



# first meeting of new fsai scientific committee

## fsai news

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The Scientific Committee is an indispensable part of the Food Safety Authority of Ireland. It is composed of scientists from a range of disciplines working in a voluntary capacity who assist and advise the FSAI Board on scientific matters. The Committee acts as a mechanism by which the FSAI can ensure its activities are underpinned by science.

The first Scientific Committee of the FSAI was in place for the past five years and had reached the end of its term. A new Committee, chaired by Prof. Albert Flynn from UCC, has now been established and it is hoped to build on the successes of the first Committee and learn from its years of experience in operation.

The first meeting of the new Scientific Committee was held over two days, in Naas, Co Kildare on 4th and 5th May. The two day meeting facilitated the opportunity for the new members to exchange views and opinions, meet with key FSAI personnel, understand the work of the FSAI and also devote enough time to forward planning, following a review carried out by the FSAI Board. Two main items were discussed, the operation of the Scientific Committee and its future work programme, and the need for Sub-committees. It was agreed that the FSAI would draw up rules of

procedure for the Scientific Committee and Sub-committees taking into account the recommendations of the review. Five Sub-committees were established, namely; Genetically Modified Organisms; Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy; Additives, Chemicals and Contaminants; Microbiology, and Nutrition.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the outgoing Scientific Committee for their hard work, valuable scientific contribution and dedication over the past five years, and to welcome the new Committee members on board. For an organisation like the FSAI, with limited scientific resource, the expansion of the scientific knowledge base that the Scientific Committee provides is vital to its risk assessment activities and its evaluation of risk management options and existing controls.

The members of the FSAI Scientific Committee (pictured below) are:

*Back row, left to right: Prof. Colin Hill, Dr Mark Lynch, Mr Cathal Kearney, Prof. Dan Collins, Dr Philipp Hess, Dr Mary Flynn, Prof. Brian McKenna*

*Front row, left to right: Ms Paula Barry-Walsh, Dr Catherine Adley, Dr Michael O'Keefe, Prof. Albert Flynn, Dr Eibhlin Connolly, Dr Paul McKeown, Prof. Michael Ryan*  
*Missing from photo: Prof. Martin Cormican*



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# science-based decision making

**“Whatever knowledge is attainable must be attained by scientific methods; and what science cannot deliver, mankind cannot know”**

**Bertrand Russell**

The FSAI bases its decision making on sound science. This fact is at the heart of our credibility as a regulatory body. Science is an objective means of establishing a basis for decision making. That is not to say that scientific fact should just be accepted at face value. The principle of science is to challenge hypotheses by well designed experiments or conjecture. Hypotheses that are well tested enjoy a high degree of confidence.

Many accomplished and respected scientists work on our staff and all respect the above principles. However, no regulatory authority has the means to employ all the scientists it needs to consult in the course of its activities. More importantly, the formulation of high-level scientific advice should be free of operational constraints. For this reason, multi-disciplinary committees of independent scientists are normally employed in regulatory assessment.

Although science has many roles in FSAI decision making, the science of risk assessment is perhaps the most important. Our quality of life and the certainty and confidence we enjoy in everyday technologies, such as motor vehicles, bridges, medicines and aircraft, all depend on risk assessment. Since food is such a familiar subject compared to some of the new technologies, food risk assessment took a different evolutionary path. There are familiar risks associated with food, the consequences of which are well known, such as Salmonella. However, there are also emerging and changing risks that must be evaluated, such as the transmissible spongiform encephalopathies. Food chemical and microbial risk assessment is now rapidly developing in response to the need for

greater confidence in our decision making. The reason that food risk assessment is so important is that it is unacceptable to wait until consumers have been harmed before taking decisive action. Equally, the action taken should be proportionate to the risk encountered by consumers.

True enlightenment comes from the skill of asking the right questions. The first task of the new Scientific Committee in collaboration with the staff of the FSAI will be to define what questions should be posed and how to obtain answers to those questions.

The new FSAI Scientific Committee will harness the expertise and experience in the Irish scientific community for the benefit of Irish consumers. As several Committee Members also sit on expert panels of the European Food Safety Authority, there is an opportunity to tap effectively into expertise available in other European countries. The experts on our Scientific Committee and Sub-committees give freely of their time. We are grateful for their time and for the support of their employers.



Dr John O'Brien

Chief Executive, FSAI

## ireland plays host to efsa communications working group

In April, Ireland was host to the seventh meeting of the European Food Safety Authority's Advisory Forum Working Group on Communications. The Working Group is made up of representatives from each of the Member States' national food agencies or other national authorities with a remit similar to that of EFSA, and it is chaired by Ms Anne-Laure Gassin, EFSA's Director of Communications. The group focuses on enhancing the coherence of food safety messages across the Community. Its job is to reinforce collaboration between all those involved in communications in the Member States' national food agencies and administrations.

