



organic food - fact or fiction?

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The FSAI's Consultative Council recently hosted an open meeting to discuss attitudes and findings in relation to organic food. Over 100 people attended the 'Organic Food - Fact or Fiction?' event in Dublin, where the Food Safety Consultative Council released details of research which highlighted consumer understanding of the perceived benefits of organic food. The open meeting provided an opportunity for a robust discussion on the organic food debate whilst also giving the general public an opportunity to see the workings of the Consultative Council.

Speakers at the event included Ms Clodagh McKenna, chef, media presenter and food consultant; Ms Siobhán Morris, organic food consultant; Dr Con O'Rourke, Plant Scientist and Dr Mary Flynn, Chief Specialist, Public Health Nutrition, FSAI. Delegates at the meeting heard that research shows that while 80% of people surveyed understood the benefits of organic food to be free from pesticides and chemicals, some 32% felt organic produce is a healthier option and only 15% believed that organic food is 'full of flavour and taste'. The survey also showed that more than half

of Irish consumers have 'never' purchased organic food. The number one reason cited for this was cost, with 54% believing organic food was too expensive.

The Consultative Council acts as a forum for debate on food safety issues and provides advice to the FSAI Board. In practice, it gives members of the public and the industry the opportunity to highlight issues of importance or concern to them in relation to food which can be placed on the agenda for the FSAI to consider.

The organic food debate and its tangible benefits are highly topical issues, given that the world organic market has been growing by 20% a year since the early 1990s. Ireland is no exception and future projections for further annual growth range between 10-50%. In this context, it was timely to debate the potential health, nutritional and safety values of these products which are becoming more widely available. The open meeting allowed both sides of the organic debate to put forward their current thinking and views on the pros and cons of organic food. The debate should also enable people to make more informed choices when purchasing organic food.

Pictured at the FSCC open meeting are (l-r): Ms Clodagh McKenna, chef, media presenter and food consultant; Ms Veronica Campbell, Campbell Bewley Group and Chair of the Consultative Council; Dr Con O'Rourke, Plant Scientist; Dr Mary Flynn, Chief Specialist, Public Health Nutrition, FSAI and Ms Siobhán Morris, organic food consultant.



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ireland's national list of health claims

Regulation (EC) No. 1924/2006 governing the use of nutrition and health claims on foods marketed in Europe was introduced into law on 1 July 2007. Under this Regulation all claims have to comply with the general principles that they are not false, ambiguous or misleading, are well understood by the average consumer and are scientifically substantiated.

Under Article 13 of the Regulation, Member States were responsible for providing the European Commission with national lists of health claims based on scientific evidence of effectiveness, together with conditions of use applying to them, by 31 January 2008. From June to December 2007, the FSAI invited industry to submit Article 13 health claims appearing on the labelling, presentation or advertisement of their food products via an online submission process. These submissions formed the basis of the Irish national list of health claims which was submitted to the European Commission on 31 January 2008. Each claim on the list will be assessed by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) for inclusion on an approved list of health claims for the European Community. The claims on this final approved EU list will be the only health claims allowed on food products from 31 January 2010 onwards.

There are 314 claims on the Irish national list of health claims. All submissions received were checked for completeness and accuracy. Food business operators have also been contacted to alert them in instances where submissions were deficient and were given the opportunity to resubmit any missing information. All claims submitted via the FSAI submission process were forwarded to the Commission. However, it is important to note that the claims on the national list have not been endorsed or approved in any way by the FSAI. Until adoption of the European Community list, businesses must ensure that they comply with current legislation.

The European Commission will consolidate the lists submitted by Member States which will form the basis for EFSA's assessment. By consolidating the lists the Commission will ensure that EFSA is only consulted on valid Article 13 health claims. Consequently, claims requiring detailed scientific dossiers (e.g. medicinal claims, reduction of disease risk claims or claims referring to children's development and health) will not be included on the consolidated list which will be sent to EFSA.

The Irish national list of health claims can be accessed on our website, see: <http://tinyurl.com/2hhupw>.

eu guidance on implementation of regulation 1924/2006

The Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health published the guidance document, '*Guidance on the Implementation of Regulation 1924/2006 on Nutrition and Health Claims Made on Foods*' on 14 December last. The document is intended to assist interested stakeholders to better understand and apply correctly and uniformly the provisions of the Regulation. Nevertheless, it has no formal legal status and in the event of a dispute ultimate responsibility for the interpretation of the law lies with the European Court of Justice.

The document covers:

- The interaction of Regulation 1924/2006 with other Community legislation
- Comparative claims
- Classification of claims, including borderline cases between 'function claims' and 'reduction of disease risk claims'.

Amongst other advice, the following is a brief summary of some of the guidance presented in the document.

- In making comparative claims, these should be with foods belonging to a group of foods that are 'similar' in terms of nutritional content. Provided that it is representative of the products of its category, a specific branded product may be used as a term for comparison.
- Nutrition claims convey only factual information e.g. contains vitamin C, whereas health claims are descriptive or indicative of functionality or an implied effect on health. Thus, for example, 'contains antioxidants', 'contains probiotics/prebiotics', are considered to be health claims whereas 'contains lycopene', 'contains lutein' are considered to be nutrition claims.

- When a claim mentions a disease risk factor generally recognised by scientific evidence it should be considered as a 'reduction of disease risk claim' only when a reduction of that risk factor is stated, suggested or implied. Other cases should be considered as 'function claims' so, for example, 'maintains (normal vital function of the body)' would be a function claim, whereas 'lowers (naming risk factor)' would be regarded as a reduction of disease risk claim.
- Health claims solely referring to the development and health of children, and where the scientific substantiation is only valid for children, should be considered as Article 14 claims. In addition, health claims used on products intended exclusively for children, like follow-on formulae and cereal-based baby foods shall also be considered as Article 14 claims.

Please see our website (<http://tinyurl.com/ywoga8>) for a copy of the Guidance document.



information resources, 2007

An important function of the FSAI is to provide information on food safety to interested parties, including members of the food industry, staff of the official agencies, consumers and the media. The FSAI advice-line, website and information centre play a large part in facilitating this exchange of information, providing up-to-date information on a wide range of food safety issues.

advice-line

The advice-line operates from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday and is staffed by trained advisors and food scientists who aim to provide information in response to queries as quickly as possible. In 2007, a total of 7,747 queries, an average of 638 calls per month, were logged by our advice-line staff, representing a slight increase from 2006. It is a popular source of information on a variety of food safety related issues such as legislation, labelling, additives, starting up a new food business and training, as well as representing an avenue for consumers to report complaints about unfit food or unhygienic food premises.

