



food safety award goes to dit, kevin street

fsai news

The FSAI held its annual competition for best food safety related project in Irish colleges on 15th June last. The competition proved to be successful again this year with a large number of entries which were shortlisted to seven projects for the final. The winning student was Colm O'Neill from Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), Kevin Street. Colm's project was entitled 'Optimisation of a Quantitative Method for the Analysis of Tetracycline Antibiotics in Farmed Fish'. The aim of the study was to optimise a quantitative High Performance Liquid Chromatography method for the screening and confirmation analysis of residues of tetracycline antibiotics in farmed finfish.

Jennifer Joyce, also of DIT, Kevin Street, came second for her project entitled 'Phytosterol Enriched Products - Consumer Awareness' and Derek Bradley, Athlone Institute of Technology was awarded third place for his project 'Studies on the Toxigenic and Mutagenic Potential of the Foodborne Bacterial Enteropathogen *Bacillus cereus*'.

The award was presented to Colm O'Neill by Dr Wayne Anderson, Chief Specialist Food Science, FSAI. The judges were Fiona Lalor, Director of Technical Affairs, Maree Gallagher Associates; Dr Geraldine Quinn, Scientific Support Manager, safe food, Food Safety Promotion Board; Dr Pat O'Mahony, Chief Specialist Biotechnology, FSAI and Clodagh Crehan, Information Executive, FSAI.

Pictured are the finalists in the FSAI competition for best food safety related project in Irish colleges. From left to right: Derek Bradley, Athlone Institute of Technology; Jennifer Joyce, DIT, Kevin Street; Colm O'Neill, DIT, Kevin Street (winner); Eileen Soraghan, DIT, Cathal Brugha Street; Maria Killeen, DIT, Cathal Brugha Street; Ciarán Fitzgerald, University College Cork; Caitriona O'Connor, DIT, Kevin Street.



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where does our food come from and what does it contain?

This issue of *fsainews* contains details of a number of FSAI special projects concerned with food surveillance and audits of businesses. Of particular interest are the results of a survey of honeys on the Irish market published recently. Although the results did not reveal any food safety concern, they are somewhat disconcerting because things were not as they seemed! Of 20 honey samples analysed, four labelled as Irish were not in fact of Irish origin as revealed by pollen analysis and examination of documentation. In keeping with FSAI policy, the results and brand names of the products examined were published on our website. By contrast, it was reassuring to learn that although low levels of benzene were detected in some soft drinks, the levels found did not represent a risk to the health of consumers. The soft-drinks industry has responded to this problem by developing new best practices to ensure that the chemical reaction that gave rise to benzene in such products, between vitamin C and the preservative benzoic acid, is avoided.

A third important project area concerns work recently initiated by the FSAI in collaboration with official food control agencies to examine compliance with labelling and traceability requirements among businesses handling beef, poultry and smoked salmon products. This work will entail detailed audits of food premises to ensure that correct documentation is available and that products are labelled accordingly. The work builds upon an unpublished preliminary study conducted in 2003 before the entry into force of the EU general food law (EC 178/2002). Businesses will be advised of the FSAI's intention to publish the results of the present study and the names of the premises visited. The above projects highlight particular strengths of the FSAI in its mission to protect the health and interests of the consumer: multi-disciplinary team working and publication of validated results.

The FSAI has long promoted the need for more transparency and improved information for consumers wishing to learn salient facts about the composition and provenance of food products. It is particularly appropriate, therefore, that Ireland is to become the second EU

Member State (after France) to make it mandatory for food business operators, including restaurants, to communicate to their customers, in written form, the country of origin of beef sold in their premises (S.I. No. 307 of 2006). This is not a safety measure of course, rather a way of addressing the rights of consumers to be informed about the origin of their food. The FSAI will continue to advocate similar regulations for poultry, pig meat and sheep meat as well as the need for improvements in the system of health marking of such products to avoid fraudulent mislabelling.

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Meanwhile, the news about the ailing Doha round of world trade talks does not make easy reading. The Doha round was born as a development intended to benefit the world's poorest countries, so a successful conclusion to the talks will be the hope of many observers. The FSAI does not regulate trade nor, indeed, do we make food policy - those are matters for our Government, the European Union and the World Trade Organization. However, we can ensure that legislation and policy is faithfully and fairly enforced and that the health and interests of consumers are protected. Assuming the Doha round achieves consensus, we may expect continued growth in food imports from EU and third (non-EU) countries. There are many ways in which liberalisation of trade in agricultural commodities can take place while adding in safeguards to avoid importing unsafe products and to ensure against fraud, counterfeiting and other illegal activities. Food imports from third countries are subject to inspection at the port of entry into the EU. In addition, meat products are only accepted from premises and countries approved by the Food and Veterinary Office of the European Commission. New analytical approaches are being developed that will assist in establishing the authenticity of food

products. For example, similar products from different geographic regions may exhibit different isotope ratios. Statistical software can then be used to analyse the complex analytical fingerprint produced. Similarly, the differing $^{13}\text{C}/^{12}\text{C}$ ratios in products from plants with different photosynthetic pathways has been exploited as a tool in authenticity testing for many years. DNA probes are being increasingly used to give definitive proof about the species of plant or animal used to make a food product, including whether the organism was genetically modified.

