EFSA Acknowledges Prof. Dan Collins

Professor John Daniel Collins recently stepped down as Chair of the European Food Safety Authority’s (EFSA’s) Scientific Panel on Biological Hazards (BIOHAZ Panel) and as a member of EFSA’s Scientific Committee. He is still however, an active member of the BIOHAZ Panel. To thank Prof. Collins for his work, dedication and valuable contribution to the Panel, EFSA held the most recent BIOHAZ Panel meeting in Dublin.

Members of EFSA’s Scientific Committee and Panels are appointed through a rigorous selection procedure on the basis of proven scientific excellence and work for EFSA in an independent capacity, bringing their expertise and experience from a diverse range of backgrounds together in a joint assessment result.

The BIOHAZ Panel provides independent scientific advice on biological hazards in relation to food safety and foodborne diseases. This covers foodborne zoonoses, transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (BSE/TSEs), food microbiology and food hygiene and associated waste management issues. The Panel carries out risk assessments in order to produce scientific opinions and advice for risk managers. Its risk assessment work is based on reviewing scientific information and data in order to evaluate the risks posed by a given issue. This helps to provide a sound foundation for European policies and legislation and supports risk managers in taking effective and timely decisions.

Professor Collins MVB MVM MS (Calif.) PhD MRCVS is currently Professor Emeritus of Farm Animal Clinical Studies at University College, Dublin (UCD). Formerly he was the Chair of UCD’s Centre for Food Safety and Director of the Centre for Veterinary Epidemiology and Risk Analysis at UCD. He specialises in veterinary preventive medicine and food safety.

He has been reappointed to the FSAI’s new Scientific Committee and its Microbiology Sub-committee and is a member of the current FSAI Board.

Professor Collins is an Honorary Member of the European College of Veterinary Public Health and an Honorary Fellow of the Institute of Food Science and Technology of Ireland. He is also a member of the European Commission’s Task Force on Animal Disease (Tuberculosis) Eradication Programmes in Member States.
Time to Improve Transparency

When the concept of a single national food safety agency for Ireland was first mooted over a decade ago, the advocates had in mind an organisation whose primary purpose would be the oversight of the almost 50 various State bodies involved in food control. The aim was that by subjecting those bodies to scrutiny and examination, our citizens and our trading partners could be reassured that their health and interests, relevant to food safety, were being properly protected. As we know, the remit with which the FSAI was eventually tasked was very different, in so far as it was granted a direct responsibility for food law enforcement and the right to develop contracts with those State bodies responsible for the delivery of enforcement services. Nonetheless, the idea that food control agencies should be subject to scrutiny and examination in respect of their work was also included in the remit of the FSAI.

The FSAI is obliged to keep the efficacy of the food inspection services under review and to report on the scope for better coordination and delivery. Underlying this is the separate obligation to confirm that official agencies are adequately providing inspection services. A central theme of the legislators in framing the FSAI Act of 1998 was that of promoting better public services. This is a goal which finds clear resonance more than ever in today’s tough economic circumstances.

Audits, once confined mainly to financial accounts, are expected nowadays from every part of public services and are an integral part of good governance.

For some time, the FSAI has conducted audits on various aspects of the controls carried out by official agencies with which we have service contracts. This is in response to the general obligations given to us by the legislators and those set down in the EU rules on official controls. Audits, once confined mainly to financial accounts, are expected nowadays from every part of public services and are an integral part of good governance. Often mistakenly considered as only emphasising faults, they are tools to demonstrate compliance, to highlight the integrity and value of services, a way to share best practice, and importantly, the foundation of service improvement. Today’s programme for Government states that real reform of the public sector will require a commitment from the whole of Government to become more transparent, accountable and efficient. The combined food control services will be expected to meet these principles. The value of transparency is acknowledged within the EU, where it is set as one of the principles of food law, requiring public consultation and information.

With respect to audits of food control services, the EU rules require them to be carried out in a transparent manner and it strongly recommends practices to improve transparency of audits for all stakeholders. It would seem that today, when all of our public services are increasingly placed under the spotlight for value, relevance and fitness for purpose, the more pressing the need for transparency becomes.

Increasingly, the FSAI has been requested to provide details of its audit programmes and reports to interested parties. These requests have come from the European Commission or Third countries proposing to approve food establishments in Ireland. Requests have also been made to release audit reports of official agencies under Freedom of Information legislation and these requests were granted by decision makers, as there were no grounds for withholding information.