The majority of calls to the advice-line in 2007 were from the food industry (34%), closely followed by consumers (30%). Members of the food industry sought information mainly on legislation, labelling, standards and HACCP. Consumers mostly called to complain about food and food businesses, either in relation to poor hygiene standards, food unfit for human consumption, or suspected food poisoning. Complaints about poor hygiene standards tend to focus mainly on inappropriate handling of food by staff preparing and serving food, and cross contamination. Consumers also complained about misleading labelling and in general are becoming more aware of what should and should not appear on a label. These complaints are referred to environmental health officers who investigate them on behalf of the FSAI. Other types of callers to the advice-line in 2007 are shown in Figure 1.

The variety of requests to the advice-line over the course of the year is outlined in Figure 2. Information requests (mostly requests for FSAI publications) and consumer complaints represented the most popular categories of calls in 2007. Other types of requests included advice on starting up a new food business; information on standards and best practice; nutrition, including food supplements, vitamins and salt; and training, which is a legal requirement for anyone working with food.

Our ever popular report 'The Labelling of Food in Ireland' was updated and published in October 2007. There have been many significant changes to the labelling legislation since the publication of the initial report, in

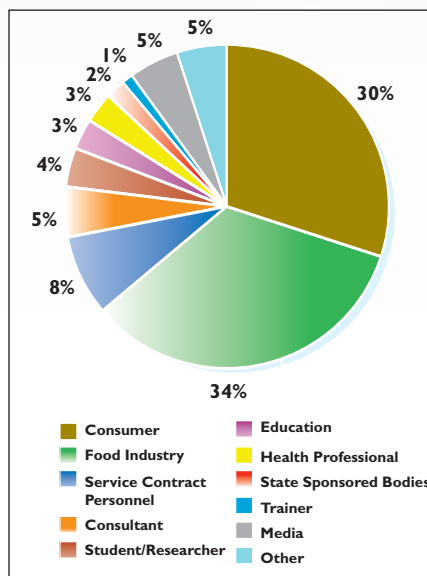


Figure 1: Categories of callers to the advice-line in 2007

particular the requirement to list all ingredients on a label, including 12 recognised allergens. Since queries on the labelling of foods is the third most popular category of request to the advice-line, this is an invaluable resource.

Requests for information on starting a food business make up 8% of all requests received and as a result a business start-up pack aimed at five different food sectors was published in 2004, and subsequently updated in July 2007 to take into account various new pieces of legislation. A business start-up factsheet and website section are also available to ensure that the information is accessible to the broadest audience possible.

The advice-line can be contacted by calling 1890 336677 (Lo-call) or emailing info@fsai.ie.

website

The FSAI website, www.fsai.ie, provides a valuable source of up-to-date information for a wide audience of people.

During 2007, 113,926 people visited the website (absolute unique visitors), 308,963 visits took place and 859,524 pages were viewed. The most popular sections included the home page, publications, legislation (especially the compendium and the new food law page), enforcement and industry. It is interesting to note that three of the top six pages viewed during 2007 related to legislation.

Visitors came from 193 countries, with just over 72% of

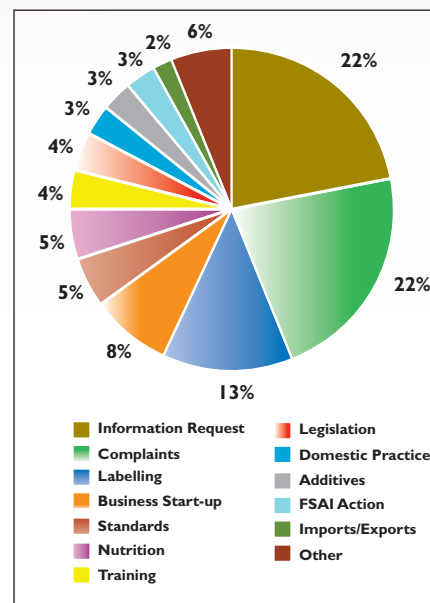


Figure 2: Types of requests received by the advice-line in 2007

visits from Ireland and over 7.5% from the United Kingdom. The majority of visits to the website (46.96%), were directed from the Google search engine or came to our site directly (36.86%). The remainder came from smaller search engines or links from other websites, e.g. the Europa website, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and the Relay Research site.

information centre

The Food Safety Information Centre, located at our offices on Lower Abbey Street, contains a wide range of books, journals, videos and online databases related to food safety. The Centre is open to staff of government agencies, the food industry, researchers and the general public, preferably by appointment, to ensure that the appropriate assistance is provided and the required information is available on visiting. Our library catalogue is available online at: <http://tinyurl.com/2dw4pr>

Pictured in the FSAI Information Centre are Alan Carberry, consumer, with Bernadette Colley, Library Assistant, FSAI.



food industry delivers on salt reductions

The FSAI is charged with working with the food industry (manufacturers, retailers, caterers, etc.) to achieve gradual, sustained and universal reductions in the salt content of processed and prepared foods. The long term goal is to reduce the average population intake of salt from 10g a day to 6g a day by 2010, through partnership with the food industry and State bodies charged with communicating the salt and health message to consumers.

Each year the FSAI and the Public Analyst's Laboratory (PAL) in Galway monitor certain food categories e.g. bread, for salt content. Generally, initial monitoring of a food category will be followed by discussions with that food industry sector about salt reduction. These discussions lead to salt reduction commitments which are enacted in a sustained and gradual manner as recommended by the FSAI Scientific Committee in its 2005 report, *Salt and Health: Review of the Scientific Evidence and Recommendations for Public Policy in Ireland*. Following salt reduction the food group is again monitored for salt levels, usually two to three years after work starts. The distributions of salt in foods in the food category are then compared to determine if salt levels are decreasing and whether the food industry sector as a whole is meeting its commitments.

The monitoring programme is designed to study the salt content of a particular food category. Hence, single samples of foods are taken and the FSAI attempt to sample most products on the Irish market within a food category. Because single samples are taken, the studies do not have the ability to resolve batch to batch variation in salt levels for single products and therefore the relative differences between the salt content of foods within the same food category cannot be compared.