## food safety award goes to cathal brugha street

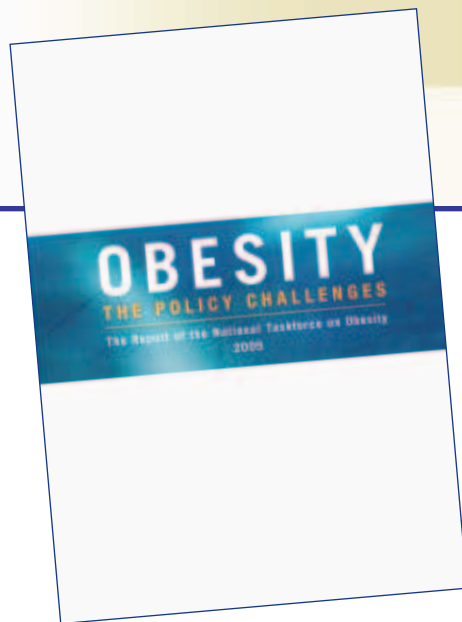
The FSAI held its annual competition for best food safety related project in Irish colleges on 17th June last. The competition proved to be successful again this year with six students competing in the final. The winning student was Amanda O'Connor, BSc Environmental Health, Dublin Institute of Technology, Cathal Brugha Street. Amanda's project was entitled *'An investigation into the food safety implications of online grocery shopping'*. This study examined the entire process of online grocery shopping, documenting the procedures involved and identifying the food safety concerns. The award was presented to Amanda by Alan Reilly, Deputy Chief Executive, FSAI.

Deborah Dunnion, BSc Human Nutrition and Dietetics, DIT, Kevin Street came in second place for her project, entitled *'Growth and diarrhoeal enterotoxin production by Bacillus cereus in a variety of feeds used in Irish hospitals and healthcare environments'*, and Jia Fang, BSc Environmental Health, DIT, Cathal Brugha Street was third for her project *'Food safety management in the Chinese food sector in Ireland'*.



Amanda O'Connor, BSc Environmental Health, Dublin  
Institute of Technology, Cathal Brugha Street.

# nutritional status of irish consumers



## National Taskforce on Obesity Reports to An Taoiseach

A recent report launched by the National Taskforce on Obesity has revealed that the prevalence of overweight and obesity has increased considerably over the past twenty years. Obesity has been described by the World Health Organization as a 'global epidemic' and is now a major public health problem throughout Europe. Most worrying, childhood obesity has reached epidemic proportions in Europe, with body weight now the most prevalent childhood disease.

In Ireland at present 39% of adults are overweight and 18% are obese. Of these, slightly more men than women are obese and there is a higher incidence of the disease in lower socio-economic groups. While currently there are no agreed criteria or standards for assessing Irish children for obesity, some studies are indicating that the numbers of children who are significantly overweight have trebled over the past decade.

The report of the National Task Force on Obesity includes over eighty recommendations including the development of consistent school policies to promote healthy eating and active living, increasing the emphasis on physical activity in schools, a new education and training programme for health professionals, guidelines for food labelling, an examination of fiscal policy and its impact on overweight and obesity, and guidelines for the detection and treatment of overweight and obesity.

The report can be accessed on the Department of Health and Children's website: [www.dohc.ie/news/2005/obesity.html](http://www.dohc.ie/news/2005/obesity.html)

## Eating habits, health and lifestyle of Irish children

The first scientific study to benchmark dietary intakes of a nationally representative sample of Irish children was launched recently by the Irish Universities Nutrition Alliance (IUNA). The study, carried out under the 'Food Institutional Research Measure' (FIRM) project and co-funded by the Department of Agriculture and Food and the Food Safety Authority of Ireland; *National Children's Food Survey*, is the first comprehensive scientific evaluation of dietary intake in children in Ireland and provides direction for the dietary strategies that need to be established to prevent obesity in Irish children. The study surveyed 600 children aged 5-12 years from primary schools throughout Ireland during 2003 and 2004 and was carried out by researchers in Trinity College, Dublin, and University College, Cork.

The study includes direct body measurements on each child and provides accurate data on the extent to which the obesity crisis is affecting Irish children. It also included essential information on lifestyle, including physical activity, for both the children and their parents. The scientific data provided by the study will be widely used to develop nutrition policy for Ireland and assist in the development of programmes to tackle childhood obesity.

One of the main findings from the survey is that overweight and obesity in 5-12 year old schoolchildren is high and is increasing:

- Over the past 15 years, obesity in 8-12 year olds increased from 6 to 8% in boys and from 5 to 14% in girls.
- Overweight and obesity combined has increased from 11 to 20% in boys and from 14 to 23% in girls.

The steady rise of overweight and obesity in schoolchildren must be tackled urgently.

The study found that only 9% of total calorie intake of 5-12 year olds occurred outside the home, therefore the home environment is critical in shaping eating behaviours and physical activity habits in this age group. A national policy is needed to help parents create a healthier home environment for children.

Other key findings on food consumption habits in Irish children identified issues that need to be addressed to promote healthy weight in children; they include:

- Low intakes of fruit and vegetables with average intakes well below international recommendations for children. (Fruit and vegetables are low in calories, but rich in essential nutrients, such as vitamins, minerals and dietary fibre).
- Overall fat intake is higher than recommended - 40% of children exceed the recommendations.
- Daily salt intake is higher than the levels recommended by the FSAI - main salt sources are processed meats and bread. (The FSAI is particularly concerned about the level of salt in children's diet and will be taking this information into context in relation to strategies working with the food industry to reduce levels of salt in the Irish diet.)

Clear guidelines for healthy eating for schoolchildren from 5-12 years and their parents are needed. Guidelines should focus on appropriate portion sizes, lower consumption of fat, salt and sugared drinks, and higher intake of vegetables and fruit, fibre, vitamins and minerals. The pyramid model used to guide healthy eating in Ireland has been completely revised to tackle obesity in the US and similar revisions need to take place in Ireland.