Considering these developments, the general remit of the FSAI to improve controls on food safety, and the Government aim to improve transparency in public services, the FSAI is of the view that it should adopt a more visible process in relation to audit activities. This will include making summary reports on audits and progress on closing out audit findings available on the FSAI website.

This change would allow access by interested stakeholders to the outcomes of audits, allow the FSAI to reassure stakeholders, consumers and other interested parties about the quality of official controls and make our combined efforts to maintain standards and bring about improvements visible to all stakeholders. If we correctly demand high standards of the food sector, we should demand similar high standards of ourselves as food control services. I would be glad to hear views of all sectors – consumers, industry and regulatory agencies on this topic, which we will implement shortly.

It would seem that today, when all of our public services are increasingly placed under the spotlight for value, relevance and fitness for purpose, the more pressing the need for transparency becomes.

Alan Reilly
CEO
Food Business Start-up

A dedicated area has recently been set up on our website, www.fsai.ie, on starting up a new food business. This is a valuable resource for anyone seeking information in relation to establishing a food venture. The new web page was set up in response to the notable increase over recent years in the number of calls from people wishing to set up a new food business in Ireland.

Since 2008, the FSAI advice-line has seen an increase of over 70% in requests for specific information and resources to assist a business start-up. 734 enquiries were received in 2008, increasing to 1,078 in 2009 and rising again to 1,259 enquiries in 2010. This may reflect the downturn in the economy in general, with many requesters possibly forced to follow an alternative career path. To continue this trend, in the first two months of this year, requests for business start-up information were up by 29%, when compared to the same period last year.

The growth in the number of calls to our advice-line from individuals seeking specific information on how to go about setting up a food business correlates with the increased number of food businesses registered with the Health Service Executive (HSE). 46,259 food businesses were registered with the Health Service Executive in 2010, compared to 44,052 in 2008. In particular, a very sharp growth has been noted in the number of manufacturers selling direct to the consumer, which would probably include people making cakes or jams at home, and other small businesses operating out of the domestic kitchen or selling at farmers markets.

One of the key strategies for the FSAI is to make it easier for food businesses to comply with legislation and to reduce the barriers for companies or individuals seeking to enter the arena. We offer expert advice and provide practical tips on actions that need to be taken in this area. In addition to our website, our advice-line operators assist people to understand what they need to do, how they need to go about it and how to comply with the law if they are thinking of setting up a new food outlet or business.

The publications of interest to those wishing to set up a new food business include:
- Starting a Food Business in the Home Factsheet
- Business Start-up Factsheet
- Business Start-up Pack
- A Guide to Food Law for Artisan/Small Food Producers Starting a New Food Business
- Safe Catering Pack – Your Guide to Making Food Safely
- HACCP Information Leaflets
- Training Guide Level 1: Induction Skills and Level 2: Additional Skills
- Training Guide Level 3: Food Safety Skills for Management
- Safe Food to Go Booklet
- General Labelling of Pre-Packaged Food Leaflet

For further information, click on ‘Starting a food business?’ on our website, www.fsai.ie or call our advice-line on 1890 33 66 77.

EFSA’s Executive Director Meets FDII

On 10 March last, Ms Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle, Executive Director of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) was in Dublin to meet with representatives of the Irish food and drink manufacturing sector. The meeting was organised by the Food and Drink Industry Ireland (FDII), in association with the FSAI.

Ms Geslain-Lanéelle has been EFSA’s Executive Director since July 2006 and begins a new five year term in July 2011. Outlining EFSA’s expanding role, she explained its core remit of providing independent scientific risk assessments to inform the decision making of Europe’s risk managers. This, of course, must include the management of Ireland’s food manufacturing sector. She briefed the meeting on the pending re-organisation of EFSA, including the establishment of an Applications Desk to act as a contact point for clients and partners, such as applicants, the European Commission and Member States. This will allow direct interaction with the food sector. Lengthy discussions covered the work of the scientific panels, consideration of novel foods, health claims and the importance of maintaining scientific excellence and independence.

Pictured are (l-r) Mr Neil McGowan, Executive, Regulatory Affairs, Food and Drinks Industry Ireland; Mr Paul Kelly, Director, Food and Drinks Industry Ireland; Ms Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle, Executive Director, EFSA and Prof. Alan Reilly, CEO, FSAI.
Analysis of Food Legislation Enforcement Activity

The FSAI is the responsible agency for the enforcement of all food legislation in Ireland. This enforcement function is carried out through ‘service contracts’ with official agencies.

