

## Salt Reduction Programme 2003 – 2012: Meeting Targets and Overcoming Barriers

The FSAI has been working with the food industry to achieve gradual, sustained and universal reductions in the salt content of processed and prepared foods since 2003. The long term goal of this work is to reduce the average population intake of salt from 10g a day to 6g a day by 2012 through partnership with the food industry and State bodies charged with communicating the salt and health message to consumers. Since 2003, great success has been achieved in some sectors in reducing salt levels in processed food. In light of these achievements, the FSAI, in conjunction with Food and Drink Industry Ireland and Retail Ireland hosted a seminar in Dublin on 3 September last to discuss what has been achieved so far, what problems have been encountered and what the issues are going forward for the food industry to further reduce the salt content of processed and prepared foods.

While the industry has made significant progress in reducing salt in processed foods, some companies are now facing technical barriers if further reductions are to be achieved. Product issues, which impact on product formulation and attractiveness for consumers, are seen as significant obstacles. The current economic circumstances have also impacted on some sectors of the food industry with commitments to the salt reduction programme waning in recent times. However, it is of vital importance that the industry regains its momentum in relation to salt reduction and keeps consumers' health at the forefront of their continued product development.

Consumers also play a huge role in reducing their salt intake where they have control in the home. Efforts made by the food industry will mean nothing if the consumer just adds more salt during cooking or at the table. The overall aim is that gradually, over time, people will become accustomed to less salt. Opening the seminar, Trevor Sargent



*Pictured at the salt seminar are Prof. Alan Reilly, CEO, FSAI and Trevor Sargent TD, Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children, with special responsibility for the promotion of food safety*

TD, Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children, with special responsibility for the promotion of food safety (and also Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, with special responsibility for food and horticulture), reiterated this point. Consumers need to choose foods that are lower in salt and reduce or remove salt used in cooking and at the table. Consumer choice will ultimately drive the food industry to continue the progress to date in reducing salt in processed foods.

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## Raw Milk – Old Issue, New Concern?

A small number of people continue to drink raw milk in Ireland contrary to the advice of food safety and public health professionals. Advocates of raw milk consumption claim additional nutritional qualities, taste and health benefits as reasons for this practice. However, science-based data to substantiate these claims are limited. The risk to health from drinking raw milk has been known for well over a hundred years. Yet, today, illness linked to raw milk consumption continues to be reported from many parts of the world. A range of pathogens are involved. Among the most notable are *Campylobacter* spp., *E. coli* O157:H7, *Listeria monocytogenes* and *Salmonella* spp. These can have serious consequences for health, particularly in vulnerable groups such as children, older people, people in poor health and pregnant women.

It is very easy for harmful bacteria to get into raw milk, either directly in the case of mastitis or from environmental contamination in the dairy during milking. Once contaminated, raw milk is a perfect environment for harmful bugs to grow and proliferate. Pasteurisation is an effective method of killing harmful bacteria and rendering milk safe to drink.

In the United States, several milk-borne disease outbreaks have occurred over the past ten years which have been traced to the consumption of raw unpasteurised milk. One of the most recent outbreaks involving *Campylobacter jejuni* caused illness in 35 people, most of whom were children. In July of this year, three Swiss children suffered from *Staphylococcus aureus* intoxication following the consumption of raw goat's milk. In Germany, raw milk consumption by children during visits to farms resulted in serious long term illness from infections with *E. coli* O157:H7.

In Ireland in 2005, drinking raw milk on a dairy farm was linked to a family outbreak of tuberculosis, with the disease having a very severe impact on the health of two young children. While the likelihood of acquiring tuberculosis from the consumption of raw milk is very low, it nevertheless remains a distinct possibility, as the herd incidence of bovine tuberculosis is reported to be around 5%. There is a greater possibility of infection with *E. coli* O157:H7 or verocytotoxin producing *E. coli* (VTEC) from the consumption of raw milk.

**The potential public health risks associated with the consumption of raw milk are well documented. The effectiveness of pasteurisation as a preventive measure is beyond scientific doubt.**

Prior to 2006, Ireland had national legislation which prohibited the sale of raw cow's milk. However, in 2006, this national legislation was rescinded with the introduction of new EU hygiene legislation. Nonetheless, this EU legislation allows a Member State to choose to prohibit or restrict the sale of raw milk or cream in its own territory. The FSAI would encourage and very much welcome a return to such national legislation. The potential public health risks associated with the consumption of raw milk are well documented. The effectiveness of pasteurisation as a preventive measure is beyond scientific doubt.

A return to a prohibition on raw milk sale will not meet with universal appeal. Opponents will argue for the right and freedom to choose, but such freedom should be limited for the greater good. Children, who often have no choice, must be protected. Adults also have the right not to be served or sold raw milk without their knowledge. Of course, the standards of milk production in Ireland are much improved and there is already a general legal obligation on all food producers to market only safe food. Pasteurisation of milk removes any doubt about safety. Science, history and experience points clearly in its favour. The FSAI believes that it would serve the greater good to require again by law, that only pasteurised milk is made available to our population and, crucially, our children.



*Alan Reilly*

**Alan Reilly**  
CEO

## Pandemic H1N1 2009

Pandemic H1N1 2009 Influenza (commonly known as 'swine flu') is a new flu virus which has been declared by the World Health Organization to be pandemic, i.e. a flu epidemic that spreads around the world.