In 2007, the FSAI and Galway PAL studied breakfast cereals and yellow fat spreads and butter on the Irish market. The breakfast cereal study was a follow-up study to a previous survey conducted in 2004. The yellow fat spread and butter study was an initial survey to examine the salt content of foods in that group with a view to commencing discussions with that industry sector.

breakfast cereal study

The results of the breakfast cereal study are shown in Figure 1 where the 2007 results are compared with the 2004 results. The same overall pattern of the sodium content of products in this food group was similar in the two studies. However, it is noticeable that there was a decrease in the percentage of products at the higher sodium concentrations, above 0.6mg/100g (1.5g salt per 100g cereal). More detailed analysis of the findings, shown in Table 1, demonstrates that the statistically significant sodium decreases have occurred in the cornflake and bran based cereal categories. The industry undertakings have been to reduce sodium on a sales weighted basis and hence it is clear that they have achieved this by reducing sodium in cereals that have a greater market share. Overall, the average sodium content of the breakfast cereal food group in the 2007 study was only around 74% of the average sodium content of the breakfast cereal food group in the 2004 study. This is a statistically significant finding. The 26% average sodium reduction is a great achievement for the breakfast cereal industry and in line with its self assessed progress.

For 2008 onwards, the FSAI would like to see continued salt reduction in breakfast cereals because they are consumed by a large proportion of the population. However, we would like to see salt reduction across a broader range of products. Our studies have shown that there has been no statistically significant decrease in the

sodium content of the rice based cereals to date. Therefore, we would like the breakfast cereal industry to pay particular attention to salt reductions in rice based cereals as these also include many products consumed by children.

yellow fat spread and butter study

The results of the yellow fat spread and butter study are shown in Figure 2. Seventy five samples were taken across the Irish retail market. The average sodium content of yellow fat spreads was 0.55mg/100g (1.34g salt per 100g spread). The average sodium content of salted butter was 0.63mg/100g (1.6g salt per 100g butter). In March 2006, the UK Foods Standards Agency set the following targets for salt reduction in these foods by 2010: salted butter 0.67mg sodium/100g average, spreads 0.60mg sodium/100g average. In the spreads and the salted butter food categories the average sodium concentrations have already reached these targets. For this the industry should be congratulated. However, for spreads, the FSAI study demonstrated that 18 of 48 products (37%) were below 0.5mg sodium/100g. The study also demonstrated no correlation between sodium concentration and fat content. Hence, it is reasonable to expect that by 2010 the spreads industry could achieve a maximum level of 0.5mg sodium per 100g spread and still produce product that is acceptable to the consumer as demonstrated by the 18 products already at or below this level. Similarly for salted butter, 5 of the 20 products sampled were at or below a sodium concentration of 0.55mg per 100g butter. Consequently, it is also reasonable to expect that by 2010 the butter industry could achieve a maximum level of 0.55mg sodium per 100g butter and still produce a product that is acceptable to the consumer. The FSAI has been in contact with Food and Drinks Industry Ireland (FDII), who support the salt reduction programme, with a view to opening discussions with the spreads and butter industry on this matter in 2008.

Overall, it is reassuring that the salt content of foods continues to decrease. The food industry is demonstrating its support for the salt reduction programme in delivering these reductions and is commended for this activity. With the 2010 target for a 6g per day maximum adult salt intake just under three years away we still have a long way to go and gradual, sustained reductions in salt must continue to be made by the food industry in the interest of public health.



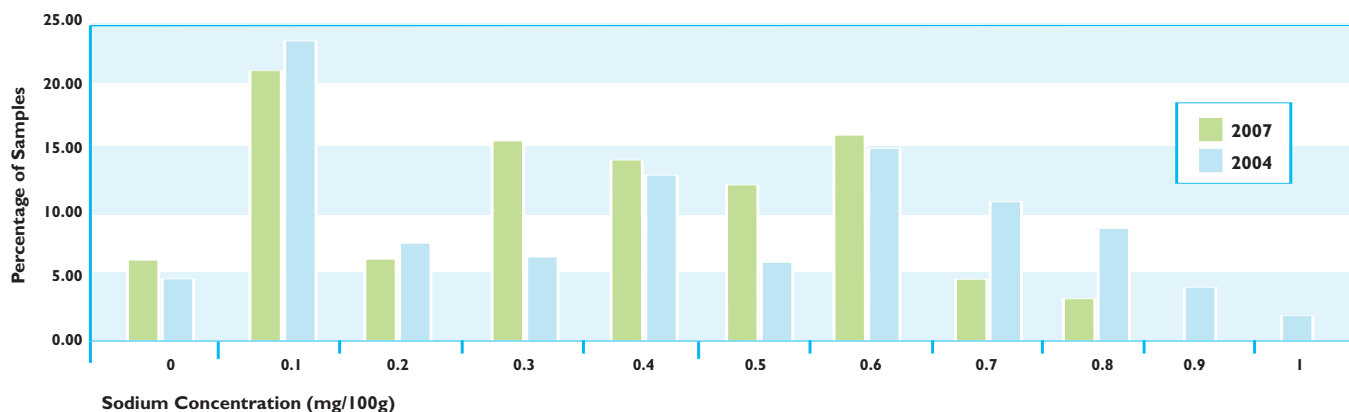


Figure 1 - Sodium content of breakfast cereal, 2007 compared to 2004

Table 1 - More detailed analysis of the findings of the breakfast cereal study

Category	Average sodium mg/ 100g (2003)	Average sodium mg/ 100g (2007)	2007 average as a % of the 2003 average	std dev (2003)	std dev (2007)	n (2003)	n (2007)	t-test (alpha= 0.05)
Bran Based Cereal	0.56	0.41	73.2%	0.175	0.156	9	20	0.021
Cornflake Based Cereal	0.71	0.55	77.5%	0.133	0.1	9	15	0.005
Adult Sport and Diet cereal	0.63	0.51	81.0%	0.097	0.179	6	6	0.098
Crunch/Cluster Cereal	0.26	0.13	50.0%	0.195	0.144	7	10	0.088
Rice based cereal	0.51	0.49	96.1%	0.168	0.214	10	10	0.408
Wheat Biscuit Cereal	0.27	0.26	96.3%	0.026	0.046	5	10	0.386
Wholewheat cereal	0.29	0.28	96.6%	0.285	0.193	5	10	0.168
Museli	0.106	0.05	47.2%	0.12	0.067	14	23	0.061
Porridge	0.02	0.02	100%	0.038	0.033	7	13	0.073
Total	0.38	0.28	73.7%	0.28	0.23	72	117	0.007
Salt levels (g/100g)	0.97	0.71						

Bold items show statistical significant differences in the means 2003-2007 at the 95% confidence level (t-test two tail assuming unequal variance).