A recent study by Ms Anna Picazo Blasco, a student of the European Masters in Food Science, Technology and Nutrition at Dublin Institute of Technology, Katholieke Hogeschool Sint-lieven, Universidade Catolica Portuguesa and Hochschule Anhalt, looked in detail at various aspects of this enforcement activity since the establishment of the FSAI.

Amongst the official agencies, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is the agency responsible for enforcing food legislation in more than 95% of all Irish food business. This study therefore focused on the HSE and evaluated its enforcement activity when using the enforcement powers under the FSAI Act, 1998. It identified the main causes of infringement of food legislation across the various types of enforcement orders and food business categories. It also identified the main causes of non-compliance with legislation.

As the HSE is responsible for enforcement in 95% of Irish food businesses, it is therefore also the agency with the highest number of enforcements served (90.09%; 3,474*). Environmental health officers (EHOs) of the HSE have conducted a total of 473,666 inspections from 2000 to 2010**.

The ‘Service Sector’ is the business category with the most establishments registered with the HSE; the ‘Primary Producers’ category has the lowest. Based on risk categorisation ‘Manufacturers Selling Direct’ (which includes butchers, bakers, confectioners, ice-cream manufacturers etc.) is the sector that accounts for most inspections, with 81.4% of premises in this category inspected at least once every year. This is followed by the ‘Manufacturers/Packers’ category which has 65.6% of premises inspected annually and ‘Primary Producers’ with 63.5% inspected.

The ‘Manufacturers Selling Direct’ category is responsible for the highest proportion of infringements per year, with 33.84% of premises not in compliance annually. In the ‘Service Sector’, 22.34% commit infringements every year. However, in the period covered by this study**, only 1.33% of food premises inspected were served with an Enforcement Order/Notice. The breakdown of enforcement by business category can be seen in Fig 1. Although the ‘Service Sector’ receives over 65% of Enforcement Orders/Notices in total, it is the category with the most registered premises. When analysed according to number of registered premises per category, over 7% each of ‘Service Sector’, ‘Manufacturer/Packer’ and ‘Manufacturer Selling Direct’ were subject to Enforcement Orders/Notices (Fig 2). The low number of food businesses receiving Enforcement Orders highlights that, in general, Irish food businesses maintain good hygiene standards and comply with food legislation.

The results of the study show that the most common infringement occurring in food establishments is improper cleaning and sanitising, as well as improper storage of foodstuffs. These infringements, and others, could be avoided with proper implementation and maintenance of a food safety management system.

Food business operators must recognise that the legal onus is on them to be responsible and ensure that the food they serve is safe to eat. If food businesses are unsure of what is required of them by law, we offer expert advice through our advice-line (1890 336677) that food businesses can contact with any queries they may have in relation to food safety. We also provide a comprehensive source of information on every aspect of food safety, food hygiene management and food legislation on our website, www.fsai.ie.

*For more information on enforcement, see www.fsai.ie/monitoring_enforcement.html.*

*Data from 1999 up to and including Q2 2010.
** Data from 2000 up to and including Q2 2010.
A total of 10,898 queries and complaints were handled by our advice-line last year, with almost a quarter of these related to consumers reporting issues concerning food and food establishments. This represents an increase in complaints of over 7% from the previous year (2,126 in 2010 and 1,981 in 2009). Complaints ranged from reports of unfit food, low hygiene standards, inaccurate labelling information and suspected food poisoning (Fig 1).

Contamination with foreign objects was frequently reported by consumers. In 2010, these reports included food contaminated with live and dead insects, a tooth, a needle, safety pins, stones, and a cotton bud. Specific incidents cited were: a ladybird in a salad, a sewing needle in a biscuit, a bolt in a pizza, glass in bottled water and a zip in a black pudding. Consumer concerns relating to poor hygiene standards in food premises ranged from staff not wearing hairnets when handling food, no hot water or soap in bathroom facilities, as well as insects and rodents visible in food premises. Complaints were also received in relation to suspect chemicals in food, indicated by smell or taste. All complaints received by the FSAI were followed up and investigated by environmental health officers (EHOs) throughout the country.

The increase in complaints is a positive indication that consumers are becoming more vigilant; they expect and should get an adequate standard of food hygiene in every food establishment and across every food product they purchase. Anyone who witnesses poor hygiene or food safety standards should report the matter to their local EHO or to the FSAI, so that it can be investigated fully.

The potential health risks posed when poor food safety and hygiene standards are not met by food businesses can be serious. There is no excuse for a food business to have poor standards across any area of its production processes – our advice-line is not only a service for consumer complaints but is also an important resource for the food industry to assist them raise their standards with the best available advice.

