better public health for all people in the UK.

'It is only through good working partnerships that we can fulfil our primary role of protecting UK consumers from unsafe food. And continue to play a leading role in improving the health of the nation by engaging with consumers so they can make informed choices about eating healthily,' he said.

The Agency will soon be publishing details on when and



how you can have your say on the Food Standards Agency's strategic priorities for 2010-2015 in the near future.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more on the Agency's strategic and corporate plans go to: food.gov.uk/aboutus/publications/busreps/strategicplan/

Two new members for COT

Anna Hansell and Clifford Elcombe have been appointed to the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COT).

Their posts, which began on 1 September, will last for three years.

The committee is an independent scientific

committee that provides advice to the FSA, the Department of Health and other government departments and agencies on matters concerning the toxicity of chemicals in food.

Its members are appointed as independent scientific and medical experts on the basis of their special skills and

knowledge and the committee also has two non-specialist members appointed for their knowledge of consumer issues and other matters.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more on the COT, go to: cot.food.gov.uk

ACMSF publishes its annual report

The Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food (ACMSF) has published its 2007 annual report.

This is the 16th annual report from the committee since it was established in 1990. It details the changing pattern of human listeriosis in the UK, botulism in sheep and goats, toxoplasmosis and food, antimicrobial treatment of poultry meat, foodborne viral infections and avian influenza.

It also looks at safe cooking of burgers, safe cooking times for

poultry, food safety advice on flooding, guidance on vacuum packaged foods, and reviews the ACMSF's recommendations on antibiotic resistance and surveillance activities.

FURTHER INFORMATION

To get a printed copy of the report, email the secretariat at acmsf@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk or go online at: food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/committee/acmsfar2007.pdf



Learn more about preventing food incidents

The Agency is holding a one-day workshop to help improve the way that small and medium-sized businesses prevent and respond to food incidents.

It is aimed at those who manufacture, package, label, distribute and sell food, particularly technical managers, quality assurance and quality care managers, compliance managers and incident managers.

A recent survey found that:

- various food incidents have hit the food chain hard
- these incidents have undermined the industry's reputation
- research shows that the public in the UK do not trust information on food coming from farmers or food manufacturers
- the industry sometimes feels it is made a scapegoat by Government

This free workshop will explain what the Agency is doing about incident prevention and management and show how business can better protect itself.

It will also give the industry the chance to talk directly to the national policy makers and incident managers.

Food hygiene legislation affects all food businesses. The 2006 EU Food Hygiene Regulations places the responsibility for safe food explicitly on food business operators, who have to have appropriate controls in place for managing food safely.

Incidents cost time and money, damage reputations and undermine consumer confidence – so building in measures that better manage incident prevention is essential.

How to attend

The Food Incident Prevention and Management workshop takes place on 7 November at Somerset County Cricket Club, in Taunton.

Those interested in attending should contact Nasreen Shah, Food Protection Division, Food Standards Agency, Aviation House, Room 415c, London WC2B 6NH. Tel: 020 7276 8553, fax: 020 7276 8446 or email: n.a.shah@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk Workshop details will then be sent to you before the event.

New regulation on pesticide residues



A new regulation from the European Commission, which harmonises the laws on maximum residue levels (MRLs) of pesticides in food, came into force on 1 September.

The regulation, which applies across the European Union, makes it easier for traders and importers to do business. It also reassures consumers of the measures in place to protect them from unacceptable levels of pesticide residues in food.

Under the legislation, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has the primary responsibility for assessing the risk and evaluating any intended new MRLs.

Based on the EFSA's opinion, the European Commission is responsible for proposing a

regulation to establish a new MRL or to amend or remove an existing one.

They are helped in this by the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health, which is made up of representatives from all the Member States. Any regulation that the Commission proposes is then scrutinised by the European Parliament before becoming law.

The new regulation also provides for the setting of a default limit of 0.01 mg/kg for most pesticide/commodity combinations for which no maximum residue level has been set.

This is a very low legal limit for particular pesticide cases where insufficient residues information has been provided.

The result will be a substantial increase in the number of pesticide/commodity combinations that now have legal limits and the potential for an increase in MRLs to be exceeded, according to the Pesticide Residues Committee (PRC).

However, this does not mean that more residues have exceeded safety levels.

In the UK, the Pesticide Safety Directorate is responsible for pesticide policy. The FSA acts as a watchdog to ensure that food safety is given high priority during the authorisation and monitoring of pesticides, so that any residues in food are within safe limits and as low as practically possible.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more on EC Regulation 396/2005, go to: www.pesticides.gov.uk/food_safety.asp?id=549 or www.ec.europa.eu/food/plant/protection/pesticides/index_en.htm

For more on the PRC and to see its quarterly reports on pesticide monitoring within the UK, go to: www.pesticides.gov.uk/prc_home.asp



Veterinary residues annual report online

The annual report of the Veterinary Residues Committee (VCR) is now available online.

It details the checks the committee carried out on a range of residues of veterinary medicines found in food.

The committee advises the FSA and the Veterinary Medicines Directorate on its work and the importance of its results, while the Agency acts as a watchdog to ensure food safety is given high priority in the work of the VCR.

Two of the results in the report that are of particular interest to the Agency are:

- The brand-name survey on chloramphenicol in high concentration royal jelly nutritional supplements: the Agency was notified about positive samples and worked with local authorities and the companies involved to withdraw the products from sale
- The fall in the number of rapid alert notifications concerning fish and shellfish products from countries outside the European Union. There could be many reasons for the fall including tighter safety measures in the countries of origin

FURTHER INFORMATION

Find the VRC's annual report at: www.vet-residues-committee.gov.uk/Reports/annual

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New wild game guide for hunters

The Agency has published an updated guide for hunters who shoot and sell small quantities of wild game.

It gives practical information about hygiene regulations and details on how to make sure that the meat they supply is safe to eat.

The wild game guide is a simple and easily accessible reference point for hunters who supply game in small quantities or game that has not been plucked or skinned. It comes with answers to commonly asked questions, lots of photographs and food safety advice.

The FSA produced the guide in partnership with the Meat Hygiene Policy Forum Working Group and the Wild Game Group, whose members come from all areas of the wild game meat industry.

The guide covers a range of subjects including definitions of wild game, lists of approved

game handling organisations and training options. And there are easy to follow flow charts on hygiene regulations as well as hunters' checklists.

Tim Hoggarth, Chairman of the Wild Game Group, said:



'Game meat has historically been one of the most risk free forms of food gathered from the wild. So I greatly welcome this very practical and helpful guide which has been written with input and agreement from, among others, hunters, dealers, conservationists and veterinarians.'

Peter Hewson, Acting Veterinary Director at the Agency, added: 'This is a useful easy to understand guide that answers all the commonly asked questions about game. It will give confidence to the game industry and to those who sell and buy wild game.'

The wild game guide has previously, and will continue to be, subject to legislative changes.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more on the Wild Game Guide go to: food.gov/food/industry/meat/wildgameguidance