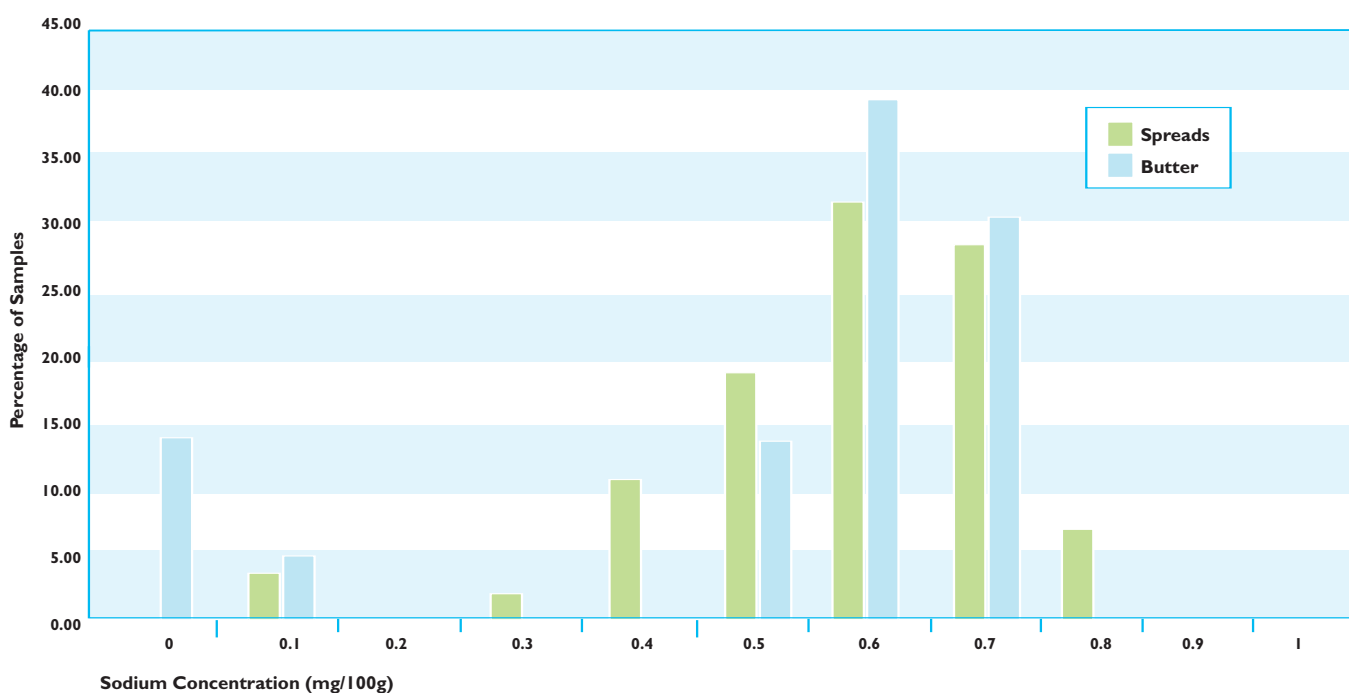


Figure 2 - Sodium content of yellow fat spreads and butter, 2007

legislation update

irish legislation

food safety authority of ireland act, 1998 (amendment of first and second schedules) order, 2007 (s.i. no. 839 of 2007)

S.I. No. 839 of 2007, signed on 19 December 2007, amends the First and Second Schedules of the Food Safety Authority of Ireland Act, 1998. The FSAI is responsible for the enforcement of food legislation which is either:

- (a) specified in Part I, II or III of the FSAI Act or
- (b) an Act or Statutory Instrument made under the European Communities Act, 1972, and deemed to be food legislation.

The purpose of S.I. No. 839 of 2007 is to:

- Amend Part I and II of the First Schedule to the FSAI Act 1998 with the addition of certain S.I.'s and EC Regulations and the deletion of others which have been revoked or repealed.
- Amend the Second Schedule to the Act as follows:
 - inclusion of The Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority, thereby making it an official agency of the FSAI
 - substitution of the "Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food" for the "Minister for Agriculture and Food", and the "National Consumer Agency" for the "Director of Consumer Affairs".
 - deletion of the "Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources".

infant formulae and follow-on formulae

The Department of Health and Children has published the European Communities (Infant Formulae and Follow-On Formulae) Regulations, 2007 (S.I. No. 852 of 2007). This S.I. gives effect to Commission Directive 2006/141/EC on the compositional, labelling, marketing and informational requirements for infant formulae and

follow-on formulae intended for infants and young children, and it also gives further effect to Council Directive 92/52/EEC on infant formulae and follow-on formulae intended for export to third countries.

These new Regulations revoke the European Communities (Infant Formulae and Follow-on Formulae) (Amendment) Regulations, 2007 (S.I. No. 242 of 2007) and provide for the transitional arrangements in Commission Directive 2006/141/EC under which certain provisions of the European Communities (Infant Formulae and Follow-on Formulae) Regulations, 2004 (S.I. No. 242 of 2004) are revoked, while the remainder will continue to remain in effect until 31 December 2009.

Trade in products not complying with Directive 2006/141/EC will be prohibited from 31 December 2009. (Note the new requirements set out in Article 7 (1) and (2) of Directive 2006/141/EC will not apply to dietary foods for special medical purposes intended specifically for infants, referred to in point 4 of the Annex to Directive 1999/21/EC, until 1 January 2012.)

marketing standards for eggs

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has published the European Communities (Marketing Standards for Eggs) Regulations, 2007 (S.I. No. 810 of 2007). This S.I. revokes the European Communities (Marketing Standards for Eggs) Regulations, 2005 and gives effect to Council Regulation (EC) 1028/2006 and its implementing rules, Regulation (EC) No. 557/2007 and Regulation (EC) No. 1336/2007.