However, for many questions of food authenticity, the most robust (and often the only) approach is to audit the paper trail of documents pertaining to the product. This is labour intensive and expensive, but produces concrete evidence that can be used in court if necessary. The increasing complexity of food trade makes cooperation among food agencies indispensable. Incidents such as the use of illegal dyes, illegal food irradiation, honey mislabelling and meat mislabelling would test the confidence of consumers if they were not quickly detected and rectified. However, it is a fact of life that the food chain has become more complex and many commodities cannot be produced in Ireland and must be imported. Therefore, we continue to depend on targeted surveillance activities and sharing of data with other countries to ensure food mislabelling and instances of food contamination are detected and dealt with.

We need to react to the growing complexity of food trade by developing new scientific tools and food surveillance programmes to give the consumer full protection. Such considerations were a major focus when the FSAI planned its programme for 2006 and will continue to require investment of resources in 2007.



Dr John O'Brien, CEO

ireland chosen to host the world seafood congress, 2007

Ireland has been chosen as the venue to host the 2007 World Seafood Congress. Dublin emerged as the strongest contender to host the Congress, which previously took place in Australia in 2005, beating off stiff competition from around the world. The World Seafood Congress is owned by the International Association of Fish Inspectors (IAFI) and the 2007 Congress will be jointly hosted by Bord Iascaigh Mhara, the Food Safety Authority of Ireland and Enterprise Ireland.

The Congress, running from 25-28 September 2007, will consist of a conference and an exhibition dedicated to the theme of 'Innovation in the Seafood Industry' where exhibitors will showcase the latest technologies and trends in new product and process development, quality assurance and eco-labelling.

It will be one of the key worldwide seafood events in 2007 and is expected to attract upwards of 1,000 attendees. It will provide an essential forum for well-informed discussion and debate on the environment, sustainability, innovation, safety, health and trade, amongst a raft of related topics. Fishermen, conservationists, processors, retailers and consumers are expected to attend.

The main topics for the Congress have been set as *health, innovation and trade*, with the FSAI leading on the 'health' element of event.

Jayne Gallagher, President, IAFI, and Marine Minister, John Browne T.D. are pictured here at the European Seafood Exposition 2006, in Brussels, where Minister Browne officially announced Ireland's hosting of the 2007 World Seafood Congress.

In this role, the FSAI will be assisted by international partners including the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and the Seafood Office of the US Food and Drug Administration.

For further information on the World Seafood Congress or to register for the event, see the World Seafood Congress website at: www.worldseafoodcongress07.com



ireland's scientific leadership acknowledged

At a recent meeting of a Working Group of the Codex Committee on Fish and Fish Products (CCFFP) it was decided to recommend that no changes be made to the action levels of biotoxins that are sometimes found in shellfish.

The CCFFP had asked the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) to provide scientific advice on marine biotoxins to inform its work. Following this request, the FAO, WHO and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO held a Joint ad hoc Expert Consultation on Biotoxins in Bivalve Molluscs in Dublin and Oslo in 2004.

These meetings resulted in a report to the CCFFP which considered all available toxicological data, and provided structured marine biotoxin risk assessments along with guidance on methodology. Following this, a Working Group, chaired by the Canadians, was established to examine the report and prepare a discussion paper for consideration by the CCFFP.

Ireland's leadership in the area of biotoxins was acknowledged and in particular the role of the Marine Institute in developing the science of detection and quantification of biotoxins. This allowed

Ireland to lead and to make significant contribution to the debate on the issue.

In formulating its recommendations, the Working Group decided that biotoxin levels should be set in a manner consistent with the approach taken for setting levels for other natural toxins in Codex standards. It was also agreed that standards should not be set where there is a lack of evidence of harm to humans, either from human clinical data, epidemiological studies or from animal voluntary feeding studies.

Considering this and also considering the full body of available knowledge, including the expert consultation risk assessments and the performance history of regulatory programmes, the Working Group decided to recommend to CCFFP that no change be made to existing levels. However, some changes have been recommended to risk management practices.

The Working Group's report will now be considered at the next meeting of CCFFP where a final decision will be made on the matter.

fsai advises of misleading irish honey claims

Between July 2005 and April 2006 the FSAI completed analysis and audits to determine whether honey sold as Irish on the Irish market complied with Council Directive 2001/110/EC relating to honey (S.I. No. 367 of 2003) and Council Directive 2000/13/EC on the approximation of the laws of the Member States relating to the labelling, presentation and advertising of foodstuffs (S.I. No. 483 of 2002).

Council Directive 2001/110/EC Annex II stipulates the compositional criteria for honey. When placed on the market as honey or used in any product intended for human consumption, it must meet the stated composition criteria.

The Directive also identifies the requirements for placing honey on the market, in particular, Article 2 4(a):

"the country or countries of origin where the honey has been harvested shall be indicated on the label. However, if the honey originates in more than one Member State or third country that indication may be replaced with one of the following, as appropriate:

- 'blend of EC honeys',
- 'blend of non-EC honeys',
- 'blend of EC and non-EC honeys'.

