



## salt - an all-island health initiative

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A forum which addressed the issue of salt as an all-island health initiative took place on 18th October in Dublin. Entitled 'Salt - An All-Island Health Challenge', it was the first initiative of the recently formed All-Island Food and Nutrition Forum comprising Government agencies and departments in the north and the south, including the Food Safety Authority of Ireland, the Food Safety Promotion Board and the Food Standards Agency, Northern Ireland.

The forum began by highlighting the public health implications of salt intake with presentations from Dr Clíodhna Foley-Nolan, Food Safety Promotion Board and Professor Ivan Perry, University College Cork. They outlined the need for Irish salt intake to halve over the next five to seven years to prevent a substantial number of deaths from heart disease and related conditions.

Working in partnership with the food industry was at the heart of the salt reduction initiatives and strategies undertaken by the Food Standards Agency, Northern Ireland and the Food Safety Authority of Ireland. Examples of programmes underway by the food industry were presented by Ian Bell of Kelloggs and Sue Bell of Marks and Spencer. They outlined the perspective of the food industry, giving a very informative

insight into the real issues associated with salt reduction. Technical and marketing issues were discussed as well as work with taste panels and consumer acceptance trials.

The forum also highlighted the challenges of communicating to consumers on issues relating to salt consumption. Various communication campaigns on salt awareness were outlined and discussed, to include the Food Safety Promotion Board's salt awareness campaign and the campaign of the Irish Heart Foundation.

Speaking at the forum, Dr Wayne Anderson, Chief Specialist Food Science, FSAI commented, "We are working closely with industry to reduce salt levels and have secured agreement with a wide range of food companies and industry bodies to support a national salt reduction policy to reduce the level of salt in manufactured foods by 2010. The food industry is best placed to achieve a positive outcome in the salt reduction challenge as it drives the agenda to a much higher degree than the relevant Government agencies and departments. Credit is due to those in the food industry who have risen to the salt reduction challenge".

*Pictured at the forum 'Salt - An All-Island Health Challenge' were (l-r): Mr Morris McAllister, Director, Food Standards Agency, Northern Ireland; Mr Martin Higgins, CEO, Food Safety Promotion Board and Mr Alan Reilly, Deputy CEO, Food Safety Authority of Ireland.*



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# measuring progress

Risk assessment is an increasingly powerful tool in decision making. The steps in food risk assessment include assessment of the potency in the case of chemical agents or the virulence/infective dose in the case of biological agents and an assessment of exposure by measuring the amount of the agent in food. Currently, one of the most challenging aspects of food risk assessment is the exposure assessment step for both microbial and chemical hazards.

Analytical science has witnessed tremendous advances in the past 50 years. For example, analysis at the picogram per gram level (parts per trillion) is routinely achieved for persistent organic pollutants such as dioxins. In research, accelerator mass spectrometry can achieve chemical analysis of selected analytes at the zeptomolar level ( $10^{-21}$  of a mole). At such low levels of determination, sampling and extraction from food matrices are major sources of uncertainty in the final result.

Progress has been slower in the microbial field where there are not only sampling challenges, but also because the target is quantification of living organisms as opposed to inanimate molecules. Traditional methods for the detection and enumeration of live microorganisms involve inoculation and culturing on appropriate growth media. The growth of microorganisms in such

cultures typically takes two-three days, but in the case of some microbial contaminants in foods, such as *Mycobacterium* spp, may take several months. In addition, definitive identification of a microorganism may require the application of several methods. Thus, the time involved in traditional microbiology may present unacceptable delays in risk management and, in response to the need for timely decision making, many rapid microbial methods have been developed.

**Currently, one of the most challenging aspects of food risk assessment is the exposure assessment step for both microbial and chemical hazards.**

Progress in the field was the subject of a recent meeting held at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls - 'Current Concepts in Foodborne Pathogens and Rapid and Automated Methods in Food Microbiology'. This meeting was the 25th in a series of annual meetings on the subject organised by Professor P.C. Vasavada. The opening keynote speaker was Professor Daniel Fung of Kansas State University, who predicted even more dramatic changes to come in the field. For example, Fung predicts that culture methods will continue to be used but with early sensing of colonies within a few hours. Methods will become more rapid giving the potential for real-time hygiene monitoring. Consumers will be able to purchase devices with the capacity to detect food hazards. This might take the form of lateral flow devices, the technology used for pregnancy testing kits. This is part of a trend of putting more information in the hands of the consumer.

A current example is the arrival on the market of time-temperature indicators that consumers may purchase to track the shelf-life of

refrigerated products. Time-temperature indicators for product cooking have been on the market for several years.

While testing will become more rapid and more automated, end-product testing does not substitute for food risk management based on the principles of HACCP (hazard analysis and critical control point management). On the other hand, HACCP implementation does not mean a decrease in the need for testing since there is still a need for food surveillance, management of foodborne disease outbreaks, validation of HACCP plans, supplier quality control and environmental monitoring in food premises. High throughput systems running on generic analytical platforms will make new methods more accessible and economic for manufacturers and food control laboratories. An additional advantage will be the trend to move testing to the point of decision making where possible. With the increasing array of methods available, an important criterion in selecting appropriate approaches will be to ensure that methods are fit for the purpose intended. This necessitates dialogue among researchers, food producers and regulatory agencies

From a regulatory perspective, the three golden rules for food analysis are as follows:

- Use of validated methods
- Accreditation of laboratories
- Training of personnel.