The remainder of the 10,898 calls made to the FSAI’s advice-line last year related to advice on food labelling, legal requirements for starting up a new food business, food safety training information, food legislation and requests for FSAI publications.

The advice-line operates from 9am to 5pm weekdays and is manned by trained advisors and food scientists.

### How to make a complaint about a food safety issue

Consumers can call the FSAI advice-line on 1890 33 66 77, or report a premises or product to info@fsai.ie or via the online complaint form on the FSAI’s website www.fsai.ie. Most food premises are inspected by environmental health officers (EHOs) of the Health Service Executive, on behalf of the FSAI.

When making a food safety complaint, please include the following information:

- The date you visited the premises or bought the food product
- The name and address of the premises or the name of the food product and address of manufacturer, use-by date or best before date, batch code etc. In the case of a complaint about a food product, you should keep the product label and also any unused product, sealed in a container, stored in a fridge or freezer if necessary and marked DO NOT EAT.
- Details of your complaint
- Your contact details
- Any other relevant information

All details provided to the FSAI are fully confidential and are required only for the purpose of follow-up by the EHOs (or inspectors from other agencies) investigating the complaint.
Fish Labelling Survey

The nutritional benefits of eating fish and fish-containing food as part of a healthy diet are now well established. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations reported that the global consumption of fish in 2009 hit a record high of 145 million tonnes, or approximately 16% of the animal protein intake. However, the availability of certain fish species can vary throughout the year, depending on seasonality and quotas, with the result that the wholesale and retail price of individual species can fluctuate accordingly. Certain fish can also be more expensive than others simply due to greater consumer demand. While some consumers may be able to identify different fish species just by looking at them, or by the texture or taste of the meat, many rely on the identification labels that are associated with the fish products they purchase. Consumers are even more dependent on food labels when the product is highly refined or processed, or in the case of fish, when it is presented as battered and/or smoked.

Price difference and availability problems may provide sufficient incentives for some food business operators to substitute one type of fish for another, without appropriate labelling. Bord Iascaigh Mhara data for October 2010 outline the price of certain fish species, e.g. cod – €11.3/kg; a type of pollock called coley – €7.3/kg; and haddock – €9.7/kg. For this reason, the accuracy of food labels is essential and is a legal requirement under the general food labelling Directive (2000/13/EC) which specifically prohibits misleading consumers through false or inaccurate labelling. Labelling is also central to food traceability, a legal requirement that is critical when it is necessary to withdraw or recall products from the marketplace in the event of a food safety problem.

DNA-based analytical techniques have made high profile advances in recent decades, most notably through their application to the forensic investigation of criminal activities. However, DNA analysis is also becoming a routine part of food law enforcement such as GMO testing and investigations of food fraud. Using DNA-based techniques, the FSAI was able to demonstrate the presence of foreign biological material in chicken fillets in 2002, and successfully prosecute an Irish food business operator in 2009 for misleading consumers by labelling salmon products as being produced from “wild” salmon, when in fact they had been produced from “farmed” salmon. The technology has become sophisticated to the point that the 30,000 (approximately) fish species on the planet could be differentiated by virtue of minor differences in the DNA sequence of one mitochondrial gene, cytochrome oxidase subunit I (cox1).

In May and June 2010, the FSAI carried out a snapshot survey by sampling 26 fish products that were labelled to indicate they contained cod. The samples, taken from a variety of retail outlets and one takeaway in Dublin were subjected to DNA analysis by a commercial laboratory. The results revealed that one of the products, purchased at a takeaway, was labelled as “smoked cod”, but actually contained pollock, while a product purchased at a retail outlet and labelled as “cod fish cakes” contained haddock. In order to get a more representative picture of the labelling and traceability of fish and fish products on sale in Ireland, a more geographically diverse survey was devised that targeted a period of the year when certain white fish species are less abundant. A total of 111 samples of fish and fish products were taken by 38 environmental health officers, covering eight counties, during the months of November and December 2010. Samples were taken from general retail outlets, fish retail premises, hotels, pubs, restaurants, takeaways and premises that could be considered restaurants and takeaways.

Almost one fifth (19%) of the products tested were found to be mislabelled. All but one of the non-compliant samples were sold as cod, but were actually found to contain pollock, smelt or other fish species (Table 1). Eight out of the 11 smoked fish products sampled were mislabelled, of which seven were purchased in takeaways. Of the 46 takeaway or restaurant/takeaway premises visited, 15 (33%) were non-compliant.