This flu virus can spread quickly from person to person through tiny drops in coughs and sneezes. Anyone who is close to a person with flu can breathe the virus in and become infected. Droplets can also be passed from surfaces like door handles and hand rails. The swine flu virus is not transmitted through food.

Recently, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food confirmed the first pig herd in Ireland had tested positive for the swine flu virus.

It is believed that the most likely source of transmission to the pig herd was from an infected person. The disease in pigs is mild and has no significance in relation to food safety.

There is no reason for public health concern associated with the consumption of cooked pork or pork products. There have been no reported human cases of swine flu in the world that have been linked to the consumption of properly cooked pork or pork products.

Pork is safe to eat, but as always, it is important to ensure good hygienic handling practices and to cook pork products thoroughly prior to consumption.



## Visit from the Saudi Food and Drugs Authority

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, with a population of over 26 million, has a large dependence on imported food and food products, with an estimated 65% coming from abroad. It is therefore essential that the Kingdom has a strong, robust and reliable system for food import control in place. In 2003, the Saudi Food and Drugs Authority (SFDA) was set up as an independent corporate body, reporting directly to the Premier. Food control is one of its main tasks. As part of its plan to modernise its food control system, the SFDA recognised the need to establish a rapid alert system for food. Indeed, it is now in the process of establishing a special centre for following international notifications relating to food safety. The centre will also be responsible for incoming local notifications from manufacturers, importers and distributors, in order to ensure that appropriate, timely measures are taken to prevent the entry, marketing or consumption of harmful foodstuffs.

Officials from the SFDA visited Ireland in order to learn more about the operation of the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed used here and to see how food incidents are managed and how information about



*Pictured during their visit to Galway are (l-r): Swailim Suhool Alotaibi and Abdullah Abdulaziz Alrubiya from the Saudi Food and Drugs Authority.*

unsafe or potentially unsafe food is gathered and disseminated. During the week-long stay, Abdullah Abdulaziz Alrubiya and Swailim Suhool Alotaibi met with staff in the FSAI, worked with the FSAI food incident team, visited with colleagues in the Environmental Health Service and the Food Control Laboratory Services in the HSE, Galway, and met with Irish food importers and distributors. The FSAI and the SFDA anticipate continuing cooperation.

## EFSA Working Group Meets at FSAI

A European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) Technical Working Group on Data Collection recently held a meeting at the offices of the FSAI. The remit of the working group is to harmonise the collection of analytical measurement data for the presence of harmful or beneficial chemical substances in food and feed.

The working group is mandated to produce guidelines on:

- The harmonisation of a standardised way of describing data on analytical measurements in food and feed samples.
- The methods to efficiently transmit and exchange data between Member States and EFSA.

The group will report to the Chemical Occurrence Expert Group, meeting in November, and to a network of pesticide residues experts. These network groups will review and approve all deliverables of the working group.



*Members of the working group, from left to right, are: (Back) Stijn Saevels (Belgium), Jean-Cédric Reninger (AFSA, France), Stefano Cappè (EFSA DATEX), Renata del Rosario (Eurostat), Fabrizio Abbinante (EFSA Zoonosis), Jens Hinge Andersen (Denmark), Lars Wiehle (BVL Germany), (Front) Josef Wolf (Austria), Eileen O'Dea (FSAI), Daniela Brocca (EFSA Pesticides).*

## Consultation on Salt Reduction Programme

The FSAI entered into a period of public consultation from June to August this year on the possible alignment of its voluntary salt reduction programme with the revised UK targets for salt reduction, published by the UK Food Standards Agency last May.

The proposal to align the FSAI salt reduction programme with the UK programme

was rejected by 48% to 44%. Many reasons were cited by respondents for rejecting the proposal: they believe the UK targets are not achievable, have not taken account of technical or safety issues and that the significant progress made by the FSAI voluntary process so far has proven that it should continue.

A detailed review of all responses received through to the open consultation will now be carried out. Review of new data on salt levels in specific product categories and progress of the current voluntary programme will now be required in addition to discussion with the industry, trade associations and other stakeholders.

An update on the food industries commitments for the FSAI salt reduction programme 2009 to 2010 is now available on our website at: <http://tinyurl.com/yaqr72n>



# Microbiological Quality of Whipped and Scoop Ice-Cream

**A national survey on the microbiological quality of whipped ice-cream, coordinated by the FSAI in 2001, showed that 51.1% of samples were unsatisfactory for Aerobic Colony Count (ACC) and 6.5% of samples were unsatisfactory for Enterobacteriaceae. Both ACC and Enterobacteriaceae are indicators of hygiene and microbiological quality. Their presence at unsatisfactory levels highlighted the need for hygiene improvements during the handling and service of whipped ice-cream. To address this, the FSAI published an information leaflet (updated in 2008) highlighting both best practices and legal requirements for those involved in the service and sale of soft ice-cream (i.e. both whipped and scoop ice-cream).**

In 2008, a follow-up national microbiological survey was coordinated by the FSAI. The aims of this survey were to:

- assess the microbiological quality of both whipped and scoop ice-cream on retail sale in Ireland.
- determine whether the microbiological quality of whipped ice-cream had improved since the 2001 National Microbiological Survey.

Samples (whipped ice-cream, n = 647; scoop ice-cream, n = 86; type not specified, n = 126) were obtained by environmental health officers (EHOs) from establishments in the retail and service sectors between May and August 2008. Samples were analysed for ACC and Enterobacteriaceae in the official food microbiology laboratories of the Health Service Executive (HSE). The following were the main findings.