These criteria are now officially enshrined in European regulations and the FSAI is engaged in the process of ensuring that food control data generated in Ireland complies with regulatory requirements. Apart from ensuring that appropriate methods are employed, the storage of secure electronic data is being addressed.

The new analytical tools in the food safety toolbox and the fine-tuning of European regulations in the area of food hygiene both promise a safer future for consumers.



Dr John O'Brien

Chief Executive, FSAI

Dr John O'Brien,  
CEO, FSAI with  
Dr Reginald Bennett,  
Branch Chief, Division  
of Microbiological  
Studies, Food and Drug  
Administration, USA

# irish food industry rises to the salt reduction challenge

The Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) has secured agreement with a wide range of food companies and industry bodies to support a national salt reduction policy and to reduce the level of salt in processed and prepared foods by 2010.

Excess salt intake is a serious public health concern and a reduced intake would result in a reduction in the number of deaths per year from cardiovascular disease (estimated to contribute to 41% of all deaths in Ireland). Whilst 10-15% of salt intake is from salt added at the table or in home cooking, 65-70% of daily salt intake is provided through processed/prepared foods. If the FSAI is to reach its target of 6g per day average population salt intake by 2010 we must work in partnership with the food industry. The current average salt intake is estimated to be 10g per day.

Discussions between the FSAI and manufacturers, retailers, caterers, and their representative bodies began late in 2003 and this has resulted in significant reductions in salt content in a number of important foodstuffs, with commitments to make further reductions in the future. This is the first time there has been a national co-ordinated approach to seek decreases in the level of salt across a comprehensive range of foods.

Examples of salt reductions by food manufacturers are shown in Table 1.

All the major retailers and symbol groups in Ireland have set long-term targets for reduction in salt levels in own-brand foods. In the catering industry, chefs are being advised to reduce salt usage in cooking and source low salt ingredients. The FSAI is also targeting manufacturers of prepared food for the catering industry to

**Table 1: Examples of Salt Reductions by Food Manufacturers**

<b>Bread</b>	10% less salt by end 2005 resulting in approximately 0.4 grams of salt per slice of bread.
<b>Cured/Processed Meat Products</b>	All products to be brought below the average salt level of their product category by end 2005.
<b>Breakfast Cereals</b>	20-30% reductions (compared to 1998 levels) by end 2005.
<b>Soups &amp; Sauces</b>	10% reduction by end 2005.
<b>Snacks (Crisps, etc)</b>	7-25% reduction by end 2005 depending on snack category.

encourage them to also reduce salt levels, which will have a knock-on effect in the catering kitchen.

The FSAI welcomes the moves by the food industry to address salt levels in processed and prepared foods and the significant reduction achieved to date. However, there is a need for continued reductions in the future. The FSAI will continue to work with the industry this year to secure agreements for further phased salt reductions over the next few years. The combined approach of working with industry to reduce salt levels in tandem with ensuring that the level of salt in products is clearly labelled on food packaging should assist in the reduction of salt consumption levels. Many companies have also agreed to clearly label the salt levels in their food.

A full copy of 'Salt Reduction Undertakings' is available on our website at: [www.fsai.ie/industry/salt/salt.asp](http://www.fsai.ie/industry/salt/salt.asp).

## visitors to the fsai

### swedish visitors

The FSAI was recently visited by the Food Safety Control Team, Solna City Council, Solna, Sweden. The five person team is responsible for the control of over 400 establishments in a city with a population of 58,000, which commuters swell to over 100,000 during the week. The team also spent time visiting and working with the Environmental Health Service in the Dublin Mid-Leinster and Dublin North-East regions.



*Pictured are (l-r): Mr Claes Ericksson, Ms Mariell Ainestrand, Ms Anne Widebeck, Mr Olle Leander and Ms Elin Stenberg (all from Solna City Council) and Ms Dorothy Guina-Dorman, FSAI.*

### visit from thailand

Dr Tipicha Posayanonda, from the Office of the Secretary General, Food and Drug Administration, Thailand, is currently spending time in the FSAI. Tipicha is here on a fact finding mission from Thailand, where they are presently revising food safety control. Her project, funded by the Royal Thai Government, aims to get to know how risk analysis has been applied to food safety control at both international and national levels. Her objective while in Ireland is to learn from the Irish model and make recommendations for restructuring the Thai food control system with a view to setting up a single agency.



*Pictured are Dr Tipicha Posayanonda, Food and Drug Administration, Thailand, with Mr Alan Reilly, Deputy CEO, FSAI.*





# regulatory developments in the field of food additives

One of the objectives in the Commission's 2000 White Paper on Food Safety was to update and complete existing Community legislation on food additives. This legislation consists of the Framework Directive 89/107/EEC together with Directives 94/35/EC on sweeteners, 94/36/EC on colours and 95/2/EC on food additives other than colours and sweeteners, which together underpin the Community list of authorised food additives. With the aim of integrating and enhancing these provisions, a draft proposal for a new Framework Regulation on additives was published by the Commission at the end of 2004.