The survey has highlighted a significant problem with the labelling of fish and fish products sold in certain retailers, restaurants and takeaways. During follow-up visits to the premises found to be selling mislabelled products, environmental health officers issued verbal warnings to the food business operators and advised of future unannounced visits to conduct similar checks. It is important to stress that the results of this survey do not have any food safety implications. To ensure that consumers can be confident that the fish and fish products they order and pay for are actually what they get, the FSAI plans to incorporate fish and fish product label monitoring into the annual routine surveillance programme.
EFSA Calls for new Scientific Experts

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has launched a call to renew the membership and create reserve lists for its Scientific Panels and Scientific Committee.

Applications are invited from highly qualified scientists from both within and outside Europe with expertise in a wide range of scientific fields such as food additives and nutrient sources, food contact materials, flavourings, toxicology, contaminants in the food chain, biological hazards, GMOs, feedstuffs, plant health and plant protection products, animal health and welfare, dietetic products, allergies, novel foods and nutrition.

For the three-year period from mid-2012 to mid-2015, membership is being renewed and reserve lists created for the following:

- Scientific Committee (SC)
- Panel on Animal Health and Welfare (AHAW)
- Panel on Biological Hazards (BIOHAZ)
- Panel on Contaminants in the Food Chain (CONTAM)
- Panel on Feed Additives and Products or Substances Used in Animal Feed (FEEDAP)
- Panel on Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO)
- Panel on Dietetic Products, Nutrition and Allergies (NDA)
- Panel on Plant Health (PLH)
- Panel on Plant Protection Products and their Residues (PPR)

For the three-year period from mid-2014 to mid-2017, this call also aims at pre-selecting experts for the following two Panels (both of which have recently been renewed for the period ending in mid-2014):

- Panel on Food Additives and Nutrient Sources Added to Food (ANS)
- Panel on Food Contact Materials, Enzymes, Flavourings and Processing Aids (CEF)

Experts who are not appointed to a Panel or Scientific Committee can be placed on a reserve list that will be used to fill future vacancies.

The call has been published in the Official Journal of the European Union and on EFSA’s website. Further information, including the application form, is available at: [http://tinyurl.com/6zsyukb](http://tinyurl.com/6zsyukb).

The closing date for applications is 31 May 2011.
Legislation Update

Irish legislation

Food Additives Other Than Colours and Sweeteners

The Department of Health and Children (DoHC) has published the European Communities (Food Additives Other Than Colours and Sweeteners) (Amendment) Regulations, 2011 (S.I. No. 93 of 2011).


Directive 2010/69/EU amended Annexes II to VI of Directive 95/2/EC by extending the use of some food additives e.g. permitting the use of L-cysteine (E920) in biscuits for infants and young children, as well as authorising the use of a number of new additives and assigning ‘E’ numbers to those new additives.

Included in the list of new additives are:

- Polyvinyl alcohol (PVA) as a film-coating agent for food supplements that are in the form of capsules and tablets. It has been assigned the E number E1203.
- Cassia gum, acting as a gelling agent and thickener. It has been assigned E427 as its E number.

The European Communities (Purity Criteria on Food Additives Other Than Colours and Sweeteners) (Amendment) Regulations, 2011 (S.I. No 128 of 2011) transposes Commission Directive 2010/67/EU of 20 October 2010, which amends Annex 1 to Directive 2008/84/EC by revising the specific purity criteria for a number of existing additives and by the addition of specific purity criteria for new additives recently approved by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA).

The new additives are:

- E 392 extracts of rosemary
- E 427 cassia gum
- E 961 neotame (as a flavour enhancer)
- E 1203 polyvinyl alcohol and
- E 1521 polyethylene glycol.

The S.I. also introduces a provision for the recovery of costs and expenses where a food business operator is convicted, in line with EU food law and DoHC policy.

Additives Colours and Sweeteners

European Communities (Additives, Colours and Sweeteners in Foodstuffs) (Amendment) Regulation, 2000 (S.I. No. 130 of 2011)

This Regulation amends the European Communities (Additives, Colours and Sweeteners in Foodstuffs) Regulation, 2000 (S.I. No. 437 of 2000). The S.I. transposes Commission Directive 2011/3/EU which amends the specific purity criteria on colours for use in foodstuffs with regard to lycopene, by replacing the specifications for lycopene set out in Annex 1 to Directive 2008/128/EC in line with the European Food Safety Authority’s 2008 scientific opinion on its safe use.