For the first time in Ireland we have scientific data that will be used to develop nutrition policy for children in Ireland. This policy will include the development of new dietary guidelines for healthy eating, dietary strategies for preventing obesity and will address issues such as the role of portion size and unhealthy dietary patterns. In addition, it will be a key resource for the food industry to support development and promotion of new products with healthy nutrition profiles.



# council of europe meeting on food contact materials



The Council of Europe is an inter-Governmental European organisation, separate from the institutions of the European Union, with currently 46 Member States. Within the Council, Member States are free to form Partial Agreements in areas where only some of its members have an interest. One such agreement operates in the social and public health field, to which Ireland is a signatory. Within the public health field, the Council has worked for many years in the area of food contact materials, developing resolutions and guidelines for best practice to prevent contamination of food from packaging materials and other food contact materials. The documents produced by the Council are on its website, [www.coe.int/soc-sp](http://www.coe.int/soc-sp). The Committee started work in this area before the European Commission and the Commission has generally taken the Council's documents as starting points for its legislation. The Council's work is carried out by a 'Committee of experts on materials coming into contact with food', who oversee the work of

several ad-hoc groups working on particular materials, such as coatings, paper and board, inks, etc. The FSAI participates on the Committee, though not in the ad-hoc groups.

The Committee held its 43rd meeting in Strasbourg (home of the Council of Europe) on 23rd and 24th May. The position of Chair is occupied by different countries each year and this year's meetings are chaired by Ireland. A main item on the agenda was the preparation of terms of reference for the Committee, which are set on a five-yearly basis. In future, the Committee will focus on the development and updating of resolutions and technical documents, particularly for food contact materials where the Commission has not developed legislation. The Committee has also been developing proposals to conduct toxicological evaluations of substances used to manufacture food contact materials; however the Committee agreed that these proposals would require discussion with the European Food Safety Authority which already evaluates packaging additives. The Committee also agreed on a resolution and testing guidelines for printing inks applied to non-food contact surfaces of food packaging.

## the state laboratory moves to backweston

The State Laboratory is a Scheduled Office under the aegis of the Department of Finance. It was established in 1924 to provide an analytical and advisory service to the newly formed Irish Government. It resulted from an amalgamation of the laboratory of the Revenue Commissioners, then located in the Custom House, with the chemistry laboratory of the Department of Agriculture and Food which was housed in Government Buildings on Merrion Street.

The State Laboratory remained in Merrion Street for almost 60 years and during that period its functions expanded from its origins in revenue and agriculture to embrace most aspects of Government legislative activity which required the application of analytical expertise. By the mid 1970's the premises had become inadequate for the demands imposed by EC membership in terms of range of analytes and the sophistication of techniques employed. Expansion within Government Buildings was not possible and in any case the design was no longer suitable to the needs of a modern laboratory. Consequently it was decided that a new purpose built laboratory was necessary. A site was provided on Government land at Abbotstown, Co. Dublin and a new facility was opened in 1984.

In early 2000 it was once again felt that the laboratory was not suitable in size or design for the level of activity undertaken and a move to a new site, again

on a Department of Agriculture and Food estate, was planned. A new building has been constructed on the Kildare end of Backweston Farm near Celbridge and the laboratory moved to the new premises in April/May 2005 this year.

The Laboratory provides a comprehensive analytical and advisory service to Government departments and offices, thereby enabling them to implement and formulate the technical aspects of national and EU legislation. The State Laboratory is an EU National Reference Laboratory for residues in food of animal origin.

*Pictured are Mr Conor Murphy, State Chemist, with Mr Brian Cowan TD, Minister for Finance, on the occasion of the official opening of the new State Laboratory building at Young's Cross Celbridge, Co. Kildare on Monday 23 May 2005.*



# marine institute leads the way in seafood safety

The Marine Institute (MI) provides a range of scientific services to the FSAI and to industry, including monitoring seafood and the quality of the marine environment to protect public health. As part of its monitoring programme, the MI tests seafood for naturally occurring marine toxins, trace metals, persistent organic pollutants, aquaculture veterinary drug residues and unauthorised treatments. This testing is carried out using a suite of chemical, microbiological, microscopy, immunoassay and bioassay techniques.



The MI's Marine Environment & Food Safety Services Area (MEFS) introduced and implemented a Quality System in 2000, based on the requirements of ISO 17025. The objective of the quality system is to develop, validate and employ methods that are fit for purpose, meet client needs and comply with International Standard ISO 17025. The quality system is subject to ongoing internal checks, controls and audits, and external quality control programmes include participation in national and international proficiency testing schemes. Accreditation in accordance with this standard is awarded by the Irish National Accreditation Board (INAB).

This Quality System is led by Conor Duffy, Quality Manager and is currently in operation in the following units of MEFS:

- Marine Chemistry (includes trace metal in fish and shellfish)
- Residues Monitoring in Farmed Finfish
- Shellfish Safety, which includes Phytoplankton & Biotoxin Chemistry
- Fish Health

The quality system is in place at four MI laboratory facilities - one in Dublin, two in Galway and one in Bantry, Co. Cork.

The MI was first awarded INAB accreditation for the chemical screening and confirmation of residues in fish tissue in 2002 (Reg No. 130T). Since then, the scope of accreditation has been extended yearly, and in May 2005, the MI was successful in having a total of 21 methods accredited (Reg No. 140T and 158T). The MI is one of the few accredited laboratories in Europe for phytoplankton analysis and the world's first accredited laboratory for the analysis of the marine toxin azaspiracid in shellfish.

