It’s good to have a ‘cool friend’

This year’s Food Safety Week (11-17 June 2012), which is organised by the Agency, will be helping people keep food safe and make their budget go further, by encouraging them to see their fridge ‘as their friend’. Advice will also be offered on how to use leftovers safely, making the most of ‘use by’ and ‘best before’ dates, and practical meal planning.

This year’s supporters, Love Food Hate Waste and FareShare, will be making a particularly strong contribution. FareShare distributes surplus ‘fit for purpose’ food from the food and drink industry to organisations that work with disadvantaged people in the community. It has 17 depots across the country.

More than 35,000 people a day benefit from its services. FareShare will be encouraging all of its community members to communicate these vital food safety messages to staff and clients alike.

Support materials developed by the Food Standards Agency include a leaflet and poster entitled ‘Your fridge is your friend’, a communications toolkit containing statistics and facts, ideas for events, and suggestions for public relations and social media Food Safety week activity.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Information and downloadable resources are on food.gov.uk. Leaflets and posters can be ordered online from the FSA publications department or by telephoning 0845 606 0667. Food Safety Week updates are available by registering at foodsafetyweek@ecgroup.co.uk, including ‘Register’ in the subject line. More is on Facebook and Twitter @foodgov #FSW2012

Review of Scotland’s food safety regime

The Scottish Government has published the Scudamore report, ‘Future arrangements to secure food standards and safety in Scotland’. The report, by an independent review panel set up by Scottish ministers, is now with Scottish Government ministers for consideration.

The review came about after the UK Government decided last year to absorb back into Whitehall departments some of the policy areas overseen in England by the Agency, which is a UK-wide body.

The panel, chaired by the UK’s former Chief Veterinary Officer, Jim Scudamore, considered the feasibility of establishing a dedicated Scottish Food Standards Agency and the merits of establishing a standalone meat inspection delivery service in Scotland.

The FSA Board will discuss the report recommendations in an open Board meeting, and will offer advice to Scottish ministers before they take a decision.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The report is available on the Scottish Government website.
The Food Hygiene Rating Scheme tells consumers about the hygiene standards in the places where they eat out or shop for food. The scheme, an FSA/local authority partnership initiative, is relatively new, but its roll-out across England, Wales and Northern Ireland has gathered momentum over the past few months.

Following launches in Cumbria, in the North West, Wycombe, in the South East, and many other places in between, 275 local authorities now have the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS) in place. This represents about 75% of local authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Many more are preparing to launch and, by the time of the London 2012 Games, the Agency expects the figure to rise to about 94%. Others are due to follow a little later and, by the end of the year, we expect Northern Ireland to join Wales in having national coverage.

This is all great news for consumers! They can already check online to find out about the hygiene standards for almost 250,000 food outlets, and the numbers are set to increase week by week.

The scheme gives consumers greater choice and the power to vote with their feet. But it’s also good news for food businesses. Good performers will be easier to spot.

Look out for the distinctive green and black stickers or check them out at food.gov.uk/ratings.

FURTHER INFORMATION
Play it Safe materials and information can be found on food.gov.uk/olympics.

There’s food hygiene safety in numbers

Food safety campaign will help 2012 visitors and businesses

The Agency’s Play it Safe campaign, which aims to ensure the safety of food bought, cooked and eaten at London 2012, had a high-profile launch on TV and radio and in the press.

Media coverage featured the work of the Food Safety Squad – 10 environmental health officers representing hundreds of others across the UK who will be carrying out additional inspections on food businesses in preparation for the Games.

The next stage of Play it Safe will aim to engage stakeholders, such as trade bodies, tourism associations, local authorities and hotel chains, encouraging them to spread the campaign messages. They’ve been sent a toolkit and the first of a number of newsletters that will provide advice on how to get involved.

Stakeholders are being encouraged to use their Twitter accounts and Facebook pages to drive their followers to the campaign’s Twitter feed @playitsafefood, and the web page food.gov.uk/olympics. Interested groups can also use their newsletters and websites to spread the campaign messages.

