

Alternative E. coli O157 control measures to the use of separate complex equipment

Area of research interest: [Foodborne pathogens](#)

Planned completion: 1 February 2014

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Background

In 2012, the Government's Focus on Enforcement campaign in England asked small food manufacturers to report on their experiences of working with national regulators and local authorities as part of a review. The review was aimed at micro and small food businesses employing up to 50 employees and raised concerns about the E. coli O157 cross-contamination guidance, in particular the use of separate complex equipment as a control measure.

Following these concerns, we commissioned a research project to find out whether alternative controls to cross-contamination might be viable.

Research approach

Three core phases of research were undertaken:

- Phase 1: telephone interviews with 30 interested parties (trade bodies and industry member that had expressed an interest in this work area) and 10 Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) to identify alternative control measures and gather evidence as to their effectiveness in preventing cross-contamination risks
- Phase 2: quantitative telephone survey with small and micro food businesses to identify current practices in relation to the use of complex equipment and alternative practices to non-dual use
- Phase 3: case studies of alternative controls in practice

Results

Overall, few alternatives were suggested by businesses, and little scientific evidence was provided in support for those which were suggested. However, given stakeholder feedback, alternative control measures considered by food businesses should be tested to determine their effectiveness. Tests can assess whether certain pieces of equipment pose a risk and whether manual cleaning can adequately control the risks from E. coli O157.

Research report

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