According to Conor Duffy: "Our aim is to extend the current scope of accreditation in 2005 for further test methods in chemistry and microbiology and then maintain these high standards across the range of seafood testing."

As well as INAB audits, MEFS laboratory units are audited regularly by the European Commission's Food & Veterinary Office, and by the FSAI to ensure continued compliance with EU Directives designed to protect the consumer from possible contamination from marine foods.

The Director of the Marine Environment & Food Safety Services team, Micheal Ó Cinneide, has welcomed the latest series of INAB awards:

*"We have invested heavily in quality since 2000. The INAB Accreditations ensure that the Marine Institute monitors the marine environment and Irish seafood according to defined procedures and quality standards and that we produce traceable results. Consumers of Irish farmed and wild fish can be assured that the Marine Institute is committed to professional practice in monitoring the marine environment, ensuring and underpinning the continuing quality of Irish seafood. This supports a €500 million Irish seafood industry. We look forward to transferring the experience and accredited tests to the Marine Institute's state of the art new facilities in Oranmore, Galway, in early 2006".*



For further information, contact: Conor Duffy, Quality Manager, MI at 01 8228210 or by email: [Conor.Duffy@marine.ie](mailto:Conor.Duffy@marine.ie)





# the control and management of *listeria mono*

The FSAI Scientific Committee has recently published a report, prepared by its Microbiology Sub-committee, entitled 'The Control and Management of *Listeria monocytogenes* Contamination of Food'. Consumer demand for minimally processed products with longer shelf-life has resulted in the mass production and distribution of chilled convenience ready-to-eat foods often associated with *L. monocytogenes* contamination. However, significant progress has been made in recognising foods that are at risk from *L. monocytogenes* contamination and in developing strategies and processes that can minimise these risks. The report summarises existing knowledge regarding the control and prevention of human infection with *L. monocytogenes* in Ireland and recommends measures to reduce the risk of contamination and infection with this organism.

## The Organism

*L. monocytogenes* is an ubiquitous bacterium that is commonly present in the environment and in food. It is widely distributed in many natural and man-made environments such as soil, water, sewage, mammalian, and vegetation and silage where it can survive for long periods of time. In food processing environments it is found on walls, floors, drains, ceilings and equipment. The organism has also been isolated from a wide variety of foods including seafood, vegetables, fruit, dairy products, salads and meat products.

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The challenge of controlling *L. monocytogenes* in foods is considerable as the pathogen has a high resistance to heat, salt, acidic pH and can grow at or below refrigeration temperatures, under both aerobic and anaerobic conditions. *L. monocytogenes* is considered one of the most heat resistant non-spore forming foodborne pathogens. The FSAI currently recommends a heat treatment equivalent to 70°C for two minutes to ensure its destruction in foods. Some strains will survive salt concentrations in excess of 20% with most growing in concentrations of up to 12%. In relation to pH, the organism has been reported to grow at a pH of 4.2, with some strains surviving at pH 3.3. The organism can grow at refrigerated temperatures as low as -1.5°C and survives freezing.

## Health Risks and Clinical Features

Human *L. monocytogenes* infections are conventionally considered an uncommon, but potentially life threatening infection. The infection primarily affects identifiable 'at-risk' sections of the population. In Ireland, listeriosis (the illness associated with *L. monocytogenes*) is a rare but significant public health concern, due to the high morbidity and mortality (up to 30%) associated with the illness. However, most people who are otherwise healthy and not pregnant may tolerate exposure to quite high levels of the bacterium in their food. As of January 2004, there is a statutory obligation on both laboratory directors and other medical practitioners to notify cases of human listeriosis in Ireland.

The minimum number of *L. monocytogenes* that must be ingested to represent a significant risk of listeriosis in humans is uncertain. Indications are that the infectious dose is low, possibly less than 1,000 cells. However investigation of cases of listeriosis indicates that implicated foods are those that support the growth of the pathogen and have elevated levels of the pathogen prior to consumption. The minimum infectious dose is also thought to be highly strain and host dependent.

There are two distinct clinical presentations of listeriosis in humans; invasive listeriosis mainly in well defined high-risk groups, and febrile gastroenteritis listeriosis, a self-limiting infection in otherwise healthy individuals. Features of invasive listeriosis include high fever, shivering, severe headache, neck stiffness and nausea. In pregnant women invasive listeriosis is associated with a risk of miscarriage, stillbirth or the premature birth of an infant with a life threatening infection. Some people are also exceptionally vulnerable to listeriosis as a result of a pre-existing illness or medical treatment they may be receiving. Febrile gastroenteritis listeriosis affects previously healthy people and is not confined to the groups at risk from invasive listeriosis. This form of the illness is characterised by aches, fatigue, fever, chills, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea, and is generally self-limiting.