One of the principal objectives of the new proposal is to simplify the existing legislation by creating a single instrument covering the principles and procedures for authorisation of all food additives in the European Union. The core principles of the existing legislation, namely the effective functioning of the internal market and maintenance of a high level of protection of human health and the interests of consumers, are maintained in the new proposal. In addition, new aspects include the following:

- It is proposed that in the future the Community list of authorised food additives will be updated through the comitology procedure laid down in Council Decision 1999/468/EC, following a proposal from the Commission to the Standing Committee for Food and Animal Health.
- The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) will play a major role in risk assessment, technical and consumer matters related to food additives, and a ten year re-evaluation programme by EFSA for existing authorisations of food additives will be put in place.
- Additives that consist of, contain, or are produced from a GMO will be authorised under the proposal for a Regulation on GM food and feed prior to inclusion in the lists of authorised additives under this Regulation.

## Moving forward

No information is currently available as to when this proposal will be tabled in the fora of the Council of Ministers and in the European Parliament, but it is not likely to pass through all stages of the legislative process and come into force until 2007 at the earliest. It is intended that the Annexes of the current Directives (94/35/EC, 95/35/EC, 95/2/EC), forming the basis of the Community list of authorised food additives, will remain in force in parallel with the new Regulation, once adopted, and as new additives are approved or existing ones re-evaluated they will be included in the Annexes of the Regulation.

Pending the introduction of the new Framework Regulation, a proposed amendment to Directive 95/2/EC on food additives other than colours and sweeteners and Directive 94/35/EC on sweeteners for use in foodstuffs is currently under discussion in the Council of Ministers and in the European Parliament.

## Key points are as follows:

- Changes are proposed to the current maximum limits permitted for nitrates and nitrites in meat and other food products, in light of the EFSA opinion of November 2003. The aim of these changes is to keep the levels of nitrosamines, which are formed from nitrite and, indirectly, nitrate in food, as low as possible whilst maintaining the microbiological safety of the foodstuff. EFSA recommended that the levels of nitrite and nitrate should be set in the legislation as "added amounts". Therefore the proposal takes this into account and the levels for nitrates and nitrites in non-heat treated or heat-treated meat products, in cheese and in fish have been set as added amounts.
- At the request of Ireland and the UK, the existing system of control, based on maximum residual levels of nitrates/nitrites in foods as sold, have been maintained for certain traditional Irish and UK meat products such as Wiltshire cured ham and bacon and

similar products. Production of these products by controlling the added amount is difficult as they use "live brine" in the curing process. However, if the curing process is carefully controlled, the products can comply with the current controls on residual levels for nitrate and nitrite. Since this derogation was added to the proposal a number of other Member States have also specified speciality products for which residual levels are required.

- Two preservative additives are proposed for withdrawal following a safety assessment by EFSA, whereby an Acceptable Daily Intake level could not be established. The additives in question are E216 (propyl p-hydroxybenzoate) and E217 (sodium propyl-p-hydroxybenzoate).
- In April 2004, the Commission suspended the placing on the market and import of jelly mini-cups containing gel-forming food additives derived from seaweed and certain gums due to risk of choking on these products (Decision 2004/374/EC). In the light of a review of that Decision, the use of certain gel-forming food additives in jelly mini-cups is prohibited via this amendment.
- The authorisation of seven new food additives is proposed. These are erythritol, 4-Hexylresorcinol, soybean hemicellulose and starch aluminium octenyl succinate (SAOS), ethyl cellulose, tertiary-butyl hydroxyquinone (TBHQ) and pullulan, following positive evaluations either by the Scientific Committee on Food or by EFSA. As well as requiring an authorisation under Directive 95/2/EC for purposes other than sweetening, erythritol also requires authorisation under Directive 94/35/EC for sweetening purposes. An extension to the uses for a number of already permitted additives is also proposed.

The discussions in the Council of Ministers and in the European Parliament are likely to be concluded by the end of this year and the provisions will become legally binding 18-24 months after the adopted Regulation is published in the Official Journal.

# gn 17 - the labelling of meat

Guidance Note No. 17 - *The Labelling of Meat* was recently published by the FSAI. The inter-agency working group responsible for formulating the Guidance Note included representatives from the Local Authority Veterinary Service, the Department of Agriculture and Food, the Health Service Executive and the FSAI. Its purpose is to:

- Provide guidance for industry in terms of documentation and labelling requirements
- Provide guidance for enforcement officers
- Develop templates for industry for meat traceability and labelling plans.

The Guidance Note applies to all meat marketed in the Republic of Ireland and covers extensively the following areas:

- European and Irish legislation on meat labelling and traceability
- Labelling and documentation rules for all meat
- Enforcement and breaches of the Regulations
- Sample labels for various meats
- Traceability and sample traceability plans for various premises types.

Guidance Note No. 17 will be a useful resource for both industry and enforcement officers and will ensure that the fundamental rule of labelling i.e. that consumers are not misled, is adhered to. Copies are available from our advice-line by calling 1890 336677 or at [www.fsai.ie](http://www.fsai.ie).