## Microbiological Results

- The type of ice-cream influenced the microbiological results (weak statistical significance). 22% of scoop ice-cream samples were unsatisfactory for ACC and/or Enterobacteriaceae compared to 36% of whipped ice-cream samples.
- The ACC results of whipped ice-cream improved between 2001 and 2008 (strong statistical significance). In 2001, 51.1% of samples were unsatisfactory for ACC compared to 35% of samples in 2008. This may be related to the finding that more food businesses used self-pasteurising machines in 2008 (84%) than in 2001 (73%). There was no significant difference in the Enterobacteriaceae results.

## Questionnaire Data

This survey included a questionnaire through which information was collated on service temperatures and cleaning practices. A total of 582 questionnaires were returned within the specified time period, i.e. there was a 68% (582/859) response rate.

For scoop ice-cream, 85% of samples were maintained at the recommended temperature of  $\leq -12^{\circ}\text{C}$  during service. Regarding the serving utensils, scoop ice-cream samples were of a better microbiological quality when the serving utensils were cleaned both before and during serving. Definitive conclusions on best practices to store the serving utensils could not be made.

For whipped ice-cream, the type of machine had a strong statistically significant effect on the microbiological results. Better results were obtained for whipped ice-cream sampled from self-pasteurising machines compared to non-pasteurising machines. Furthermore, better results were obtained when the temperature display of the machines was  $\leq 5^{\circ}\text{C}$  compared to  $> 5^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Regarding cleaning, the majority of samples (63%) were obtained from machines with a documented cleaning schedule. The cleaning procedure and the cleaning frequency were stated in 78% and 86% of the documented cleaning schedules respectively. The survey revealed good compliance with the recommendations regarding cleaning frequency of ice-cream machines (96% of samples were obtained from machines which were cleaned within the recommended timeframe).

The FSAI would like to thank the EHOs and the laboratory staff in the seven food microbiology laboratories of the Health Service Executive who participated in this survey.

For further information see:

Survey reports: <http://tinyurl.com/ydtu2nu>

FSAI information leaflet: [www.fsai.ie/resources\\_publications.html](http://www.fsai.ie/resources_publications.html)



# Examining Portion Size in the 'Bread, Cereals and Potato' Food Group

'Bread, cereals and potato' is the main food group of the food pyramid used to guide on energy intake. Irish people are advised to have a certain number of portions from this food group per day depending on age, gender and activity levels. But how does the average consumer quantify what size a portion is? Differences in commercial portion sizes and recommended portion sizes can be confusing for people trying to follow the Healthy Eating Guidelines.

Portion sizes are known to have a significant impact on energy (calorie) intake i.e. larger portion sizes lead to higher amounts of energy consumed. There is evidence that the consumption of larger portion sizes is linked with the rise in obesity. Given the current high obesity rate in Ireland, energy intake needs to be controlled and attention focused on portion sizes.

## Assessment of Current Recommended Portion Sizes

The current recommended portions of bread, cereals and potato for all over five years of age provide a very wide range of energy - some portions provide just 60 kilocalories (kcal) whereas others provide as many as 250 kcal. Following the current Healthy Eating Guidelines for Ireland, a consumer could eat a slice of pan bread providing approximately 75 kcal as one of their daily portions or they could eat a scone containing around 250 kcal.

The FSAI assessed Irish portion sizes against recommendations in other countries such as Australia and Canada, which have recently revised their healthy eating guidance. To visualise the comparisons, two displays of 22 commonly eaten foods from the bread, cereal and potato group, were set up. One contained smaller portions based on the current recommendations in the Irish food pyramid. For the smaller portions sizes, the amounts of higher calorie foods (i.e. scone, bagel) were reduced to narrow the energy range. This meant the smaller portion size display included servings such as a third of a scone and half a bagel. The second display portrayed larger portions based on recommendations in Australia; these were almost double the weight, energy and carbohydrate content of the smaller portions.

A survey was carried out on dietitians and nutritionists attending a consultation meeting for the Healthy Eating Guidelines on the practicality of the current Irish portion sizes. Almost all of these health professionals thought that the larger Australian portion sizes were more realistic and practical. However, they advised that consumers in Ireland should be asked which portion sizes made most sense to them.

## Consumers' Perceptions of 'Average' Portion Sizes

In response to this recommendation, the FSAI carried out a survey to assess consumers' perceptions of 'average' portion sizes of bread, cereals and potato in Ireland. Using the two food displays described above as visual aids, data were collected on shoppers' preferences for larger or smaller portion sizes. Over 1,000 (n=1,011) shoppers provided information on their preferences and understanding of portion sizes. Information was collected at two Dublin branches of a large supermarket (covering both an advantaged and a disadvantaged area of Dublin), using a standardised questionnaire.

When shoppers were asked which set of portion sizes (smaller/larger) 'best fit with their idea of average', almost 75% indicated the larger

portions (Fig 1). Females and the older age group (71+ years) were most likely to choose the smaller portions, but even amongst these groups the overall majority chose the larger portions.

Shoppers were asked to indicate any portion sizes within their chosen group that they'd like to change to better fit with their idea of average. Some of those choosing the larger portions overall preferred extra large portions of breakfast cereals (8%), batch loaf (12%), rice (10%), wheaten soda bread (13%) and pasta (15%). Around one in eight of these preferred extra small portions of mashed potato. Therefore an 'average' portion of rice or pasta contains approximately three times more energy than an 'average' portion of mashed potato.