# cytogenes contamination of food

## At Risk Foods

The first reported case of listeriosis was reported in 1953 after a stillbirth was linked to a mother's consumption of raw milk from a cow suffering from mastitis. Outbreaks of listeriosis associated with the consumption of coleslaw and soft cheeses in the early 1980s led to increased recognition of *L. monocytogenes* as a foodborne pathogen. Risk factors typically associated with foodstuffs linked to outbreaks of listeriosis include:

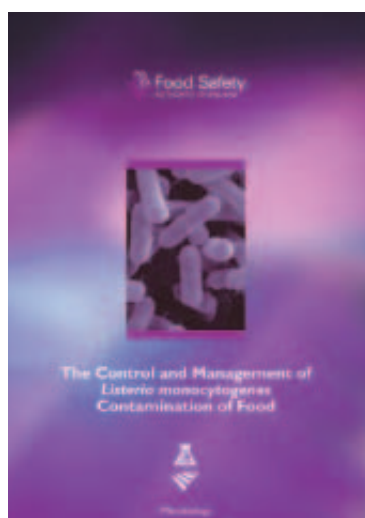
1. The food is ready-to-eat
2. The food requires chilled storage
3. The food has an extended shelf-life
4. The food receives no listericidal processing such as cooking
5. There is a risk of post-process contamination
6. The product formulation supports the growth of *L. monocytogenes*
7. The food may be consumed by immuno-compromised individuals and pregnant women.

Foods which are typically associated with *L. monocytogenes* contamination include products made with red-meat, poultry-meat and fish (e.g. frankfurters, pâté, smoked salmon, fermented raw meat sausages, etc.), dairy products (e.g. soft cheeses, unpasteurised milk, etc.) and prepared salads (e.g. coleslaw, beansprouts, etc.).

## Control in the Food Chain

Many of the measures which will control and manage *L. monocytogenes* in the food chain are encompassed within good hygiene practices, good manufacturing practices, food safety/hygiene training and the implementation of a Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) plan. The implementation of HACCP by food business operators and the provision of food safety training for all employees is a legal requirement. However, additional measures

are required to manage and control *L. monocytogenes*. Therefore, the challenge for the food industry is to develop, implement, maintain and where necessary, enhance programmes for the monitoring and control of *L. monocytogenes*. Domestic consumers also have a responsibility to insist on high standards for foods they purchase, and to handle foods in a hygienic way and in accordance with manufacturer's instructions.



## Key Recommendations for Control in all Sectors of the Food Chain

The control of *L. monocytogenes* in food requires commitment at different levels within the food chain. The challenges for controlling *L. monocytogenes* are considerable given its ubiquitous nature, high resistance to heat, salt and acidic pH and its ability to grow and survive at or below normal refrigeration temperatures of 5°C. The report outlines 58 recommendations which are targeted at the food industry, consumers and Government agencies. The following recommendations are given for Listeria control in all sectors of the food chain:

1. Good food hygiene habits should be practiced
2. Separate storage areas for ready-to-eat foods should be provided
3. Cross-contamination of ready-to-eat foods should be avoided
4. The susceptibility of specific population groups to *L. monocytogenes* infection should be considered
5. All fruit, vegetables and prepared salads should be washed in potable water before use
6. All refrigerators and storage areas should be regularly cleaned
7. Only potable water should be used in the production, preparation, handling and consumption of foods
8. Manufacturers' instructions should always be followed
9. Food preparation areas should be cleaned and sanitised before and after use
10. Raw materials and ingredients should only be sourced from approved suppliers
11. Poor standards of food hygiene in any food business should not be accepted and should be brought to the attention of the business.

# new requirements for food businesses to notify product withdrawals/recalls

In February and May of this year, two food incidents saw the removal of dozens of products from the Irish market due to spice products being adulterated with Sudan Red 1 and Para Red dyes. These incidents are a reminder of the complexity of the food chain and the need to have efficient recall and traceability systems in place.

Since the General Food Law (Regulation 178/2002) came into force on 1 January 2005, there is a clear obligation for food businesses to notify details of food withdrawals and recalls to the FSAI or one of the official agencies.

## Responsibility for food safety lies with the food industry

These requirements are set out in Article 19 of the Regulation which explicitly states that the obligation is on the food business operators to act when they have information indicating that food on the market does not meet food safety requirements and a specific requirement to notify the details to the relevant authority.

In order to ensure that consumers' health and interests are being protected, there is also a requirement that where food subject to a withdrawal has been sold to consumers, that there is a recall of the affected products and consumers are provided with information on the need for the recall. In order to achieve this, food business operators are expected to place notices in stores about the recalls and to put the information out to the public by other means, such as public notices in the national press and the use of press releases.

These provisions build on one of the principles set out in the Regulations: that the responsibility of placing safe food on the market rests with food business operators.

## New Code of Practice

The FSAI *Code of Practice No. 5: Food Incidents and Alerts* summarises the obligations of food business operators, which include:

- Taking all necessary measures to protect public health.
- Maintaining and testing an effective and efficient recall and traceability system.

- Maintaining all process documentation and product testing and traceability documentation.
- Notifying the relevant official agencies and/or the FSAI of incidents or potential incidents without delay.
- Initiating the withdrawal and/or recall of products as necessary.
- Provide all necessary assistance and co-operation to an investigating agency.
- Ensure timely release of information relevant to an investigation.
- Prevent the sale of food which does not comply with the provision of any regulation applicable to that particular food.

There is also a template notification form in the Annex to the Code, which is available electronically on the FSAI website at:

[www.fsai.ie/legislation/notif\\_forms/food\\_alert\\_not\\_form.doc](http://www.fsai.ie/legislation/notif_forms/food_alert_not_form.doc)

Food business operators can download the form, complete the details and send it to the FSAI by e-mail: [rapidalert@fsai.ie](mailto:rapidalert@fsai.ie)

Detailed guidance has been prepared by the European Commission on Regulation 178/2002 and the FSAI is currently drafting guidance based on this for use in Ireland.