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

#### **S.I. No. 544 of 2005**

European Communities (Material and Articles intended to come into contact with foodstuffs) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations, 2005

#### **S.I. No. 647 of 2005**

European Communities (Labelling, Presentation and Advertising of Foodstuffs) (Amendment) (No. 3) Regulations, 2005

## fsai awarded the w-mark

The FSAI was awarded the W-Mark Global Website Certification at the 2005 National Quality and Excellence Awards. Excellence Ireland Quality Association (EIQA) in association with their global partner e-Commerce Standards Board (eCSB) designed and developed the global website certification and recognition programme. The W-Mark has been launched in Ireland, UK, USA, and Australia to date and will continue to be rolled out across all English speaking countries. It is the only complete website certification programme aligned to the eCSB global standard.

The FSAI website underwent a rigorous audit process to achieve the global recognition and certification mark. The website was audited under a number of criteria to ensure excellence and best practice and was scored on such items as consistency and appearance; accessibility; privacy compliance management; navigation, data and information security management and customer service commitment.

*Pictured at the National Quality and Excellence Awards Ceremony are (l-r): Mr Paul O'Grady, Managing Director, EIQA; Dr Brian Redahan, Director of Consumer Protection, FSAI; and Dr Chris Brendon, Chairman of the e-Commerce Standards Board.*



# avian influenza

Outbreaks of the highly pathogenic Avian Influenza strain H5N1 have occurred in Asian and Russian countries since 2004, and more recently in some countries bordering the European Union. As safeguard measures, imports of live birds, poultry meat and poultry products from affected regions have been prohibited by the European Commission.

## Strain Variation

Avian Influenza is a disease arising from infection with the *Influenzavirus A* genus of the *Orthomyxoviridae* family. These are negative-strand segmented-genome RNA viruses. The replication of RNA viral genomes is prone to errors, and the accumulation of point mutations gives rise to distinct variations over time. This is known as 'genetic drift'. Furthermore the genome of influenza viruses is comprised of eight separate segments, permitting reassortment of those segments following simultaneous infection of a single host cell by two different strains. This results in occasional rapid emergence of novel subtypes, and is known as 'genetic shift'. In combination, these mechanisms result in a remarkable potential for the emergence of novel strains. Advantages arise for a pathogen which can adapt rapidly to occupy specific ecological niches or to evade immune responses of the host.

## Categorisation

Categorisation of influenza viruses is usually based on the expression of antigens, specifically haemagglutinin (H1 to H15) and neuraminidase (N1 to N9) antigens, e.g. H5N1. Avian Influenza viruses may also be categorised according to their virulence in poultry, as highly pathogenic (HPAI) or low pathogenicity (LPAI). That categorisation describes the ability of HPAI to infect tissues throughout the host, resulting in peracute systemic viraemia with high mortality. LPAI in contrast, replicates only in respiratory and intestinal tissues, to produce a milder bird disease characterised by respiratory disease, depression and reduced egg production. Reasonable correlation exists between these two separate classification systems, with all HPAI described to date restricted to the H5 and H7 subtypes.

## Zoonotic Potential

Due to their intimate interaction with host tissues, viruses tend to have narrow host ranges. Avian Influenza viruses in general exhibit disease in birds, but aquatic birds appear to be relatively resistant to many strains and therefore act as reservoirs for

these viruses in nature. Point mutations and reassortments which would provide the virus with a broader range of hosts would be favoured by natural selection in a mixed global ecosystem. Some recently-emergent HPAI strains, including the H5N1 strain implicated in the current outbreaks do exhibit pathogenicity in man. Small numbers of people in direct contact with affected poultry have developed disease due to this virus, with high mortality rate. The tropism of this virus for human tissues would appear to be very low, requiring high viral load to cause disease, and minimal possibility for transfer within a human population.

## Viral Presence in Food

HPAI infection results in dissemination throughout the avian body and the presence of viable viruses in muscle and eggs has been shown. LPAI is restricted to infection of respiratory and enteric tissues, which could also result in contamination of food products, e.g. chicken carcasses or eggs. The clinical syndrome of Avian Influenza, particularly HPAI, but also including LPAI, reduces chances of entry of contaminated products to the food chain. Viruses are obligate pathogens requiring live host cells in order to replicate, so food products do not support growth and multiplication. Outside of the host cell, survival of the Avian Influenza virus is facilitated by low temperatures. Stability at 4°C and 37°C have been reported at 35 days and six days respectively. Normal cooking temperatures of over 70°C will inactivate the virus, and therefore consumption of well-cooked poultry meat carries no risk. Handling of raw poultry meat whether fresh, frozen or thawed, could result in contact with the virus, so normal hygienic precautions regarding handling of raw poultry meat should be strictly observed. Hands, utensils and surfaces should be thoroughly cleaned following contact with raw poultry products; and there should be adequate separation of raw food from cooked or ready-to-eat foods. Current evidence pertaining to human cases of Avian Influenza do not provide any indication of infection of people solely through food contact. The risk to human health from affected birds arises primarily from inhalation of large viral load, due to entering the house of affected birds, or slaughter, plucking and evisceration of affected birds.