The Regulations concern such matters as grading and labelling of eggs, standards for free range egg production and authorisation of egg packing centres. Authorised officers are appointed by the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Electronic copies of the Statutory Instruments can be accessed on our website at: www.fsai.ie/legislation.

european legislation

fruit and vegetable sector

Commission Regulation (EC) No. 1580/2007 of 21 December 2007, laying down implementing rules of Council Regulations (EC) No. 2200/96, (EC) No. 2201/96 and (EC) No. 1182/2007 in the fruit and vegetable sector was published on 31 December 2007 in the European Official Journal (OJ L350, p1, 31/12/2007).

The Regulation applies since 1 January 2008. The previous implementing rules covering the fruit and vegetables sector were contained in a large number of Regulations, many of which have been amended several times. Those implementing rules needed to be changed as a result of the modifications made to the fruit and vegetables regime by Regulation (EC) No. 1182/2007 which laid down specific rules as regards the fruit and vegetable sector. In the interests of clarity, implementing rules are now incorporated into Commission Regulation (EC) No. 1580/2007.

As well as detailing the labelling requirements for fruit and vegetables, the Regulation also lists the labelling requirements for sales packages containing a mix of fruit or vegetables not covered by Community marketing standards. It also sets out the procedure for conformity checks for fruit and vegetables for export or import as well as internal trade.

future challenges paper, 2009-2014

The Health and Consumer Protection Directorate-General (DG SANCO) of the European Commission has published a 'Future Challenges Paper: 2009-2014'. The paper provides a 'draft vision' of the main challenges that DG SANCO may face in the lifespan of the next Commission. Core issues such as governance, globalisation, changing society and confidence were looked at in a series of workshops, and outcomes of those meetings are reflected in the paper. The paper also looks at possible influences on the environment which will evolve in the coming 10-20 years, ways to handle different future scenarios and how DG Sanco could prepare itself pro-actively.

The *Future Challenges Paper: 2009-2014*, as well as an information leaflet describing the project, can be found on the Europa website, see: <http://tinyurl.com/yv8zr6>.



guidance and training in determining product shelf-life

Food products which, from a microbiological point of view, are highly perishable and are therefore likely after a short period of time to constitute a risk to public health must have a use-by date to indicate shelf-life. The use-by date will indicate the date up until which the product can be safely consumed. Therefore, the accurate determination of product use-by date is an integral component of food safety.

In recognising the importance of shelf-life to food safety and in response to many industry requests for information, the FSAI published *Guidance Note No. 18: Determination of Product Shelf-Life* in 2005. Just recently, the FSAI has launched an extensive advertising campaign to highlight the importance of proper food labelling and in particular proper shelf-life declarations.

Also this year, food safety trainers from the Ashtown Food Research Centre, Teagasc (formerly The National Food Centre) and the FSAI developed and launched a two day FETAC certified course to

compliment Guidance Note No. 18. The course is designed to give participants a greater understanding of the factors affecting shelf-life and the techniques available to ensure compliance with current food safety and hygiene legislation. The course aims to provide technical specialists in the food industry with the knowledge to establish a scientifically based shelf-life for food safety.

For further information on shelf-life and copies of Guidance Note No. 18 please visit our website at www.fsai.ie or call our advice-line on 1890 336677. For further information on the FETAC certified course, please contact the Ashtown Food Research Centre, Teagasc at 01 8059520 (Course Administrator) or email mhennessy@nfc.teagasc.ie. For booking details please see www.teagasc.ie/ashtown/training.

The next course is scheduled for 16 and 17 April 2008, in the Ashtown Food Research Centre.

efsa call for expressions of interest for membership of scientific panels



The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) is the keystone of European Union risk assessment regarding food and feed safety. In close collaboration with national authorities and in open consultation with its stakeholders, EFSA provides independent scientific advice and clear communication on existing and emerging risks.

The authority has set up a selection procedure that aims to draw up a reserve list of scientific experts to be considered for the membership of two scientific panels:

- The **Panel on food additives and nutrient sources added to food**, which will deal with questions of safety in the use of food additives and nutrient sources with associated subjects concerning the safety of other deliberately added substances to food.

- The **Panel on food contact materials, enzymes, flavourings and processing aids**, which will deal with questions of safety in the use of flavourings, processing aids, food enzymes and materials in contact with food; and with questions related to the safety of processes.

These two Panels will replace the current scientific Panel of food additives, flavourings, processing aids and materials in contact with food (AFC Panel).

The required expertise is as follows: toxicology and risk assessment, chemistry, biochemistry, food consumption and exposure assessment, safety and bioavailability of nutrient sources, food technology and microbiology within the area of the Panels as described above.

The closing date for application is 17 March 2008.

For more information, see the EFSA website at: <http://tinyurl.com/2fotf6>.

listeria monocytogenes

In January, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) updated its advice on the risks in ready-to-eat (RTE) foods from *Listeria monocytogenes*. (See: <http://tinyurl.com/28q5a8>.) Listeriosis is a rare but potentially lethal foodborne infection caused by *Listeria monocytogenes*. Foods associated with transmission of listeriosis are mostly ready-to-eat foods that support the growth of *L. monocytogenes*. Sections of the population that are most at risk are immuno-compromised groups such as the elderly and also pregnant women.

In its advice to industry, EFSA identified the key areas for attention as food packaging and preparation practices in the food chain (such as the slicing of RTE meat products), storage temperatures, general industrial good hygiene practices and the education and training of food handlers. Consumers were advised to continue to observe recommended storage temperatures and keep food appropriately chilled at all times, and take note of the shelf-life of food in their refrigerators. Good food hygiene and preparation principles also play an important role in the prevention of *Listeria* and other food-borne infections.

The number of cases of listeriosis is small in comparison to cases of foodborne illness caused by other bacteria such as Salmonella and Campylobacter. However, provisional data for Ireland from the Health Protection Surveillance Centre have shown a three fold increase in 2007 (21 cases) when compared with 2006 (7 cases). Likewise, across Europe, the number of cases of listeriosis is increasing.