In order to determine if a notification of a food withdrawal is required under these provisions, it will be necessary for a food business operator to consider whether the food complies with the food safety requirements and whether it has left their immediate control.

## Unsafe food

In determining if food safety requirements have been met, Article 14 of the Regulations states that food should be considered 'unsafe' if it is 'injurious to health' or 'unfit for consumption', which are further explained. This article also states that food can be considered safe if it complies with EU and national food legislation.

To be considered as 'under immediate control' of an operator, the implication is that where there is a problem with a food identified, that food business operator is able to take action to remedy the situation

without assistance from other operators, an official agency or the FSAI. 'Immediate control' does not relate to the ownership of the food, but to its physical location in the food chain and the ability for an operator to act on it.

The Regulation emphasises the need for an operator to co-operate not only with the enforcement agencies, but also with other food operators at different parts of the food chain. This includes retailers who may not be responsible for manufacturing or packaging of food, but who have a vital role in passing on information both to consumers who may have purchased food affected by a recall and to other business operators when they identify a problem associated with a food being sold.

## Food recall

The responsibility for determining whether or not a withdrawal needs to be notified is with the food business operator, but where there is any doubt, advice should be sought from either the relevant enforcing agency (such as the local HSE office) or the FSAI. Where there is any likelihood of a risk to health from microbiological contamination, chemical contamination (including Sudan Red and Para Red dye contamination) or foreign object contamination, notification is essential.

Once the notification of a withdrawal or recall has been made to an official agency or the FSAI, the details will be reviewed with the food business operator and the necessary course of action taken.

Where food has been distributed outside the state, there is a requirement that a notification is made to the European Commission through the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF). Where a wide scale recall is necessary in Ireland, the FSAI will issue a Food Alert. A full explanation of what these systems are and how they operate is also given in Code of Practice No. 5. The roles of the FSAI and the official agencies are also explained in some detail.

COP No. 5 is available on the FSAI website and from our information centre on 1890 33 66 77.



# open consultations

There are currently two open consultations on our website, [www.fsai.ie/consultations](http://www.fsai.ie/consultations)

## **Draft Community Guidance on HACCP flexibility and draft Regulation on HACCP**

### ***Draft Community Guidance on HACCP flexibility***

Article 5 of Regulation (EC) No 853/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the hygiene of foodstuffs requires food business operators to put in place, implement and maintain a permanent procedure based on Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) principles. The concept allows HACCP principles to be implemented with appropriate flexibility. The purpose of this document is to give guidance on the flexible application of the HACCP principles in order to ensure a harmonised approach in all Member States.

### ***Draft Community Guidance on HACCP flexibility***

The draft Regulation contains a small number of recitals and articles and consists principally of the Annex detailing guidelines on the application of the 7 principles of HACCP for all sectors.

**Closing date** for submissions is Friday 1st July, 2005

## **Draft Guidance Note on the notification of dietary foods for special medical purposes under the European Communities (Foods for Special Medical Purposes) Regulations 1999, S.I. No. 64 of 2001**

This document aims to provide information on the implementation, enforcement and compliance with the Dietary Foods for Special Medical Purposes Statutory Instrument

No. 64 of 2001 (and Directive 1999/21/EC) on dietary foods for special medical purposes currently on sale in Ireland, those being manufactured or being imported directly, or through third parties i.e. agents.

The document is designed with manufacturers, importers, distributors and retailers of Dietary Foods for Special Medical Purposes as well as the enforcement officers in mind. It covers such areas as the Dietary Foods for Special Medical Purposes legislation, the notification process and definitions.

**Closing date** for submissions is Friday 1st July, 2005

# memorandum of understanding

Both the FSAI and the Food Standards Agency, Northern Ireland, aim to protect consumers' health and consumers' interests in the area of food safety. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed recently by both parties which sets out a framework for communication and co-operation between the two agencies. The agencies jointly affirm their commitment to develop effective working relations so as to ensure that the best possible service is delivered, in the interests of food safety and consumer protection on the island of Ireland.

*Pictured signing the MoU are  
Dr John O'Brien, CEO, FSAI and  
Mr. Morris McAllister, Director, FSA, NI.*



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

**S.I. No. 172 of 2005** European Communities (Marketing standards for eggs) Regulations, 2005

**S.I. No. 173 of 2005** European Communities (Pesticide Residues) (Products of Plant Origin including Fruit and Vegetables) (Amendment) Regulations, 2005

**S.I. No. 174 of 2005** European Communities (Purity Criteria on Food Additives other than Colours and Sweeteners) (Amendment) Regulations, 2005

**S.I. No. 180 of 2005** European Communities (Avian Influenza) (Control on imports of Avian Products and Live Birds from certain Asian Countries) Regulations, 2005

**S.I. No. 192 of 2005** European Communities (Additives, Colours and Sweeteners in Foodstuffs) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations, 2005

**S.I. No. 193 of 2005** European Communities (Additives, Colours and Sweeteners in Foodstuffs) (Amendment) (No.3) Regulations, 2005

**S.I. No. 228 of 2005** European Communities (Labelling, Presentation and Advertising of Foodstuffs) (Amendment) Regulations, 2005

**Designation Order** Live Bivalve Molluscs (Production Areas) Designation, 2005

# an update on service contracts

## cross agency meetings

The enforcement officers in Ireland are playing their part in ensuring consumers are adequately protected and the synergies derived from inter-agency working will ensure a more effective national inspectorate. It is important that good working relationships continue to grow between enforcement officers, laboratory staff, administrators and all stakeholders throughout the food chain as no group can act in isolation in the pursuit of high standards and full compliance.