## Import Prohibition

An outbreak of HPAI in Ireland would have profound animal health implications requiring the slaughter of affected herds, and stringent biosecurity practices on all poultry farms, including extensive units. From a public health perspective, every outbreak of Avian Influenza in poultry increases the amount of viral replication and environmental load of circulating viable virus, thus increasing the risk of emergence of novel strains, including variants with high pathogenicity in man. Moreover, control mechanisms based primarily on preventing contact of the virus with its host create selection pressures to evolve towards a broader host range. Substantial human influenza pandemics have arisen due to the introduction of novel strains of influenza virus to the human population. The potential for 'genetic drift' of H5N1 HPAI towards greater pathogenicity does exist, and evidence exists for a tendency for increasing human pathogenicity since its initial implication in avian disease. The potential for reassortment of genetic elements of Avian Influenza with another influenza strain to produce a novel strain capable of efficiently infecting man and generating a human pandemic is exceedingly remote. RNA is very labile in the environment and viruses need to be actively replicating in order to

facilitate reassortment, so co-infection of a single cell by two strains would be required.

Genomic segment reassortment would then have to produce a complete novel combination of segments capable of viability and virulence. While speculation exists that the HPAI strains may originate due to reassortment of LPAI H5 or H7 strains from wild birds, all genetic segments of the H5N1 strain are currently of avian origin with no evidence of reassortment with human strains.

## In Summary

Direct human health risks associated with food products from affected regions are negligible, but the direct animal health risk of outbreaks in poultry may pose indirect risks for public health. In that context prohibition of imports from affected regions, and vigilance regarding wild migrating birds, are warranted to manage these risks. The FSAI's Scientific Committee will maintain a watching brief over the Avian Influenza situation, and particularly any alteration in the zoonotic potential or foodborne risk.



### Key messages

- The risk of direct foodborne Avian Influenza in humans is very low
- All raw poultry meat should be regarded as containing pathogens and treated accordingly
- Hands, utensils and surfaces should be thoroughly cleaned following contact with raw poultry products
- Cook poultry meat thoroughly as temperatures above 70°C will inactivate the virus
- Raw poultry should be separated from cooked or ready-to-eat foods
- Protection of poultry from the risk of Avian Influenza is an important public health issue.



### For further information, see:

World Organization for Animal Health (OIE)  
[www.oie.int](http://www.oie.int)

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations  
[www.fao.org/ag/aginfo/subjects/en/health/default.html](http://www.fao.org/ag/aginfo/subjects/en/health/default.html)

European Commission's Directorate General for Consumer Health and Protection  
[http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/animal/diseases/controlmeasures/avian/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/animal/diseases/controlmeasures/avian/index_en.htm)  
[http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/health\\_consumer/dyna/influenza/index.cfm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/health_consumer/dyna/influenza/index.cfm)

World Health Organization  
[www.who.int/csr/don/2004\\_01\\_15/en/](http://www.who.int/csr/don/2004_01_15/en/)

WHO: International Food Safety Authorities Network of the World Health Organization  
[www.who.int/entity/foodsafety/fs\\_management/No\\_02\\_Avianinfluenza\\_Dec04\\_en.pdf](http://www.who.int/entity/foodsafety/fs_management/No_02_Avianinfluenza_Dec04_en.pdf)

## prepared for avian influenza

The Department of Health and Children and the Health Service Executive are working closely together on pandemic influenza preparedness activities. A detailed plan for response to an influenza pandemic was prepared in 2004 - see: [www.dohc.ie/publications/influenza\\_pandemic.html](http://www.dohc.ie/publications/influenza_pandemic.html). This plan is currently being updated to reflect the most up-to-date advice of the Influenza Pandemic Expert Group and the World Health Organization (WHO).

The Influenza Pandemic Expert Group which is chaired by Professor William Hall, Director of the National Virus Reference Laboratory (NVRL), comprises medical experts as well as representatives of relevant organisations including the Irish College of General Practitioners, the Irish Medicines

Board, NVRL, the Health Protection Surveillance Centre and other Health Service Executive nominees.

The Terms of Reference of the Influenza Pandemic Expert Group are as follows:

- To function as a standing expert group that will monitor and review national and international research and developments in relation to pandemic influenza, and provide expert advice to the Minister for Health and Children.
- To review current advice and guidance on pandemic influenza preparedness and response, identifying gaps, and update and provide clear, evidence-based expert advice on pandemic influenza preparedness and response.

The Health Service Executive has also established seven Working/Implementation Groups to urgently address actions required in the following areas:

- Communications
- Surveillance
- Laboratory Capacity/Availability
- Case Management/ Treatment and Infection Control
- Vaccines and Antivirals
- Health Service Facilities
- Personnel, Supplies and Excess Mortality.

# determination of product shelf-life

Food products should not contain microorganisms, their toxins or metabolites, in quantities that present an unacceptable risk to human health. Regulation (EC) 178/2002 sets down general food safety requirements, according to which food must not be placed on the market if it is unsafe. The shelf-life of food products is an integral part of food safety.

Food products that, from a microbiological point of view, are highly perishable and are therefore likely after a short period of time to constitute a danger to human 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 the use-by date to ensure product safety is very important.

In recognising the importance of shelf-life to food safety, and in response to industry requests for information, the FSAI will soon publish a new Guidance Note on shelf-life determination. The

Guidance Note was developed by a multi-disciplinary working group composed of industry, regulatory and academic representatives.

In parallel to the publication of this Guidance Note, a two-day FETAC (Further Education and Training Awards Council) approved training course on determination of product shelf-life has been developed by the Ashtown Food Research Centre, Teagasc (formerly The National Food Centre). The course aims to provide technical specialists in the food industry with the knowledge to establish a scientifically based microbial shelf-life for food safety. It is proposed that the course will run in spring 2006.