Shoppers were also asked to indicate whether the generic 200ml plastic cup or a dessertspoon is a more practical measurement tool for portions of breakfast cereals, rice and pasta. 75% of shoppers preferred the cup.

## Conclusions

- Recommended portion sizes used in dietary guidance should be made larger so that healthy eating advice is more meaningful to the consumer.
- The food industry should reduce the size of individual portion sizes for the bread, cereals and potato food group.
- The food industry should provide clear labelling on the energy (calorie) content per portion as well as per 100g.
- Consumers need to be educated on the varying energy content of different starchy foods (e.g. mashed potato with low fat milk is lower in calories and more filling than boiled rice).
- Using the generic plastic cup as a measurement tool could be the key to helping consumers estimate their portion sizes.

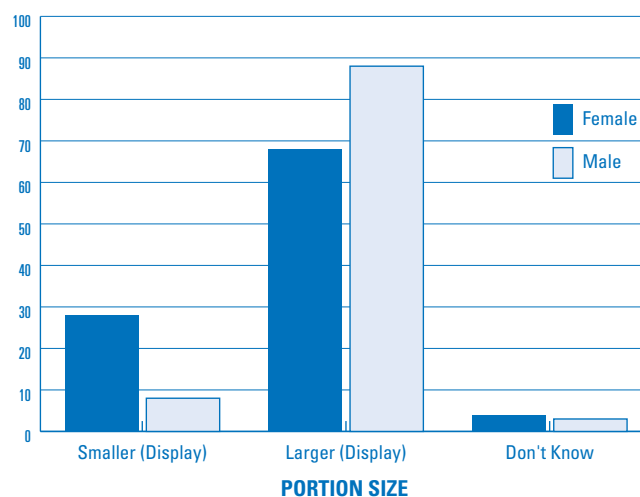


Figure 1: The Proportion of Shoppers Indicating Smaller/Larger Portion Sizes As Their Perceptions of "Average"



# Legislation Update

## EU Legislation

### Organic Aquaculture Animal and Seaweed Production

Commission Regulation (EC) No. 710 of 2009 which lays down detailed rules on organic aquaculture animal and seaweed production was published in the European Official Journal in August.

The Regulation entered into force on 9 August 2009 and is directly applicable. It shall apply from 1 July 2010, with the following exceptions:

- Point 4 of Article 1 (concerning feedingstuff) applies from 6 August 2009
- Corrective measures as provided for in point 19 of Article 1 and points 1(b) and (c) of the Annex shall apply from the entry into application of Regulation (EC) No. 889 of 2008.

The Regulation sets out detailed production rules for the collection and farming of seaweed. It applies *mutatis*

*mutandis* (as necessary) to the production of all multi-cellular marine algae or phytoplankton and micro-algae for further use as feed for aquaculture animals. It also sets out the production rules for species of fish, crustaceans, echinoderms and molluscs as covered by Annex XIIIa to the Regulation. It also applies to zooplankton, micro-crustaceans, rotifers, worms and other aquatic feed animals.

Feed for aquaculture animals should meet the nutritional needs and is also required to meet the health requirement that feed coming from a species is not fed to the same species as laid down in Regulation (EC) No. 999 of 2001 laying down rules for the prevention, control and eradication of certain transmissible spongiform encephalopathies. Therefore, the Regulation sets out appropriate measures to lay down specific provisions on feeds for carnivorous and non-carnivorous aquaculture animals.

For the purpose of organic aquaculture animal and seaweed production, the use of certain non-organic feed materials, feed additives and processing aids is allowed under well-defined conditions.

The Regulation can be viewed at: <http://tinyurl.com/y8zrxaw>

### Official Controls on Imports

Commission Regulation (EC) No. 669 of 2009 (OJ L194, p11, 25/07/2009) of 24 July 2009, implementing Regulation (EC) No. 882 of 2004 as regards the increased level of official controls on imports of certain feed and food of non-animal origin and amending Decision 2006/504/EC was published in the official journal of the European Union in July 2009.

See our website at: <http://tinyurl.com/y9umldx>

This Regulation which will apply from 25 January 2010 lays down rules concerning the increased level of official controls to be carried out at designated points of entry into the European Community on imports of food of non-animal origin listed in Annex I to the Regulation.

Regulation (EC) No. 882 of 2004 establishes a harmonised framework of general rules for the organisation of official controls on the introduction of food from third countries (i.e. countries outside the EU). In addition, it provides for a list to be drawn up of food of non-animal origin that is on the basis of a known or emerging risk to be subject to an increased level of official controls at the first point of entry into the European Community. This new Regulation includes in its Annex this list of foods.

### Release For Free Circulation

Food business operators or their representatives must give adequate prior notification of the estimated date and time of physical arrival of the consignment at the designated

point of entry and of the nature of the consignment. For this purpose, they must complete Part I of a common entry document (CED) and transmit that document to the competent authority at the designated point of entry, at least one working day prior to the physical arrival of the consignment. A model of a CED is set out in Annex II to the Regulation and this document must be drawn up in the official language, or in one of the official languages of the Member State where the designated point of entry is located.

The release for free circulation of consignments is subject to the presentation by the food business operator or their representative to the custom authorities of a common entry document or its electronic equivalent duly completed by the competent authority once all controls required in accordance with the Regulation have been carried out and favorable results from physical checks, where such checks are required, are known.