At recent meetings (4th, 5th, 24th and 25th May) in Dublin, Galway and Cork, of the multi-agency, multi-disciplinary inspectorate hosted by the FSAI, presentations were well received on a range of new topics including the proposed Regulation on microbiological criteria for foodstuffs; the impact of the new hygiene package for future auditing; Regulation 178 of 2002 and the development of the official agency extranet.

To remain an effective inspectorate it will be necessary for all agencies and competent authorities to keep up with the momentum of change and to embrace the implementation of the new legislation in a way that will ensure consistency in enforcement and uniformity in interpretation. The new legislation will bring a commonality of approach across all agencies and the regular exchange of views, ideas and experiences will be of enormous benefit to all. Hopefully the FSAI can be the umbrella that can span all the groups and we can all work together in a climate of trust and mutual respect to develop a national inspectorate that will be the undisputed leader in the EU.

## enforcements

For the first five months of 2005, 20 Enforcement Orders were served. These Orders comprised:

- Thirteen Closure Orders
- One Improvement Order
- Six Prohibition Orders

The agencies involved in serving the Orders were the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources; the Health Service Executive; the Food Safety Authority of Ireland and a local authority.

This is a reduction in the number of Enforcement Orders served over the same five month period in 2004 (29); 2003 (30) and 2002 (24). Table 1 shows the breakdown of Enforcement Orders served over the last four years.

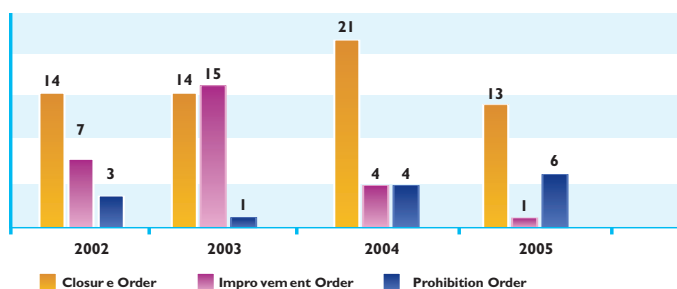


Table 1: Enforcement Orders Served, Jan - May, 2002 to 2005

Of the 13 Closure Orders served to date this year, 54% were in the 'service sector' while the remainder were in the 'distributors & transporters', 'manufacturers & packers' and 'retailers' categories. The one Improvement Order was also served on a 'service sector' business while the six Prohibition Orders were served on businesses that included 'retailers' and 'distributors & transporters'. Detailed examination on the 13 premises that were served Closure Orders showed no history of any previous enforcement breaches. The distribution of these premises covered the country; five Closure Orders were served on premises in Dublin; four in Cork, and one each in Monaghan, Donegal, Offaly and Meath.

## fo missions

A Mission of the EU Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) to look at illegal imports of live animals and products of animal origin, and border inspection posts (BIPs) took place in Ireland from 23rd to 27th May last. The Mission involved the Department of Agriculture and Food; the Customs and Excise Service of the Office of the Revenue Commissioners; the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources and the FSAI, and included visits to BIPs, customs warehouses, catering and ship suppliers and postal sorting offices.

Overall, the findings of the Mission were positive with the Mission team noting that Ireland has systems in place for both border inspection controls and illegal imports. The Mission findings will be produced in two reports - one on illegal import controls and the second on BIP controls. The draft report on BIPs will be issued in 21 days with the final report published on the FVO website.

## Import control information on the FSAI website

Information regarding import controls has been recently included on the enforcement section of the FSAI website at: [www.fsai.ie/enforcement/controls\\_imports/controls\\_imports.asp](http://www.fsai.ie/enforcement/controls_imports/controls_imports.asp)



This information, which pertains to importing food of animal origin and non-animal origin into Ireland and lists the relevant BIPs and legislation will be beneficial to both industry and consumers.

## meeting with the local authority veterinary service

The first round of Local Authority Veterinary Service (LAVS) service contract regional meetings for 2005 took place on 12th May in Carrick-on-Shannon and 17th May in Thurles. These meetings provide a valuable opportunity for veterinary inspectors and the FSAI to meet and discuss relevant issues and developments.

The agenda included:

- A new Guidance Note on meat labelling developed by a working group from the FSAI and the official agencies
- The Hygiene Package, including official controls and its implications for agencies and premises
- Renewal of the service contract between the FSAI and the local authorities
- Funding
- 2005 Service Plan
- Legislation updates and updates on audits
- Standard Operating Procedures used by the LAVS
- Approval and licensing of premises
- Abattoir training
- Residue sampling

Presentations were given by both FSAI staff and members of the LAVS. Both meetings were very successful and generated important discussion on key areas of food safety management. The next round of regional meetings is scheduled for November 2005.

### fsai and daf - egg regional meeting, 2005

The FSAI and the Department of Agriculture and Food's egg inspectorate regional meeting took place on 1st and 2nd June 2005. The egg inspectorate is responsible for the enforcement of the EU Regulations on the production and marketing of table eggs from the farm through to the retailer. This is carried out through inspections, sampling and surveillance of farms (battery unit, free range and barn operations), packing centres, storage depots, wholesalers, retailers, bakeries and hospitals.