Further information on the new Guidance Note can be obtained from the FSAI by calling 1890 33 66 77 or by emailing [info@fsai.ie](mailto:info@fsai.ie). For further information on the shelf-life course please contact the course administrator at the Ashtown Food Research Centre, Teagasc, on 01-805 9520 or at [mhennessy@nfc.teagasc.ie](mailto:mhennessy@nfc.teagasc.ie).

## labelling training for daf

A series of ten labelling training workshops were hosted and delivered by the FSAI between June and August this year. The workshops were developed for the Veterinary Public Health Inspection Service in the Department of Agriculture and Food and were held in Dublin, Cork, Sligo, Portlaoise, Mullingar and Kilkenny. They provided information on:

- General labelling requirements for pre-packaged foods
- Beef labelling requirements
- Labelling requirements for meat and meat products, and
- Labelling requirements for poultry meat.



*Pictured are attendees at the training workshop in Sligo.*

## training in the chinese food sector

Since its launch in May 2004, the FSAI's training programme for the Chinese food sector has been well received by 70 Chinese food premises nationwide.

The programme which focuses on training managers (proprietor, manager, head chef) has been found to be of benefit to Chinese premises for the following reasons:

- It is delivered by Chinese trainers to trainees in their own language - Mandarin or Cantonese
- Imagery and examples used are of foods and practices relevant to their business
- The training is delivered in three hour modules, scheduled at a time to suit the premises
- The management team in the business is equipped with the knowledge required to provide basic level training to their staff.

If you know of a premises that could benefit from the programme please advise them to contact Mary or Shinaede on 01 8171348, or email [training@fsai.ie](mailto:training@fsai.ie) for an application form.

*The five Chinese trainers pictured here are: front (l-r) - Xueyan Tang, Jessica Kang and Tingting Moylan back (l-r) - Zhengyong Yan and Zhihang Zhang.*





# gone ploughing...

The FSAI had an information stand at the National Ploughing Championships which was held in Mogeely, Co. Cork from September 27th to 29th. The event attracted a massive 179,000 visitors, proving to be still Ireland's most popular farming festival.

This was the FSAI's seventh year participating at the event, and the theme appropriately was 'Farmers - the first link in the food safety chain'. The event provides the FSAI with an opportunity to meet with those working in the farming sector, to answer their queries and discuss any issues they may have.

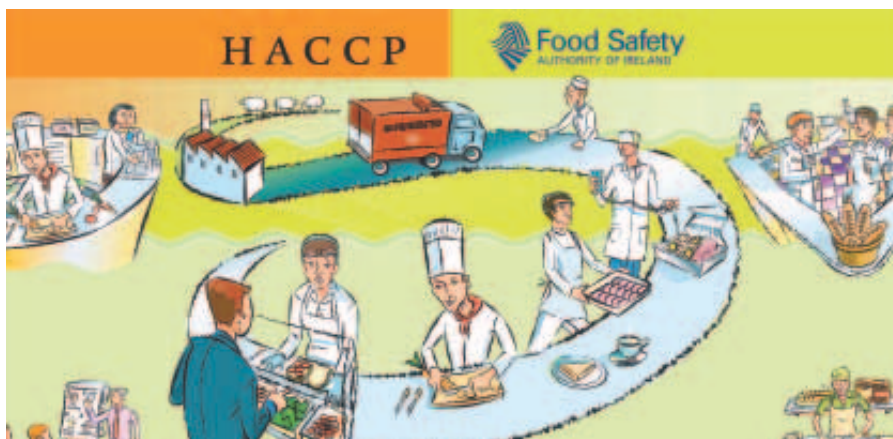
In 2006, the World Ploughing Championships, which will be a four day event, will be held in Tullow, Co. Carlow.



Tim Camon, Agricultural Officer, FSAI (right), gives advice to a visitor at the FSAI information stand at the national ploughing championships.

## fsai at forecourt

Forecourt 2005 is Ireland's only exhibition dedicated to the convenience, retail and forecourt (retail & equipment) sectors. With over 120 exhibitors and many thousands of visitors, the show provided an excellent opportunity for FSAI to meet with people working in the Irish food industry. The event was held in the RDS, Dublin from 16th - 18th October and the theme for the FSAI information stand was 'HACCP'. The information stand was manned by trained advisors and scientists who work on a daily basis on issues concerning the food industry, and was visited by many interested parties over the three days.



## food safety in natural disasters

When a natural disaster occurs such as the tsunami in South East Asia or hurricane and floods in New Orleans, food in affected areas may become contaminated with dangerous microbiological and chemical agents. Consequently, those populations are at risk from outbreaks of foodborne diseases, including hepatitis A, typhoid fever and diarrhoeal diseases, such as cholera and dysentery.

Food safety risks are mainly linked to unsafe food storage, handling and preparation. In many cases cooking may be impossible during natural disasters due to the lack of facilities or fuel. Poor sanitation, including lack of safe water and toilet facilities, can increase the risks. As persons suffering from the direct effects of the disaster may already be at risk through malnutrition, exposure, shock and other traumas, it becomes essential that the food they consume is safe.