In the European Union, there are maximum safety tolerance levels for *Listeria monocytogenes* in food products, i.e. absence in 25g or 100cfu/g on products placed on the market during their shelf-life (See: Commission Regulation (EC) No. 2073/2005 (<http://tinyurl.com/2cxkar>) amended by Commission Regulation (EC) No. 1441/2007 (<http://tinyurl.com/24fu8w>)).

Adherence to these microbiological criteria leads to very low numbers of listeriosis cases as most are linked with foods markedly above the 100cfu/g limit.



animal cloning

The European Commission requested advice on the issue of cloning in February 2007 from the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and the European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies (EGE). These bodies have recently published reports relating to cloned animals.

EFSA issued a draft Opinion for public consultation on 11 January 2008, on the implications of animal cloning for food safety, animal health and welfare and the environment. The draft EFSA Opinion notes that on the basis of the available scientific evidence it is not likely that food from cloned animals or their offspring would introduce any new food safety issues compared to food derived from conventionally bred animals. However, it recognises that uncertainties exist, particularly due to limited data, and acknowledges that there are health and welfare issues for cloned animals. Work on this Opinion should be complete by May 2008. (See the EFSA website at: <http://tinyurl.com/2u8vgc>.)

On 16 January, the EGE published an Opinion that questions the ethics of using cloned animals in food production. That Opinion also sets out certain criteria that should be considered where cloned animals and their offspring are to be used in food production. To view the Opinion, see: <http://tinyurl.com/2cvm8g>.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the US has expressed a favourable Opinion regarding the use of cloned animals for food production. The FDA examined information on cattle, pigs and goats and did not consider it necessary to require specific labelling as it considers that food derived from these sources is no different from food derived from conventionally bred animals. At this time, the FDA recommends that

food from clones of species other than cattle, pigs and goats (e.g. sheep) should not be introduced into the food supply. (See the FDA website at: <http://tinyurl.com/yw2v2n>.)

Research into animal cloning has been ongoing for a number of years in almost 40 countries including the USA, China, Japan and Argentina. New Zealand and Australia have also indicated that they have no safety concerns with food from cloned animals or their offspring.

what is animal cloning?

Animal cloning is a form of animal reproduction that does not require the union of a sperm and an egg. The most common animal cloning technique is referred to as somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT) where the nucleus of an immature egg cell is replaced with that of a cell from a body part (somatic cell) such as an ear, leg, nose, etc. Once nuclear replacement has been completed, the reconstructed embryo is artificially activated and the developing embryo transferred to a surrogate mother, where the foetus develops. In essence, the nuclear DNA of a cell that has been performing as part of an ear, leg or nose etc., is artificially reprogrammed to be able to develop into a complete animal.

Conventional breeding and assisted reproduction has been used for some time to improve the value of domestic animals for the benefit of mankind. Such improvements are evident in current food production with high yielding milk cows, as well as more efficient meat producing cattle, pigs, sheep and poultry. However, conventional breeding is relatively time consuming and limited in that desirable traits can be difficult to transfer between related breeds or be diminished or diluted out in subsequent generations. Cloning however, allows for the reproduction of

genetically identical animals that have all the genetic characteristics of the parent.

Plants have been produced by cloning for many years by taking a small part of a plant and growing another one from it and this has been done on a larger commercial scale for some time with some fruit and vegetables, for example bananas. The technology has more recently been applied to animals (since 1997 with the birth of Dolly the sheep at the Roslin Institute in Edinburgh, Scotland).

food from cloned animals

Food from cloned animals or their offspring is not on sale in Ireland, or anywhere in the EU at present. In the US there has been a voluntary moratorium on the sale of such products since July 2001. There is no information suggesting that products from cloned animals would be on the market in other parts of the world.

Food from cloned animals may however appear on certain markets within a short number of years. The prohibitive cost of producing cloned animals means that only the offspring of cloned animals will be used in food production.

At present there are no specific tests that can reliably distinguish between food from cloned animals and food from their non-cloned counterparts. However, genetic testing, similar to that used in GMO testing, may be adapted to identify genetically identical individuals.

While not governed by specific legislation yet, food from cloned animals would likely fall under the novel food Regulation (EC No. 258/97) whereby the process of cloning itself could be considered novel. Whether food from the offspring of cloned animals would be considered novel or not is still under debate.

labelling enforcement working group

The principal function of food labelling is to inform consumers of the properties of pre-packaged food. The fundamental rule of the labelling of foodstuffs is that consumers should not be misled. Detailed labelling of a product educates consumers as to the exact nature and characteristics of the foodstuff and enables them to make a more informed choice. The FSAI has overall responsibility for the enforcement of the general and

nutrition labelling legislation in collaboration with its official enforcement agencies.

In 2007, the FSAI established a cross agency working group to review the enforcement of food labelling Regulations in Ireland. Representatives on this group include staff from the Health Service Executive, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority and the Local Authorities. The objectives of

the working group include identifying priority labelling legislation for enforcement, development of agency reporting systems on labelling enforcement, identification of agency training needs and identification of gaps/overlaps in the service contract. It is envisaged that an annual labelling programme will be established which will focus on specific food types and the labelling legislation which applies to that food type.

european zoonoses report 2006

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) in conjunction with the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) has recently launched a report on trends and sources of zoonoses, zoonotic agents, antimicrobial resistance and foodborne outbreaks in the European Union (EU) in 2006. The report contains information from 24 Member States, including Ireland, and six countries outside the EU.

Despite a small decrease in cases observed in 2006 as compared to 2005, campylobacteriosis remained the most frequently reported zoonotic disease in humans in the EU with 175,561 reported confirmed cases in 2006. Salmonellosis was the second most commonly recorded zoonosis accounting for 160,649 confirmed human cases. It was noted that the incidence of salmonellosis has decreased over the past years, and in the last three years this decrease has been statistically significant.

In foodstuffs, the highest proportion of *Campylobacter* positive samples was reported for fresh poultry meat, where on average 35% of samples were found positive. *Campylobacter* was also commonly found in live poultry, pigs and cattle. Of particular concern is the high level of resistance to ciprofloxacin observed in animal and food isolates, ranging from 30.6% to 56.7%. Ciprofloxacin is an antibiotic commonly used to treat human campylobacteriosis.

Salmonella was most often found in fresh poultry and pig meat where proportions of positive samples, on average, of 5.6% and 1.0% were detected, respectively. The *Salmonella* prevalence in flocks of egg laying hens and their breeding flocks has decreased significantly at EU level, possibly indicating the success of the control measures implemented in this sector.