Controls on the Import of Food of Non-Animal Origin

European Communities (Official Controls on the Import of Food of Non-Animal Origin) (Amendment) Regulation, 2011 (S.I. No 131 of 2011)

This Regulation implements Commission Regulation (EU) No. 187/2011 which replaces Annex I to EC Regulation 669/2009 to provide an up-to-date list of foods which, due to a known or emerging risk, are subject to increased levels of official controls at the point of entry into Member States of the EU.

Commission Regulation (EC) No. 669/2009 lays down rules concerning the increased level of official controls to be carried out on imports of feed and food of non-animal origin listed in Annex I to that Regulation at specified points of entry. This list of imports is reviewed on a regular basis and takes into account information received since the previous amendment. This amending Regulation reduces the level of official controls on some products of non-animal origin previously listed while increasing the amounts of checks on others. The full list is contained in the Annex to Regulation (EU) No. 187/2011.
Polycarbonate Infant Feeding Bottles

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has published the European Communities (Plastics and Other Materials) (Contact with Foodstuffs) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No 105 of 2011)

The S.I. gives effect to Council Directive No. 2011/8/EU insofar as it restricts the manufacture of polycarbonate infant feeding bottles. Directive 2011/8/EU amends Directive 2002/72/EC with regard to 2,2-bis (4-hydroxyphenyl) propane, commonly known as Bisphenol A (BPA). BPA is used as a monomer in the manufacture of polycarbonate plastics. Polycarbonate plastics are used amongst others in the manufacture of infant feeding bottles. When heated under certain conditions small amounts of BPA can potentially leach out from food containers into foods and beverages and be ingested. The Directive prohibits its use from 1 March 2011 in the manufacture of infant feeding bottles. When heated under certain conditions small amounts of BPA can potentially leach out from food containers into foods and beverages and be ingested. The Directive prohibits its use from 1 March 2011 in the manufacture of infant feeding bottles.

The European Commission is obliged to adopt implementing measures as regards the content, drafting and presentation of applications to update the EU lists under each sectoral food law, arrangements for checking the validity of applications and the type of information that should be included in the opinion of the European Food Safety Authority. Regulation (EC) No. 234/2011 introduces these measures and while the Regulation entered into force on 31 March 2011, it will apply from 11 September 2011.

EU Reference Laboratories


EU Publications

The European Court of Auditors has published a report on the European Commission’s management of the system of veterinary checks for meat imports following the 2004 hygiene legislation reforms. This Special Report No. 14/2010 can be viewed at http://tinyurl.com/63u9ftm.

The European Court of Auditors audited the EU Commission’s supervision of the EU system of veterinary checks carried out at border inspection posts (BIPs) for meat imports. The system was put in place through a framework introduced by the so-called 2004 “hygiene package” regulations, which came into force in 2008. The authorities and BIPs of four Member States were visited (France, the Netherlands, Spain and Romania). Also, Court auditors participated in the Commission’s Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) inspection visits carried out in three Member States (Lithuania, the United Kingdom and Greece). The FVOs planning and reporting procedures were the subject of close scrutiny, because of the particularly relevant role it plays in the Commission’s supervision and control of EU veterinary checks. The audit concluded that the implementation of the 2004 “hygiene package” is behind schedule and still has to be completed in important regulatory aspects.

On the basis of its observations, the Court makes recommendations which could help the Commission to increase the effectiveness of the system of veterinary checks for meat imports. These recommendations and further details regarding the audit may be found in the text of the Special Report available in print and online at: www.eca.europa.eu.

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

S. I. No 93 of 2011
European Communities (Food Additives Other Than Colours and Sweeteners) (Amendment) Regulations 2011

S. I. No 105 of 2011
European Communities (Plastics and Other Materials) (Contact with Foodstuffs) (Amendment) Regulations 2011

S. I. No 128 of 2011
European Communities (Purity Criteria on Food Additives Other Than Colours and Sweeteners) (Amendment) Regulations 2011

S. I. No 130 of 2011
European Communities (Additives, Colours and Sweeteners in Foodstuffs) (Amendment) Regulations 2011

S. I. No 131 of 2011
European Communities (Official Controls on the Import of Food of Non-Animal Origin) (Amendment) Regulations 2011

EU Legislation

Common Authorisation Procedure for Food Additives, Food Enzymes and Food Flavourings


Regulation (EC) No. 1331/2008 lays down procedural arrangements for updating the lists of substances, the marketing of which is authorised in the EU pursuant to Regulation (EC) No. 1333/2008 on food additives, Regulation (EC) No. 1332/2008 on food enzymes and Regulation (EC) No. 1334/2008 on flavourings and certain food ingredients with flavouring properties for use in and on foods (sectoral food law).