In order to assist governments in their planning and response to natural disasters, the World Health Organization (WHO) has developed the guide *Ensuring Food Safety in the Aftermath of Natural Disasters*. It offers specific advice to those involved in food storage, handling and preparation during disaster situations. The guide is modelled after the WHO Five Keys to Safer Food (<http://www.who.int/foodsafety/consumer/5keys/en/>) and is intended to:

1. Provide public health and other authorities with guidance on key food safety issues to be considered in such disaster situations
2. Remind authorities of the need to restore and maintain basic support for food safety infrastructure
3. Heighten their vigilance against the introduction of new foodborne risks

4. Serve as a quick reference to those involved in providing emergency food aid, such as managers of refugee camps and food distribution centres
5. Provide guidance for the development of simple food safety messages to those involved in food handling and preparation in disaster areas, including ordinary consumers.

While the guide has been primarily developed to be used following natural disasters, most of its food hygiene advice may also be applicable to other emergencies such as those caused by armed conflicts and serious social disruptions.

# multi-annual national control plan

The European Commission recently circulated a draft Decision which sets out guidelines to assist Member States (MS) in preparing a single integrated Multi-Annual National Control Plan (MANCP). The purpose of the MANCP is to have a global and uniform approach to official control and to establish a solid basis for undertaking Commission controls in MS. The plan involves the consolidation and integration of local, regional and central control plans into one national plan. The guidelines will be non-binding on MS but cognisance must be taken of them in the preparation of the MANCPs.

The guidelines apply to all official controls coming within the scope of Regulation 882/2004 including in particular food, feed, animal health and welfare and plant health (Articles 41-46 only). Article 41 of Regulation 882/2004 requires Member States to prepare a single integrated MANCP to ensure compliance with the requirements of Article 17(2) of Regulation 178/2002. Article 42 specifies the principles for the preparation and content of the MANCP which must take account of Commission guidelines (Article 43). An incremental approach is proposed taking account of experience gained, FVO missions, MS audits and their annual reports.

The Commission requires a single contact point in each Member State to facilitate communication (a unit, an office and/or a named

individual). Guidance is provided on the legal requirements and the reporting format for MANCPs. General information is required on MS strategic objectives; risk categorisation; designation of competent authorities; delegation of control systems and co-ordination of activities; delegation of control bodies; compliance with operational criteria; training of staff performing official controls; documented procedures; operational contingency planning; organisation of co-operation and mutual assistance and adjustment of the MANCP.

The current requirement under other EC legislation to prepare specific control plans is not negated by the MANCP. These specific control plans must be integrated into the overarching MANCP and must be appended to the MANCP.

A working group meeting was convened by the Commission on the 14th/15th September in Grange, Co. Meath, at which the Commission requested written comments from MS by 30th September to facilitate redrafting and circulation of a revised document prior to the meeting which took place at the end of October in Grange.

Comments from Ireland on the draft Decision have been forwarded to the Commission.

## fvo - 2005 inspection update

The European Union Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) has planned a total of 188 inspections for the latter half of 2005, the majority of which are food safety related. Of the total number of inspections planned, 79 (67%) will take place in the 25 EU Member States, 10 (8%) in candidate countries and 29 (25%) in other third countries. Inspections in Member States will broadly be in the areas of food safety and animal health, animal welfare and plant health.

The largest number of inspections in Member States will take place in the recent accession countries and relate to public health and disease controls. Inspections are also planned in the candidate countries of Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Turkey. For third countries the majority of planned inspections relate to fish, fishery products and live bivalve molluscs.

In Ireland, an FVO Mission took place last May on import controls and border inspections posts, DG(SANCO)/7658/2005, and illegal imports of products of animal origin and live animals, DG(SANCO)/7659/2005. The draft report for this Mission has been received and the final report is currently awaited. Most recently, a mission relating to Scrapie took place from 10th-14th October and a Mission is also scheduled on poultry meat.

The 2005 EU FVO Inspection Programme can be found at [http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fvo/inspectprog/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fvo/inspectprog/index_en.htm).

## congratulations to jim buckley



The FSAI would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Jim Buckley on his recent promotion to Chief Veterinary Officer with Cork County Council. Mr Buckley was a founder Member of the Cork Zoonoses Committee, is President of Veterinary Ireland Public Health Committee and Executive President of the Local Authority Veterinary Officers Association. He is an Honorary

Associate of the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, UCD, and is a founder member of the FSAI Artisan Food Forum. We wish him success in his career and look forward to continued working relations.

## srm audits

The latest round of SRM audits began last July at the request of the TSE Sub-committee of the FSAI Scientific Committee. This round of audits focuses mainly on abattoirs where older cattle are slaughtered, and will continue to the end of the first quarter 2006. It will entail visits to at least 100 retail outlets, with a number of hauliers also subjected to audit. The audit team/s will also visit a number of local authority abattoirs where minor non-compliances were discovered in the 2003/4 audit. A full report will be published on completion and will detail any non-compliances discovered and the current status of SRM controls.



# marketing of infant formulae and follow-on formulae

A new leaflet entitled *Marketing of Infant Formulae and Follow-on Formulae* has recently been produced by the FSAI. The leaflet is aimed at all professionals who are involved with infant formulae and follow-on formulae, whether from the industry, from the official agencies (e.g. EHOs) or from the health care system.