The number of listeriosis cases has significantly increased over the past five years and in 2006 a total of 1,583 human cases were reported. Listeriosis is an important food-borne zoonosis due to the severity of the disease and high mortality rate. In 2006, the reported mortality rate was 14.2% of food-borne listeriosis outbreak cases. *Listeria monocytogenes* was most often reported above the legal safety limit in ready-to-eat fishery products, followed by cheeses and other ready-to-eat products.

The reported incidence of VTEC (Verotoxigenic *E. coli*) infection decreased, but the disease still accounted for 4,916 human cases in 2006. VTEC was reported mainly from cattle, pigs and products thereof.

Salmonella was once again the main cause of reported foodborne outbreaks in the EU but for the first time, foodborne viruses were the second most frequent cause. The number of viral outbreaks is assumed to have been severely underreported in the previous years.

Given the increased incidence of campylobacteriosis in recent years, the 2006 report contained a special focus on control strategies. Six Member States and one non-Member State have formal control strategies in place, while other countries reported ad-hoc interventions at various points along the food chain. In general, the control strategies are similar at farm level (with a focus on enhanced biosecurity), whereas at slaughter, retail and consumer level they are somewhat differently constructed.

The report also provides data on other zoonotic agents such as *Mycobacterium bovis*, *Brucella*, *Yersinia*, *Trichinella*, *Echinococcus* and *Toxoplasma*. For the full report see the EFSA website at: <http://tinyurl.com/ys3lfn>.



The following Regulations have been introduced over the last few months in Ireland:

S.I. No. 756 of 2007 European Communities (Foot and Mouth Disease) (Restriction on Imports from Cyprus) Regulations, 2007

S.I. No. 763 of 2007 European Communities (Foot and Mouth Disease) (Restriction on Imports from the United Kingdom) (No. 2) (Second Amendment) Regulations, 2007

S.I. No. 808 of 2007 European Communities (Labelling, Presentation and Advertising of Foodstuffs) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations, 2007

S.I. No. 810 of 2007 European Communities (Marketing Standards for Eggs) Regulations, 2007

S.I. No. 814 of 2007 European Communities (Foot and Mouth Disease) (Restriction on Imports from the United Kingdom) (No. 2) (Fourth Amendment) Regulations, 2007

S.I. No. 817 of 2007 European Communities (Pesticide Residues) (Amendment) (No. 3) Regulations, 2007

S.I. No. 839 of 2007 Food Safety Authority of Ireland Act, 1998 (Amendment of First and Second Schedules) Order, 2007

S.I. No. 852 of 2007 European Communities (Infant Formulae and Follow-On Formulae) Regulations, 2007

S.I. No. 861 of 2007 Animal Remedies (Poisons Act, 1961) Regulations, 2007

S.I. No. 2 of 2008 European Communities (Foot and Mouth Disease) (Restriction on Imports from Cyprus) (Amendment) Regulations, 2008

S.I. No. 3 of 2008 European Communities (Foot and Mouth Disease) (Restriction on Imports from the United Kingdom) (No. 2) Regulations, 2008

S.I. No. 7 of 2008 European Communities (Avian Influenza) (Precautionary Measures) Regulations, 2008

supervisory arrangements

Following the introduction of the 'hygiene package' legislation in January 2006, supervisory arrangements in a range of food establishment types including cold stores/distribution centres, cutting plants, composite product plants and dairy plants etc. were reviewed. The review, which commenced in late 2006 and continued throughout 2007, aimed to minimise dual supervision (i.e. supervision by more than one official agency) and achieve a more consistent approach to the supervision of different establishment types. The FSAI met with all agencies initially in October 2006 to establish the process of reviewing supervision. At this preliminary meeting, the group reviewed and clarified the hygiene legislation that applied to certain food

establishment types and also considered those establishments which lacked clarity as to who the appropriate supervising agency should be.

Following the introduction of some amendments to national legislation allowing official agencies to enforce Regulation 853/2004, the next stage was to agree which agency should supervise which establishment type. To progress this, the FSAI circulated a survey on supervisory issues in March 2007. The aim of the survey was to ascertain the number of establishments in the various categories and which establishments needed to be transferred between official agencies. A number of meetings were held both with

individual agencies and all agencies to agree the criteria upon which supervision by an official agency is based and the transfer mechanism that would take place for these establishments if supervision was to change.

At a cross agency meeting in November 2007, the FSAI agreed the supervisory criteria and transfer protocol with all official agencies. The transfer of establishments between official agencies will take place over the coming weeks. The transfer of 'butcher shops' and 'small poultry plants' will take place at a later stage when the necessary national legislation is put in place. Further consideration will also be required on the issue of fish retail/wholesale establishments.

enforcements orders, 2007

In 2007, a total of 58 Enforcement Orders were served by official agencies under the Food Safety Authority of Ireland Act, 1998, for breaches in food safety legislation. This is an increase of 57% when compared with 2006, and an increase of 35% from 2005. It is the highest number of Enforcement Orders served since 2004, reversing the downward trend in enforcements apparent over the last number of years (Table 1).

Between 1 January and 31 December 2007, enforcement officers served 37 Closure Orders, six Improvement Orders and 15 Prohibition Orders on food businesses throughout the country. This compares with 27 Closure Orders, seven Improvement Orders and three Prohibition Orders issued in 2006 and 27 Closure Orders, four Improvement Orders and 12 Prohibition Orders issued in 2005 (Table 2). As a result, the FSAI has urged all food business operators to prioritise their food safety and hygiene practices in 2008 and to ensure that all staff involved in food production or preparation are adequately trained and/or supervised in food hygiene practices.

In 2005 and 2006, the majority of Closure Orders were served on 'service sector premises' (63%). This trend continued into 2007 with 84% of the total number of Closure Orders served on the service sector. The majority of Prohibition Orders (73%), were served on premises categorised as 'manufacturer selling direct to the final consumer'.

The FSAI and its official agencies will continue to implement a rigorous inspection policy throughout 2008 to ensure full compliance with food safety legislation is achieved industry wide.

The details of the businesses served with these Orders are published on the FSAI

website. Closure and Improvement Orders remain listed on the website for a period of three months from the date of when a premises is adjudged to have corrected its food safety issue, with Prohibition Orders listed for a period of one month.