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The Agency has published guidance to help meat processors comply with the moratorium on the production of ‘desinewed meat’ (DSM) from cattle, sheep and goat bones, which applies from 28 April 2012. This follows advice from the European Commission that DSM produced by mechanically separating residual meat from animal bones must be regarded as mechanically separated meat. Under European law this cannot be produced from cattle, sheep and goat.

Guidance on glitter

The Agency has produced guidance to help food businesses and consumers use ‘edible’ and ‘non-toxic’ glitters and dusts with food. It is hoped this will dispel the confusion within the baking community about which decorative materials can be used safely on products. The guidance addresses common questions received by the Agency.

‘Change of direction’ for FSA communications

Terrence Collis, who has been FSA Director of Communications since April 2006 is to retire from the Agency at the beginning of June to pursue his activities in the voluntary sector. He will be replaced by the FSA’s Deputy Director of Communications Stephen Humphreys.

Terrence Collis said: ‘I have been active in the British Red Cross and Samaritans for many years and more recently become involved in fostering. It has been a delight to work with so many dedicated colleagues at the FSA but I am keen to spend more time on these activities and so, not without some sadness, will leave the Agency in June.’

Stephen Humphreys, who has been Deputy Director since May 2007, will take up his new post on 1 June. The Deputy Director role will disappear as part of the overall Senior Civil Service reductions made by the FSA.

Stephen Humphreys said: ‘I want to maintain The Food Standards Agency’s commitment to communicate clearly and openly with consumers and stakeholders.’

Guidance on desinewed meat

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Stakeholders will have an opportunity to contribute to the review and a consultation will be issued before further advice is provided to the FSA Board on possible options for managing the food safety risks associated with raw drinking milk and cream.

Review planned on raw milk

The Food Standards Agency is developing plans for a review of the controls governing the sale and marketing of unpasteurised, or raw, drinking milk and cream.

The review will explore options for managing food safety risks associated with raw drinking milk and cream, and consider recent developments in the sale of raw milk, for example its sale over the internet and through vending machines.

It will also take account of the variation in labelling requirements for raw cow’s drinking milk across England, Wales and Northern Ireland and controls for species such as sheep and goat.

Sales of raw drinking milk in Scotland are prohibited.

Stakeholders will have an opportunity to contribute to the review and a consultation will be issued before further advice is provided to the FSA Board on possible options for managing the food safety risks associated with raw drinking milk and cream.

FURTHER INFORMATION

More details are at food.gov.uk

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Guidance will be issued next month on DSM from pig bones and poultry carcasses.

FURTHER INFORMATION

More details on the guidance are at food.gov.uk
The FSA in Northern Ireland has launched Caloriewise, a six-month pilot scheme in which local food businesses will display calorie information on menus for the first time.

Caloriewise will help consumers make more informed choices when eating out.

Research published by the FSA in March 2011, revealed that there is a lack of public knowledge of the recommended calorie intake for maintaining a healthy weight.

Maria Jennings, Head of Dietary Health at the FSA in Northern Ireland, said: ‘The Caloriewise scheme is designed to get people thinking a bit more about their overall calorie intake in a day and encouraging them to make informed choices to keep the calories in check. Food outlets will not only display calorie content for individual items and portions, but will also provide a clear reminder of the recommended daily intake on posters and leaflets.’

Speaking at the launch of the scheme, Health Minister Edwin Poots MLA, said: ‘Protecting public health is my department’s number one priority. I congratulate the Food Standards Agency and the participating local organisations who are working in partnership to deliver real benefits for consumers. I would urge other businesses to pick up this mantle and work with the FSA to have a positive impact on your customers’ health.’

The Caloriewise pilot, which is being trialled by eight local businesses, will run from 1 May to 31 October 2012.

**FURTHER INFORMATION**
More information is available on food.gov.uk.

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In the market for training

The FSA in Scotland held a successful food standards training event for enforcement officers last month.

The workshop was based on an updated version of a training manual developed by FSA in Scotland in conjunction with FSA in Northern Ireland and launched a year ago.

The workshop covered:
- nanotechnology
- protection of consumers from the dangers of counterfeit products
- food information regulation update
- workshop sessions on these topics

Attendees also heard a Scottish Farmers Markets Partnership presentation on the future of farmers’ markets.