The European Commission is introduced these measures and
arrangements for checking the validity of applications and the type of information that should be included in the opinion of the European Food Safety Authority. Regulation (EC) No. 234/2011 introduces these measures and while the Regulation entered into force on 31 March 2011, it will apply from 11 September 2011.

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EU Reference Laboratories

Zoonoses in Europe in 2009

The Annual Report on Zoonoses and Foodborne Outbreaks for 2009 has been published by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). Zoonoses are infections and diseases that are naturally transmissible directly or indirectly (e.g. via contaminated food) between animals and humans.

The report shows that cases of salmonellosis in humans fell by 17% in 2009, marking a decrease for the fifth consecutive year. Campylobacteriosis continued to be the most commonly reported zoonosis. Based on the reported fatality rates and the total numbers of reported confirmed cases, it is estimated that there were approximately 270 human deaths due to listeriosis; 90 deaths due to salmonellosis and 40 deaths due to campylobacteriosis in the European Union (EU).

Salmonella species

The decreasing trend in salmonellosis cases over the past five years was found to be statistically significant, with an average reduction of 12% per year. In total, 108,614 confirmed human cases were reported in 2009 and in particular, human cases caused by S. Enteritidis decreased markedly. This represented an EU notification rate for confirmed cases of 23.7 cases per 100,000 population; the Irish rate was 7.5 cases per 100,000.

The reduction in salmonellosis cases across Member States has been predominantly attributed to successful implementation of national salmonella control programmes in fowl populations. Eighteen Member States reached the EU salmonella reduction target for breeding flocks of fowl, 17 Member States met their reduction target for laying hens and 18 Member States met the reduction target for broilers. Ireland met the reduction targets in all three animal populations. In foodstuffs, Salmonella species were most often detected in fresh broiler, turkey and pig meat, on average at levels of 5.4%, 8.7% and 0.7%, respectively. Salmonella species were rarely detected in other foodstuffs, such as dairy products, fruit and vegetables. Products non-compliant with legal criteria for Salmonella species were mainly observed in the minced meat and meat preparations category as well as in live molluscs.

Campylobacter species

The notification rate for campylobacteriosis increased slightly in 2009 with 45.6 cases per 100,000 compared to 43.9 cases per 100,000 in 2008. It continued to be the most commonly reported zoonosis in the EU with 198,252 confirmed human cases in 2009. The notification rate in Ireland was 40.7 cases per 100,000. In foodstuffs, the highest proportion of positive samples was once again reported for fresh broiler meat with, on average, 31% of samples positive. Campylobacter species were also commonly detected in live poultry, pigs and cattle.

VTEC

A total of 3,573 confirmed verotoxigenic Escherichia coli (VTEC) infections were reported in 2009; a slight decrease on the previous year. Ireland had the highest reported notification rate at 5.3 per 100,000; the EU rate was 0.75 per 100,000. The most commonly identified VTEC serogroup was O157 (51.7%). Among animals and foodstuffs, human pathogenic VTEC bacteria were most often reported in cattle and bovine meat. Overall, 2.3% and 0.7% of fresh bovine meat units were positive with VTEC and VTEC O157, respectively. VTEC O157 was also reported from cow’s milk. In animals, VTEC and VTEC O157 were mostly reported from cattle, at levels of 6.8% and 2.7%, respectively.

Listeriosis

The number of listeriosis cases in humans in the EU increased by 19.1% compared to 2008, with 1,645 confirmed cases recorded in 2009. This represented an EU notification rate of 0.4 per 100,000 population. The Irish rate was 0.2 per 100,000, which represented a slight decrease on the 2008 rate. As in previous years, the elderly were especially affected by the disease across Member States. A high case fatality rate of 16.6% was recorded among those cases where information was available, showing a slight decrease compared to 2008.

Listeria monocytogenes was seldom detected above the legal limit set for ready-to-eat foods and findings over this limit were most often reported from fishery products, cheeses, and meat products at levels of 0.3% to 1.1%.

Foodborne outbreaks

A total of 5,550 foodborne outbreaks were reported, causing 48,964 human cases, 4,356 hospitalisations and 46 deaths. The total number of verified outbreaks (977) increased; these are defined as outbreaks where either the causative agent is detected in the food or analytical epidemiological evidence reveals a strong link between human cases and a consumption of a certain food.