Infant formulae and follow-on formulae are regulated in Ireland by EC (Infant Formulae and Follow-on Formulae) Regulations, 2004 (S.I. No. 242 of 2004). The Regulations cover composition and labelling as well as the marketing of infant/follow-on formulae. In addition to the Regulations, there is also an International Code of Marketing of breast milk substitutes published by the World Health Organization.

This code includes more rigorous standards than the legislation regarding the marketing of both infant and follow-on formulae. While this code is not legally binding, many sectors of the health care system are applying it. The marketing aspects of the Regulations are enforced by the environmental health officers of the Health Service Executive, however, the International Code is not enforceable.

The leaflet aims to clarify the current legislation applying to the marketing of infant formulae and follow-on formulae by summarising the requirements for advertising, labelling, giving of samples/gifts, provision of information/education, and the role of the health care system in relation to the promotion of infant/follow-on formulae.

The leaflet is available by calling our advice-line on 1890 33 66 77, or on our website at [www.fsai.ie](http://www.fsai.ie).

## open consultation

There is currently one open consultation on our website:

### Guidance Note on Production of Heat Processed and Chilled Foods

The Guidance Note on Production of Heat Processed and Chilled Foods was prepared by a working group chaired by the Food Safety Authority of Ireland. The working group was composed of representatives of the food industry in Ireland.

The Guidance Note is applicable to food businesses producing heat processed, chilled foods under static or batch processing conditions which are sold to another food business or organisation for sale or use. These foods will require minimum storage at  $\leq 5^{\circ}\text{C}$  to maintain shelf-life during distribution, display and sale. The Guidance Note is not applicable to:

- i. Food business operators involved in the processing and direct sale or supply of products directly to consumers (e.g. food service operations such as restaurants, hospitals etc.)
- ii. Cook-chill food produced under FSAI Guidance Note No. 15
- iii. Foods produced in plate heat exchangers and scraped surface jackets vessels
- iv. Heat processed ambient stable foods (e.g. canned foods)

- v. Heat processed milk and milk products
- vi. Dried, fermented or cold or hot smoked meat, poultry-meat and fish which is heat and/or chill processed
- vii. Live bivalve molluscs (i.e. bivalve molluscs are filter-feeding lamellibranch molluscs)

The Guidance Note intends to provide food businesses with information on designing, implementing, validating and verifying the safety of heating and chilling processes to eliminate or reduce pathogens that could endanger public health to safe levels. The document also emphasises the need for all aspects of heating and chilling processes to be included as integral parts of a food businesses Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) plan.

Further details on this consultation are available on our website at [www.fsai.ie/consultation](http://www.fsai.ie/consultation).

Comments submitted to this consultation will be reviewed by the working group in preparing the final draft of this Guidance Note.

Comments and views should be submitted by 5pm on Tuesday 3rd January 2006 to email: [consultation@fsai.ie](mailto:consultation@fsai.ie); fax: +353 1 817 1301, or post: Consultations, Food Safety Authority of Ireland, Abbey Court, Lower Abbey Street, Dublin 1.

## new hygiene legislation - an information resource

On January 1st 2006, the current hygiene Directives will be replaced with new legislation. The new legislation takes into account a high level of protection for the consumer, will simplify the existing legislation and will separate aspects of food hygiene from animal health and official control issues.

In order to provide food businesses with an overview of the new hygiene legislation and what it means to their business, the FSAI has produced an information resource, consisting of a suite of leaflets and a dedicated section on its website. This resource is due to be launched mid November. The leaflets will be distributed widely and will also be available by calling our advice-line on 1890 33 66 77.





## 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 form below. This form can also be used to amend your own mailing details if required.

Please tick here if you would prefer to receive the newsletter by email ☐

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**Please return this completed form to:**

**Bernadette Price, Food Safety Authority of Ireland, Abbey Court, Lower Abbey Street, Dublin 1.**

## new appointment

Mr Micheál O'Mahony has recently been appointed Chief Specialist in Veterinary Public Health with the FSAI. He is a veterinary graduate from University College Dublin (UCD) with a Masters degree in organic dairy farming.

Micheál joins FSAI with a wide range of experience in the application of veterinary skills in the protection of public health. Following graduation, he worked as an intern in large animal medicine at University College Dublin's Veterinary Teaching Hospital, then as an assistant in mixed veterinary practice and as a temporary veterinary inspector.

In 2000 he joined the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at UCD as a lecturer in veterinary public health and food safety. For the past five years he has co-ordinated the multi-disciplinary team involved in the provision of undergraduate and postgraduate training in veterinary public health. He has been involved in a broad range of research projects co-ordinated by UCD's Centre for Food Safety, examining the role of animals in epidemiology of various zoonotic disease hazards, including Norovirus, Campylobacter, Salmonella and VTEC. He provides veterinary expertise at the Scientific Advisory Committee of the Health Protection Surveillance Centre.

As Chief Specialist, Mr O'Mahony will manage and develop the veterinary public health and agriculture group within the Consumer Protection Division of FSAI, and work closely with stakeholders in official agencies and the food industry, to ensure optimal consumer protection.



## recent publications

The following publications have recently been produced by the FSAI:

- *Guidance Note No. 17 - The Labelling of Meat*
- *Leaflet - Marketing of Infant Formulae and Follow-on Formulae*

These publications are available on our website at [www.fsai.ie/publications](http://www.fsai.ie/publications).

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