### Splitting of Consignments

Consignments may not be split until the increased level of official controls has been completed and the common entry document has been completed by the competent authority. In the case of subsequent splitting of the consignment, an authenticated copy of the common entry document must accompany each part of the consignment until it is released for free circulation.



## European Update

### Application of the Food Hygiene Package

The European Commission has published a report to the European Council and the European Parliament on the experience gained from the application of the hygiene regulations - (EC) No. 852 of 2004, (EC) No. 853 of 2004 and (EC) No. 854 of 2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004.

In April 2004, the European Parliament and the Council adopted the 'hygiene package', which comprised three basic Acts: Regulations (EC) No. 852 of 2004 and 853 of 2004, addressed to food business operators (FBOs), and Regulation (EC) No. 854 of 2004; along with Regulation (EC) No. 882 of 2004 on official controls. Some implementing Regulations and transitional measures have also been laid down.

The objective of the 'hygiene package' was to simplify the existing legal rules on food hygiene and make it more coherent by separating the different disciplines - public health, animal health and official controls. Built into the rules was a requirement for the European Commission to submit a report after three years of implementation which would review the experience gained from the application of the new Regulations.

As part of the process of preparing the report, the Commission consulted major stakeholders bilaterally or collectively. The purpose of the report is to present the experience gained in 2006, 2007 and 2008 from the implementation of the 'hygiene package' by both the Competent Authority and by private stakeholders' organisations, and

to identify the difficulties that arose from this implementation.

Broadly speaking, the report states that the overall experience of applying the hygiene regulations may be regarded as positive and that most Member States are, in general, satisfied with the principles of the hygiene legislation and are not of the opinion that the legislation requires a fundamental overhaul. The report identifies the main areas of difficulty as follows:

- certain exemptions from the scope of the hygiene regulations,
- certain definitions laid down in the regulations and the procedure for adapting those definitions,
- certain practical aspects concerning the approval of establishments handling foods of animal origin and the marking of such foods,
- the import regime for certain foods,
- the implementation of HACCP-based procedures in certain food businesses and
- the implementation of official controls in certain sectors.

While no future action plans are included in the report, the Commission has stated that it will consider how to address

the identified difficulties and in submitting its proposals, it will pay particular attention to the fact that the benefits of the simplification achieved with the introduction of the hygiene package are, as far as possible, maintained.

The report can be found on the Europa website at: <http://tinyurl.com/ydpg4en>

## EFSA Update



### Materials and Articles Intended to be Used in Contact With Food

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has published guidelines on submission of a dossier for safety evaluation on active or intelligent substances present in active and intelligent materials and articles intended to come into contact with food.

Regulation (EC) No. 450 of 2009 lays down specific rules for active and intelligent materials and articles to be applied in addition to the general requirements established in Regulation (EC) No. 1935 of 2004

for their safe use. Regulation (EC) No. 450 of 2009 requires that the substance(s) responsible for the active and/or intelligent function of the material be evaluated. A European Community list of authorised substances, that can be used to manufacture an active or intelligent component of active and/or intelligent materials and articles, shall therefore be established after EFSA has performed a risk assessment and has issued an opinion on each substance. In some cases, restrictions may be proposed by EFSA on a group of substances especially when the active or intelligent function implies interactions between different substances.

The purpose of these guidelines is to give guidance to applicants and other interested parties for the preparation and the submission of a dossier for the evaluation of the safety of active and/or intelligent substances responsible for active and/or intelligent functions of active and/or intelligent materials and articles intended to be used in contact with food. It gives guidance on the administrative and technical data required, and on the format of a submission for the evaluation by EFSA.

See: <http://tinyurl.com/yc7yat4>

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

### S.I. No. 380 of 2009

European Communities (Hygiene of Foodstuffs) (Amendment) Regulations, 2009

### S.I. No. 345 of 2009

European Communities (Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies and Animal By-Products) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations, 2009

### S.I. No. 366 of 2009

Diseases of Animals Act, 1966 (First Schedule and Notification) Order, 2009

### S.I. No. 373 of 2009

Abattoirs Act, 1988 (Veterinary Examination and Health Mark) (No. 2) Regulations, 2009

## Euro-toques

When you see the Euro-toques symbol (Fig. 1) at the entrance to a restaurant, it tells you that you are about to enter a restaurant run by a member of Euro-toques (the European Community of Chefs and Cooks). Euro-toques was established in 1986 and one of its founding members was Myrtle Allen from Ballymaloe House, Shanagarry, Co. Cork. Euro-toques stated objectives include “protecting the fine quality and flavour of food” and “supporting producers of the best foods in Europe be they small artisan food producers or large organisations”.

Euro-toques Ireland, which represents in the region of 200 leading chefs and cooks throughout Ireland, held its annual forum “The Whole Hog; re-examining how we rear, kill and eat pigs”, at Evan Doyle’s Brooklodge Hotel, Macreddin Village, Co. Wicklow, on Sunday 6 September. Speakers at the event included Minister of State, Trevor Sargent, TD; Helen Browning of ‘Helen Browning Organics’, UK and Massimo Spigaroli, chef and artisan producer, Italy.



Figure 1: Euro-toques symbol — displayed on restaurants run by a member of Euro-toques.

The forum, which sought to explore what effects, if any, rearing conditions, feed and slaughter practices have on the quality of pigmeat, was attended by a wide cross-section of micro and artisan pigmeat producers. The FSAI attended to respond to any technical queries from the floor.

As part of its longstanding cooperation with artisan food producers, the FSAI has, through its Artisan Forum, provided an effective mechanism for artisans to interact directly with relevant regulators.