The majority of the reported outbreaks were caused by Salmonella species, viruses and bacterial toxins. As in previous years, the most important food sources were eggs and egg products, mixed or buffet meals and pig meat and pig meat products. In addition, 15 waterborne outbreaks were reported in 2009 related to the contamination of private or public water sources.

Other zoonoses

The report, which covers 14 zoonotic agents, including brucellosis, bovine tuberculosis, toxoplasmosis and rabies is available to download at: http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/2090.htm
Many people contact our advice-line each day to ask questions on a variety of food safety issues. Some questions get asked time and time again – so in each issue of FSAINEWS, we will feature a Frequently Asked Question. This issue’s question is ...

**How Must Allergen Information be Declared on Food Labels?**

Food allergies are allergic reactions to food or an ingredient in food (allergen). Symptoms may vary in severity therefore it is essential that consumers can identify the presence of an allergen in food that they buy.


The following 14 ingredients are defined in legislation as ‘ingredients that are known to cause allergies’ and so must be clearly identifiable on the food label:

- Cereals containing gluten and products thereof
- Crustaceans and products thereof
- Eggs and products thereof
- Fish and products thereof
- Peanuts and products thereof
- Soya and products thereof
- Milk and products thereof (including lactose)
- Nuts
- Celery and products thereof
- Mustard and products thereof
- Sesame seeds and products thereof
- Sulphur dioxide and sulphites at concentrations more than 10mg/kg or 10mg/l expressed as SO₂
- Lupins and products thereof
- Molluscs and products thereof.

Any ingredient from the above list used in the production of a food product and still present in the final product, even if in an altered form, must be indicated on the label with a clear reference to the name of the ingredient from which it originates.

Where the name of a food product indicates the presence of a defined allergen, this is sufficient in terms of providing consumer information; for example ‘almond slice’. However, in most cases, the name of the food will not identify the presence of a food allergen and so the list of ingredients may be used to indicate its presence.

In circumstances where the name of the ingredient, declared in the ingredients list on the label, is in fact a derivative of a defined allergen but the actual allergen name is not clearly identifiable to the consumer, many manufacturers may choose to display a separate ‘contains’ box on the label, i.e. ‘contains nuts’. This is optional and is not a legal requirement.

Some manufacturers may declare on the label ‘may contain nuts’ or ‘manufactured on a line that also uses nuts’ (or similar). This is voluntary information and is likely to be of little benefit to allergy sufferers. Manufacturers should adhere to good manufacturing practices and HACCP controls to prevent cross contamination of foods with known allergens and avoid using such statements which can unnecessarily restrict the food choices available to allergy sufferers.

**More Information**

A leaflet on food allergens is available on our website, [www.fsai.ie](http://www.fsai.ie).

See the legislation section of our website for more information on allergen labelling: [http://tinyurl.com/3e7jxp](http://tinyurl.com/3e7jxp).

Subscribe on our website to receive allergen alerts to your mobile or email.

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**Visitors from the Royal Thai Embassy**

In March, the FSAI welcomed a delegation of counsellors from the Mission to the European Union of the Royal Thai Embassy in Brussels. Pictured is the FSAI’s Chief Specialist in Environmental Health, Dorothy Guina Dornan (centre right), together with the Thai group, led by Dr Adisorn Promthep (4th from left), Director of the Office of Agricultural Affairs.
President’s Award for Work Placement Student

Ms Alice Kenny, Work Placement Student with the FSAI 2010/11, was presented with the President’s Award for ‘exceptional academic excellence’ for Stage 2 of her BSc in Human Nutrition at University College Dublin. Alice received the same award in 2010 for her academic results during Stage 1 of her course. We would like to congratulate Alice and wish her every success in her future career.

Recent Publications

The following publications have recently been produced by the FSAI:

- On-farm Slaughter of Small Quantities of Poultry (factsheet)
- Guidance on Food Additives, Revision 1, 2011
- Fish Labelling Survey
- Establishing Baseline Data on the Presence of *Listeria monocytogenes* on Cooked Meat Slicers in Retail and Catering Premises Survey

The publications are available on our website at: http://www.fsai.ie/resources_publications.html

Mailing List

FSAI News 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. You can also use this form to change your own mailing details.

Please add the following person to your mailing list for future issues:

Please return this completed form to: Eleonore Donohoe, Food Safety Authority of Ireland, Abbey Court, Lower Abbey Street, Dublin 1.