The regional meeting is an opportunity for the FSAI to meet with the inspectors, to update them on the work of the FSAI, provide feedback on the service contracts and to facilitate discussion of food safety issues relating to eggs. The topics discussed at the 2005

regional meeting included the FSAI/FVO close-out audit and service contracts, zoonoses, residue testing in eggs and poultry and the outcomes from the 2004 egg inspection and sampling programmes. The meeting schedule for 2005 was focused particularly on training and included labelling training workshops provided by the FSAI and HACCP training provided by the National Food Centre.

### food labelling training

The FSAI hosted food labelling workshops for Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM) and technical agriculture officers in the egg and poultry inspectorate of the Department of Agriculture and Food (DAF), in May and June. These workshops were in response to requests from both BIM and DAF for labelling training specific to their needs.

The interactive workshops gave the groups the opportunity to discuss and raise issues which they have come across and the programme covered:

- general food labelling requirements
- specific labelling requirements for poultrymeat and
- nutrition labelling requirements.

### official agencies working together – investigation of domoic acid in scallop samples

The ready availability of shellfish around our coast and the premium price it commands can be a temptation for some to bypass the stringent food safety control measures that are in place and take part in a 'back door sale'. Fortunately, this is not common practice, but when it occurs it can pose a serious risk to public health.

Molluscan shellfish such as mussels, oysters and scallops are filter feeders and can accumulate natural toxins (biotoxins) which are produced by phyto-plankton in the water. Consumption of shellfish containing such toxins can result in illness and, more seriously, Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning (ASP). The symptoms of ASP, caused by the neurotoxin domoic acid, are short term memory loss, brain damage, and in severe cases, death. Normal purification methods do not remove biotoxin contamination, therefore strict controls are in place prior to shellfish consumption.

Since 1999, the Marine Institute (MI) has carried out regular testing of shellfish for domoic acid, using High Performance Liquid Chromatography (HPLC). This is a statutory requirement under the EC Directive (91/492/EEC and amendments) for the safety of shellfish, which specifies that the total ASP content in the edible part of molluscs must not exceed 20µg/g of domoic acid.

The threat posed by illegal sale of shellfish should not be underestimated and a recent incident in Galway highlighted the importance of good interagency collaboration in deterring such sales while preventing toxic shellfish entering the food chain. The local sea fisheries officer (SFO) was made aware of an incident involving scallops which were illegally fished and sold on to a restaurant in Connemara. The SFO notified the local environmental health officer (EHO), who together visited the restaurant to carry out an investigation. Seventy five kilos of partially shucked frozen scallop (in one kilo bags) were found in the freezer for which no supporting documentation was available. Documentation is legally required to ascertain details of the sale, origin of the shellfish, biotoxic status, etc.

Samples were taken and analysed by the MI, and were found to have unacceptable levels of domoic acid (in one instance over 20 times the legal limit!). The restaurateur was requested to voluntarily surrender the batches of scallops involved but was unwilling to do so. The product was detained by the EHO, and further investigations were carried out which resulted in the product being seized, removed from the premises and subsequently destroyed.

The FSAI, in association with BIM is currently looking at producing guidance to assist enforcement officers to highlight to the catering trade the need for extra vigilance in this area. Training workshops for relevant enforcement officers will also be provided.





## mailing list

**fsainews** is a resource for all public health professionals, researchers, food scientists, food hygienists and quality control personnel working in food safety.

**We would like to ensure that anyone who may find it useful receives a copy.**

If you think there is someone else in your organisation who would benefit from receiving a copy please fill in the enclosed form. This form can also be used to amend your own mailing details if required.

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## special adviser to farmhouse cheesemakers



*Attendees at the National Seminar in Moate*

The FSAI together with Enterprise Ireland, Cáis (the cheesemakers representative body) and Teagasc is funding an advisory programme for the farmhouse cheese industry. The programme, which is now in its second year, is being delivered by Ms Sara McSweeney, a technical advisor working at the Teagasc Dairy Products Research Centre, Moorepark, Co Cork. Whilst the main focus is on food safety, hygiene and legislation, Ms McSweeney also provides advice on technical/quality issues as well as good manufacturing practice. The ongoing co-operation from the Department of Agriculture and Food dairy produce inspectorate is contributing to the success of this programme.

To date, most producers have received an on-site advisory visit which included the collection of both product and environmental samples for later analysis and feedback in addition to the individually tailored advisory visits and consultations. In February of this year two national seminars were held — one in Cork and the other in Moate. Topics covered included cleaning and disinfection, milk quality/mastitis control, good manufacturing practice and HACCP and plenty of discussion was afforded.

Currently, HACCP workshops for small groups of cheesemakers are being held to enable participants to develop their individual plans. Producers are now receiving their second detailed advisory visit focussing on issues identified in the first visits.

## recent publications

The following report has recently been produced by the FSAI:

- The Control and Management of *Listeria Monocytogenes* Contamination of Food

Editor:  
**Edel Conway**

Contributors:

**Wayne Anderson  
Anne Marie Boland  
Tim Camon  
Gail Carroll  
Bernard Hegarty  
Anne-Marie Kierans  
Karl McDonald  
Jeff Moon  
Olive Prior  
Peter Whelan**

External Contributors:

**Conor Duffy, Marine Institute  
Paul Hickey, HSE Western Area**

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**Abbey Court, Lower Abbey Street, Dublin 1  
Tel: (01) 8171300  
Fax: (01) 8171301  
E-mail: [newsletter@fsai.ie](mailto:newsletter@fsai.ie)  
Website: [www.fsai.ie](http://www.fsai.ie)**