There was a common perception that many regulatory barriers can impede the development of the artisan sector in Ireland. However, the FSAI’s pro-active role in developing guidance which has facilitated the collection of fresh blood for the manufacture of traditional black puddings was acknowledged

The principle outcome of the Forum was a challenge to artisan producers to set up a network or producers group which would help them to overcome the challenges to this vibrant and innovative sector.

## FSAI to the Fore in the Progression of Management Systems

Over the last number of months, the FSAI has chaired a working group sponsored by the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) on the development of guidance for public sector organisations who wish to implement a management system based on the requirements of ISO 9001:2008. The outcomes of the working groups’ deliberations will be published over the next couple of weeks in a document entitled “*Embedding Effective Management Systems in Public Sector Organisations*.”

The impetus for the project came from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) report: “IRELAND: Towards an Integrated Public Service” (2008) which focused on enhancing organisational performance, in particular outcomes and outputs while delivering quality services to the public. The report encourages public sector organisations to adopt and achieve international standards. Following on from the OECD report the Government Statement on Transforming the Public Services “requires that public services are delivered at the least possible cost and that the maximum output is received from the resources – financial, human and physical”.

An effective management system provides a mechanism for public sector organisations to meet these challenges. The OECD report recommends “that Irish public bodies could consider adopting and achieving international standards quality frameworks, such as the ISO 9000 series”. ISO 9001:2008 management systems focus strongly on the achievement of objectives and the delivery of outputs and outcomes using a process approach.

An organisation, with a well designed and implemented management system, continually improves its ability to provide services that meet citizen, customer and stakeholder requirements. The benefits of implementing a management system based on ISO 9001 include:

- Performance improvement and measurement
- Support achievement of strategic objectives
- Factual approach to decision making
- Reduction of duplication
- Maximisation of efficiencies
- Enhanced service delivery
- Provides a framework for continual improvement
- Improved citizen, customer and stakeholder satisfaction
- Assists staff mobility and induction to new roles
- Supports statutory and regulatory compliance
- Standardisation of similar processes across a large organisation or across regions
- Meets the requirements for external certification to international standards.

The FSAI management system based on the requirements of ISO 9001 was first registered with NSAI in 2001. In March this year the FSAI became only the third public sector organisation to be registered to ISO 9001:2008. The continued development of the FSAI ISO 9001 system has ensured the Authority comfortably meets the recommendations made in the OECD and The Government Statement on Transforming the Public Services reports regarding the implementation and adoption of international standards.



# Chile: The Latest Country to Establish a Food Safety Agency

The establishment and strengthening of national systems of food control has been one of the aims of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) which has worked consistently with governments around the world to achieve it. Both the FAO and the World Health Organization (WHO) have developed policy documents and guidance to assist countries improve their food control systems. The FSAI has been referenced as a model. Some seven years ago, the FSAI was invited to Chile by the FAO to explain the concept of a single national control agency and inform the various Government Ministries about our experience. Later, in 2007, the Deputy Minister for Agriculture and other officials from Chile came to Ireland and, as part of that visit, called to the offices of the FSAI to see first hand and question the systems in place here.

Since the FSAI was founded 10 years ago, most other European countries now have a food safety agency and the movement has spread across the globe. Again this year, the FAO invited the FSAI to Chile; this time to mark the establishment of its new food safety agency - Agencia Chilena Para la Inocuidad Alimentaria (ACHIPIA). Raymond Ellard, Director of Audit and Compliance, represented the FSAI. The FAO also invited Dr Ana Troncoso, Executive Director of AESAN, the food safety agency of Spain.

The visit to Chile involved meetings with senior officials from the relevant Government Ministries, parliamentarians, the WHO and the FAO. A recent former Minister for Health, Dr María Soledad Barría, has been appointed as Chief Executive of ACHIPIA. ACHIPIA staff are drawn from a wide variety of backgrounds, including journalism. To mark the founding of ACHIPIA, a two day conference was organised on the theme "Food Safety Agencies: Strategies and Case Studies". The FSAI and AESAN both made presentations to an audience of around 200 people drawn from both the official food services and the food sector in Chile. There were many questions from an enthusiastic audience about food control in Europe, the organisation of official controls and, in particular, risk management.

Chile is now a major food producing and exporting nation with a growing tourism industry. Solid coordinated systems of food controls are important to it to protect public health and to underpin its agriculture, tourism



*Mr Raymond Ellard, Director of Audit and Compliance, FSAI, addressed the conference in Chile to mark the establishment of ACHIPIA.*

and food sectors. Chile is an extraordinary country; beautiful, rich in minerals, about ten times the size of Ireland but over 4,000km long and bounded on one side by the impressive Andes mountain range and on the other by the Pacific Ocean. With a population of some 17 million, it has climates varying from the desert in the north to the temperate, cool and damp in the south. ACHIPIA has much work ahead of it, but very optimistic and eager about its work. The FAO is working on food control with many other countries in Central and South America and with the establishment of ACHIPIA, the emergence of more national food safety agencies in that part of the world seems more likely than not.

See: [www.achipia.cl](http://www.achipia.cl)



*Delegates at the 'Food Safety Agencies: Strategies and Case Studies' conference, Chile.*

# How Affordable Is Healthy Eating?

It is well established that healthy eating is a necessary part of preventing chronic diseases such as heart disease, stroke, cancers, obesity etc. Research shows that people on low incomes have a greater chance of getting these conditions, and at a younger age. Low income households have been found to have a lower quality diet in general, which may be related to food costs. Based on this knowledge and current economic circumstances, the Food Safety Authority of Ireland assessed the affordability of healthy eating for low income households.