Table 1: Total Number of Enforcement Orders, 2002 to 2007

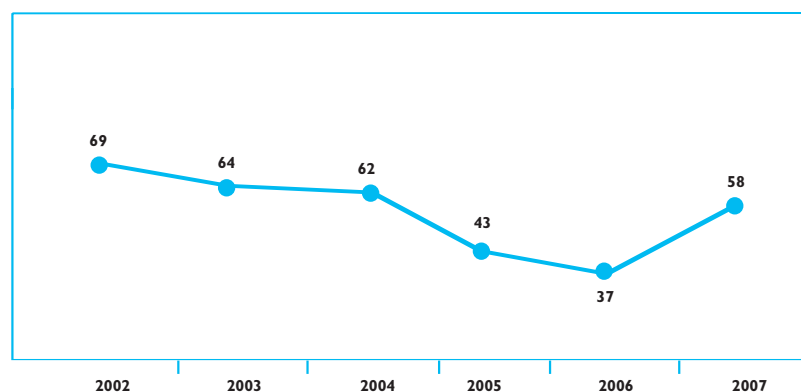
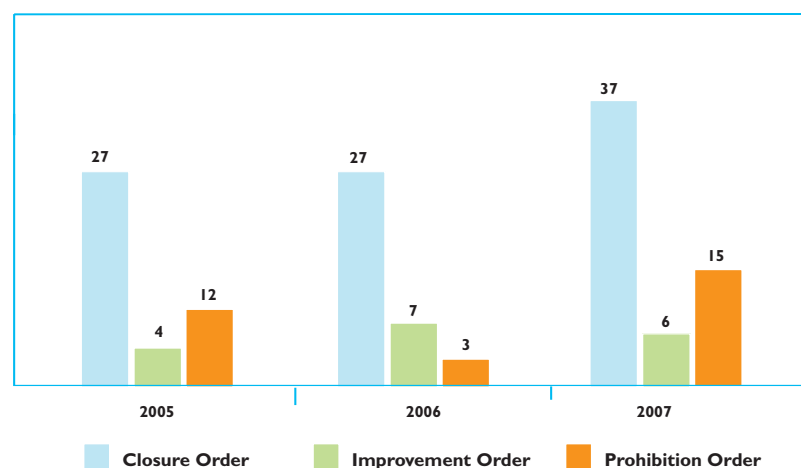


Table 2: Number of Enforcement Orders, by Order Type, 2005 to 2007



fvo programme of audits and inspections, 2008

The EU Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) has set out its audit and inspection programme of DG Health and Consumer Protection for 2008 with a detailed plan for January to December. The plan must remain flexible to enable it to respond to emergencies, other urgent issues and unforeseen circumstances, therefore, as in previous years, adjustments to the plan will be required as the year progresses. An update of the programme will be available in June 2008.

Of the 256 audits and inspections scheduled for 2008, a capacity of 65 specific audits has been set aside for the general audits planned in six Member States (including Ireland) (Table 1).

Table 1 - General Audits in Member States in 2008

General Audits	Member States
A capacity of 65 specific audits across all control systems	Estonia
	Germany
	Hungary
	Ireland
	Slovakia
	Spain

These 65 specific audits make up a quarter of all planned audits and inspections and will be carried out across all areas of the food chain including animal welfare and plant health. The main purpose of the general audits is to verify that, overall, official controls take place in Member States in accordance with the multi-annual national control plans. 2008 is the first year of a foreseen three year cycle of general audits in all Member States.

The general audits will be supplemented by specific audits targeted at specific areas and sectors across all main control systems in Member States (Table 2). The list of specific audits for each Member

State is determined by combining the regular prioritisation process with a desk analysis of the Member States' multi-annual national control plans and additional information such as Member States own audit reports.

The majority of the remaining inspections will deal with food safety issues (54%). However, in line with the "farm to fork" approach, a large number of food safety inspections also cover animal health (4%) and welfare (3%) elements. 4% of inspections are targeted at phytosanitary controls. General reviews make up a further 9% of the planned audits and inspections (See Table 2).

Table 2 - Breakdown of audits and inspections 2008 by main areas

AREA	No. of audits and inspections	%
General audits	65	26
Food safety	139	54
Animal health	11	4
Animal welfare	8	3
Plant health	11	4
General review	22	9
Total	256	100

The majority of inspections will take place in the European Union (64%). In EFTA countries, 2% of inspections are planned, while 4% of inspections will take place in candidate countries, and 30% in other third countries.

The detailed plan of audits and inspections, 2008, is available on the Europa website at: <http://tinyurl.com/2ul6ma>.

expertise in the area of food regulatory affairs

FSAI Chief Executive, Dr John O'Brien, recently completed his five year term as External Examiner of the Masters in European Food Regulatory Affairs at the University of Ulster. The course, directed by Dr Aideen McKeivitt, is the fruit of collaboration between the Universities of Ulster, Dublin and Cork and has attracted widespread interest from professionals wishing to study part-time by distance learning, including several staff members of the FSAI.

The FSAI and the Food Standards Agency, Northern Ireland, recognise the contribution of the programme to the development of expertise in the field of food regulatory affairs on the Island of Ireland by awarding a prize each year for best overall performance on the course. This year the prize was shared by Ms Ann Marie Lynam, Dietitian, St. James's Hospital and Ms Janis Morrissey, Dietician, Irish Heart Foundation.

The occasion coincided with the graduation of FSAI staff member Ms Nicola Ryan, pictured here with Dr John O'Brien.





mailing list

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Pictured here is Vanessa Cooling, Advice-line Assistant, speaking with a visitor to the FSAI stand at the Hospitality Expo exhibition.

hospitality expo

The FSAI had an information stand at the Hospitality Expo exhibition in the RDS, Dublin, from 4-6 February last. Hospitality Expo 2008 was dedicated to all sectors of the hospitality industry throughout Ireland offering the FSAI an opportunity to interact with food business operators and offer advice and assistance to them in the area of food safety and hygiene.

recent publications

The following publication has recently been produced by the FSAI:

- The National Control Plan for Ireland

The publication is available on our website at www.fsai.ie/publications.

open consultation

There are currently no open consultations on our website. To view details of closed consultations, see: www.fsai.ie/consultations.

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