**FURTHER INFORMATION**
A food safety guide for businesses selling at farmers’ markets is available on food.gov.uk, as is the training manual.

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FSA cookery show takes the high road

Outdoor cookery demonstrations in Scotland in March? The FSA in Scotland mobile cookery road show sizzled over four days last month, when healthy eating and food safety advice were brought to communities in Oban, Fort William, the Isle of Skye and Inverness.

Guest chef Brian Gunn whipped up six recipes, demonstrating dishes that were healthy and delicious, yet low in salt, sugar and saturated fat. He also explained to visitors to the stall how to prepare and eat food safely in the home.

The FSA in Scotland was joined on the road by Highland and Argyll & Bute councils. Both councils are partners in the Food Hygiene Information Scheme, which advises consumers on how well local food retailers and caterers are performing.

Visit Scotland leaflets also encouraged visitors to look out for the display of a ‘PASS’ certificate on business’s windows, showing they comply with food hygiene law.

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New screening methods developed for GMOs

FSA-funded research has developed nine new tests for use by enforcement laboratories in detecting genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in food or feed. Once successfully validated, the tests will be made available worldwide, to improve the ability of enforcement laboratories to detect the current and next generation of GMOs present in food/feed.

In recent years, an increasing number of countries have adopted labelling policies for genetically modified food. In the European Union (EU), any food or feed product containing a GM ingredient must declare this on the label. Detection of unauthorised GMOs is an increasing problem, for which EU validated methods don’t exist. As well as the nine new assays, a software tool has also been created that optimises the screening of samples for authorised and unauthorised GMOs, saving time and money. A follow-up validation project will compare the performance of a large number of different laboratories in using these methods.

FURTHER INFORMATION
More information is available on food.gov.uk.

Acrylamide advice: no change

The Agency has published results from its latest study of the levels of process contaminants acrylamide and furan in a range of UK foods. In 2002, Swedish studies revealed that high levels of acrylamide formed during the frying or baking of potato or cereal products. This raised worldwide public concern because studies in laboratory animals suggest acrylamide has the potential to cause cancer in humans.

The Agency report found an upward trend in acrylamide levels in processed cereal-based baby foods (excluding rusks), and a reduction in other products, such as pre-cooked French fries, potato products for home cooking and bread during 2007-2011.

The levels of acrylamide and furan reported do not, however, increase concern about the risk to human health and the Agency has not changed its advice to consumers.

The Agency advises that chips should be cooked to a light golden colour. Bread and bread products should also be toasted to the lightest colour possible. The survey was based on samples taken from 248 products sold in the UK.

As with previous years, the survey results for acrylamide and furan will be sent to the European Food Safety Authority for collation, trend analysis and, in the case of furan, a risk assessment.

FURTHER INFORMATION
The acrylamide and furan survey is on food.gov.uk
The Agency website also includes answers to common questions on acrylamide and furan.

FURTHER INFORMATION
The monitoring report is on food.gov.uk

Research assists shellfish harvesters

The Pseudo-nitzschia species of phytoplankton, which can lead to amnesic shellfish poisoning in humans, was found in more than 91% of seawater samples taken in shellfish-producing areas in Scotland during 2011.

In 2010, 90% of samples contained this species. The presence of Pseudo-nitzschia does not, however, always lead to shellfish poisoning in people. Further study is required to find out why.

The Monitoring Programme for the Presence of Toxin Producing Plankton in Shellfish Production Areas in Scotland also tested for Alexandrium spp. (leads to paralytic shellfish poisoning) and Dinophysis spp. (leads to diarrhetic shellfish poisoning).

FURTHER INFORMATION
The monitoring report is on food.gov.uk.
food.gov.uk is the Food Standards Agency’s main website. It contains the latest Agency news, food alerts, consultations, science, research and regulatory information.

Bite is the Food Standards Agency’s new quarterly magazine. It provides an in-depth look at challenging policy issues and includes stakeholder discussion and opinion.

Newsletter of the Food Standards Agency

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