## Methods

Four-day hypothetical food plans (patterns) were developed for 22 hypothetical individuals representing males and females within four age groups (5-13, 14-18, 19-50 and 51+ years). All of the daily food patterns met goals for healthy eating and included commonly eaten foods.

To determine the overall cost of these healthy eating patterns, three supermarkets (Dublin outlets of prominent nationwide stores) were surveyed to find the cost of each of the food products included in the food patterns. The three stores included a national Irish supermarket, a low-cost foreign supermarket and a local convenience shop.

To apply the healthy eating costs to actual households in Ireland, the 2006 Census was used to identify the composition of the four most typical households in Ireland. These were found to be:

1. a couple with children
2. a couple without children
3. an elderly female living alone
4. a lone parent with one child.

The age and gender of each individual within these households is outlined in Table 1. This table also displays the daily energy requirements for each household.

**Table 1: Typical Irish households: Energy Requirements (Moderately Active\*\* 5+ Years) Used To Develop Healthy Eating Food Patterns**

Household	Age & Sex	Energy Requirements (kcal/MJ)*
1=Two adults with two children	Adult male (35 yrs)	2400 / 10.05
	Adult female (30 yrs)	2000 / 8.37
	Male teenager	2400 / 10.05
	Male 5 year old child	1400 / 5.86
	Entire household	8200 / 34.33
2=Two adults without children	Adult male (35 yrs)	2400 / 10.05
	Adult female (30 yrs)	2000 / 8.37
	Entire household	4400 / 18.42
3=Elderly adult	Adult female (65+ years)	1800 / 7.54
	Entire household	1800 / 7.54
4=Single adult with one child	Adult female (30 yrs)	2000 / 8.37
	Male 5 year old child	1400 / 5.86
	Entire household	3400 / 14.24

Finally, the cost of healthy eating was determined using the cost of the food plans as a percentage of the household social welfare income (which includes child related benefits but excludes the national fuel scheme, back to school clothing and footwear allowance and household benefits package).

## Results

Table 2 shows the percentage of weekly social welfare income that would need to be spent to buy the foods necessary for healthy eating for the four typical households (depending on which type of shop or store was used).

**Table 2: Percentage of Social Welfare Spent on Healthy Eating Patterns for Each of the Four Households in Three Different Stores**

Household	Percentage (%) Social Welfare Allowance		
	National Irish supermarket	Low cost foreign supermarket	Local convenience shop
Household 1 – Two adults with two children	30	26	58
Household 2 – Two adults without children	26	21	49
Household 3 – Elderly adult	15	13	25
Household 4 – Single adult with one child	22	18	43

The percentage of social welfare that needed to be used for food expenditure ranged from 13% to 58%, with an average of 29% required for all households. The couple with two children had the largest percentage of social welfare allocated to food costs with 26% in the low-cost foreign supermarket and 58% in the local convenience shop.

In monetary terms, the total weekly food cost for the four typical households in Ireland ranged from €29 (for a single female living alone and shopping at the cheapest store) to €273 (for a couple with two children shopping at the most expensive store). The average difference in cost between the cheapest store (the low-cost foreign supermarket) and the most expensive store (the local convenience shop) was 46%. Despite this, there was not a big difference in price between the national Irish supermarket and the low cost foreign supermarket.





The households with children had higher food costs than those without. However, Table 3 shows large variation in cost between the 5 year old boy and the teenage boy. Depending on which supermarket is used to buy food, the cost of providing a healthy diet for a teenage boy takes up between 54% and 106% of his weekly allowance. On the other hand, the cost of providing a healthy diet for a 5 year old boy is between 28-61% of his weekly allowance.

**Table 3: Cost of Healthy Eating (€) For 5 and 14 Year Old Boy as a Percentage of Social Welfare Benefit**

	National Irish supermarket	Low cost foreign supermarket	Local convenience shop
5 year old boy	€18.20 (28%)	€17.55 (27%)	€39.65 (61%)
14 year old boy	€35.10 (54%)	€35.75 (55%)	€68.90 (106%)

When considering the cost of each food group in the food pyramid (as a % of total food cost), the fruit and vegetables food group was the most expensive for all four households, ranging from 28% to 37% (depending on the shop). The second most expensive food group was the meat, fish and alternative group and on average claimed 31% of the total food cost. The least expensive food groups were the fats and oils, and snacks groups. The fruit and vegetables group cost 45 cent for every 100 calories provided while the cost per 100 calories is just 4 cent using foods in the fats and oils group and just 11 cent using foods in the snacks groups. In other words, it is 11 times and 2.5 times cheaper to get calories from fats and oils and snacks, compared with fruit and vegetables, respectively.

## Conclusions

Healthy eating accounts for a significant proportion of social welfare payments. This is particularly true for households with children who have higher food costs. However the weekly social welfare payment of only €64.16 per child does not give many parents the option to buy more expensive 'healthy' food. Furthermore, this payment is not age related. This is significant as the cost of healthy eating is much greater for older children, as adolescence is a period of rapid growth and development, where energy and nutrient needs are much greater than that of a younger child.

Foods such as fruit and vegetables and lean meat (which are highly promoted in the food pyramid) are much more expensive than foods such as fats and oils, snacks etc. which are found at the top of the food pyramid (to be eaten sparingly). This means it is far more expensive to meet daily calorie needs by eating healthier foods such as fruit and vegetables, lean meat and fish. Instead it is much more affordable to provide calories in the form of high fat, high-sugar foods which are more accessible and which satisfy hunger quickly.

Food in smaller local shops was found to be more expensive than food in larger retail stores. However, as many low income households rely on public transport, it is easier for them to shop in local stores rather than larger stores which are further to travel to. This is another barrier that needs to be overcome by people on a low income who want to eat a healthy diet.

The cost and availability of food greatly affects choice, especially within low income households. In order for healthy eating advice to make a difference and change the foods people choose to eat, it is essential that action is taken to help low income households purchase healthy food and access a healthy diet.

## Commission Signals Changes to Testing for Marine Biotoxins

As part of the European Commission's review of the management and testing of marine biotoxins, DG-Sanco held a colloquium in Brussels on 10-11 September last. Attending the two day meeting were Member States, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), the shellfish industry, the Community Reference Laboratory (CRL) for marine biotoxins and National Reference Laboratories (NRL) of Member States. Discussions focused on the recent EFSA opinions on marine biotoxins and possible alternative methods of testing.

EFSA presented the various findings of its opinions on marine biotoxins which have been published in stages during 2008 and 2009, pointing out its dissatisfaction with performance of the mouse bioassay method. EFSA acknowledged that the 400g portion size used as the basis of its risk assessment was large, but was used to ensure protection of most consumers (95th percentile). The meeting dealt only with methods of analysis. The validity or appropriateness of current regulatory limits for biotoxins was not discussed.

The CRL chaired a round table discussion of the NRLs on the need to move towards harmonisation of chemical methods and the capabilities of each national laboratory in chemical methods. There is significant variation amongst NRLs on the use of chemical methods. The Irish Marine Institute highlighted the significant difficulties posed by current legal requirement for international validation of such tests for lipophilic toxins. NRLs in Germany and The Netherlands presented

data demonstrating a 16 country international validation of one method using liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry (LC-MS)/MS technology.

In a paper circulated at the meeting, the Commission signalled its intention to introduce proposals which would require chemical testing, rather than the current bioassay, to detect biotoxins. The discussion paper suggested modifications to Regulation (EC) No. 2074/2005 on analytical methods. The changes proposed included:

- LC-MS/MS chemical method shall be used as detection method for okadaic acid and dinophysistoxins, pectenotoxins, yessotoxins and azaspiracids.
- Mouse bioassay may be used for monitoring new toxins in production areas.
- The CRL is to define the performance characteristics and protocol and to validate the method.
- Mouse bioassay may be used for a transitional period of two years as Member States develop LC-MS/MS capacity.

Industry representatives highlighted the trade issues which could arise where chemical results from one country differ to biological results in another. It is expected that a refined draft of the proposal will be prepared and that it will also be notified to the CODEX Committee on Fish and Fishery Products prior to final adoption.



# Meat Traceability – Everyone's Business

The FSAI, in association with GS1 Ireland, is hosting a seminar on meat traceability on 11 November next. Presentations by speakers from Ireland, Canada, New Zealand and Denmark will provide valuable insights on the development of effective and efficient meat traceability and recall systems. The closing panel discussion will provide an opportunity to discuss any issues and/or concerns attendees have in relation to meat traceability systems.

The seminar, which will be held in the Radisson Hotel, Golden Lane, Dublin 8, will discuss key topics such as:

- Case study: Irish dioxin crisis
- RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) tracking of animals in New Zealand
- A global product recall solution
- Pork traceability in Denmark
- Traceability of Irish meat (beef, pork and poultry)

The seminar will be of interest to supply chain/quality managers in the meat industry, retail and foodservice sector representatives, craft butchers, animal feed suppliers, veterinary inspectors and academia.

For further information or to register your interest, please contact: Miriam McDonald at [traceabilityseminar@fsai.ie](mailto:traceabilityseminar@fsai.ie) or telephone: 01 817 1341. (Places are limited so early registration is advisable.) Fee: €100 - lunch and refreshments will be provided.

## DATE FOR YOUR DIARY

# MEAT TRACEABILITY - EVERYONE'S BUSINESS

**Wednesday, 11th November, 2009**  
 Radisson Hotel, Golden Lane, Dublin 8

The Food Safety Authority of Ireland, in association with GS1 Ireland, is hosting a seminar on meat traceability. The seminar will review current meat traceability systems and also showcase 'model' solutions from Ireland and abroad.  
 Presentations by speakers from Ireland, Canada, New Zealand and Denmark will provide valuable insights on the development of effective and efficient meat traceability and recall systems.  
 The closing panel discussion will provide an opportunity to discuss any issues and/or concerns attendees have in relation to meat traceability systems.





**Key topics include:**

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**Fee:** €100 - lunch and refreshments will be provided

**Attendance:** Places will be limited and early registration of interest is recommended

**Who should attend:**

- Supply chain/quality managers in the meat industry
- Retail and foodservice sector representatives
- Craft butchers
- Animal feed suppliers
- Veterinary inspectors
- Academia

For further information or to register your interest, please contact:  
 Miriam McDonald at [traceabilityseminar@fsai.ie](mailto:traceabilityseminar@fsai.ie) or telephone: 01 817 1341.  
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Please return this completed form to: Eleonore Donohoe, Food Safety Authority of Ireland, Abbey Court, Lower Abbey Street, Dublin 1.