A total of 20 randomly selected Irish honey samples were analysed by the Department of Life Sciences, University of Limerick. The physiochemical tests carried out included moisture, ash, free acidity, hydroxymethylfurfural (HMF) content, electrical conductivity, reducing sugars and sucrose. All samples were tested for the presence of antibiotics.

Analysis of the floral origins of the honey samples was also carried out by identifying the pollens found in the honey. This enabled Irish honey to be distinguished from foreign honey. Samples were prepared and analysed in accordance with the methods recommended by the International Commission of Bee Botany. The pollen in a 10g sample was extracted by a series of centrifugations and mounted in glycerine jelly (a swelling agent). A total of 200-250 pollen grains were counted and identified using a compound microscope at x40 magnification. Pollen types were identified using keys and photographs from recognised library references and a library of pollen grain reference slides constructed from fresh pollen taken from annuals, perennials and woody plants. The nomenclature of plant species was identified. The morphological differences between pollen grains is often so slight that the identification to species level is difficult except for species with a distinct pollen type, for example, *Trifolium pratense* and for a genus with a single species occurring in Ireland such as *Crategus mongyna*. In general plant species were classified into groups and families recommended. The pollen frequency of each plant species was determined:

"Predominant" pollen	>45% of the total grains counted
"Secondary" pollen	16 - 45% of the total grains counted
"Important minor"	3 - 15% of the total grains counted
"Minor"	< 3% of the total grains counted

Of the 20 samples analysed, six were found to be non-compliant with legislative requirements. One sample was found to contain 410µg/kg sulfadimidine (sulfamethazine) and less than 10µg/kg of other sulfonamides. Four samples were labelled as being of Irish origin and were not. One sample, also not Irish, was misleadingly labelled to imply Irish origin.

Audits were carried out on the food business operators responsible for packing/distributing the six non-compliant samples. During the audits, the non-compliances regarding legislation relating to the labelling and authenticity of the products were outlined to the food business operators. Corrective action was requested of each food business operator to ensure the relevant legislation is being complied with.

There is no immediate food safety concern highlighted by these results, but consumers are being misled by the presence on the Irish market of these products labelled as Irish. Retailers audited during the survey and known to have received stocks of product from these traders have been advised that products do not meet the requirements of the legislation and have taken action to prevent the further sale of mislabelled honey.

The monitoring of honey and other products for authenticity and accurate labelling will be ongoing in Ireland to ensure that consumers are not being misled and appropriate follow up action will be taken where breaches of legislation are identified.

The survey 'Analytical and Traceability Survey to Determine the Authenticity of Honey Labelled as Irish on the Irish Market' is available on our website, www.fsai.ie.

memorandum of understanding

In May, the FSAI signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Teagasc, which sets out a framework for co-operation of food safety activities between the two organisations. The agencies jointly affirm their commitment, in the interest of food safety and consumer protection, to develop effective working relationships so as to ensure that the best possible service is delivered. It is recognised that good communication is essential to effective working within and between both organisations.

Pictured signing the MOU are: Dr John O'Brien, CEO, FSAI and Mr Jim Flanagan, Director, Teagasc.



safe handling and serving of soft ice-cream

The FSAI has published an information booklet for retailers involved in the sale and service of whipped and scoop ice-cream. This booklet entitled *Safe Handling and Serving of Soft Ice-Cream* contains simple and easy to follow information. It will assist retailers to comply with their legal obligation to produce food in a hygienic manner.

This information booklet was produced as a result of a national microbiological survey which found that improvements are required during the handling and serving of soft ice-cream in retail premises (See: www.fsai.ie/surveillance/food/3rdQuarter.pdf).

Food handlers with poor hygiene and poor food handling practices (e.g. inadequate hand washing, using dirty machines/equipment/utensils, storing ingredients/supplies incorrectly) can spread bacteria to soft serve ice-cream. This can lead to food poisoning. Those particularly at risk of food poisoning include young children, pregnant women, the elderly and the sick. Typical symptoms include nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, stomach pains and headaches.

The spread of bacteria can be controlled through good hygiene and good food handling practices. Food handlers must be clean and tidy, wear protective clothing where appropriate, keep hair clean and neat, keep fingernails short and clean, wash hands regularly and must

not serve ice-cream if they are ill. In addition, ice-cream machines and utensils must be cleaned thoroughly (to remove the dirt and food particles that allow bacteria to grow) and must be sanitised regularly. Good food handling practices are required from the time of intake of the ingredients/supplies to the time of serving. These include following the manufacturers/suppliers instructions, rotating supplies in order (i.e. first in, first out, with respect to best-before and use-by dates) and discarding any ice-cream with signs of thawing and refreezing.

As the weather gets warmer consumption of soft serve ice-cream will be nearing its annual peak. Therefore, food businesses involved in the sale and service of soft ice-cream should ensure that good practices are in place to protect the health of their customers.

This information booklet will be distributed to ice-cream vendors and retailers throughout the country. A copy of the booklet can also be downloaded from our website (www.fsai.ie/publications) or can be obtained by contacting our advice-line on 1890 336677.



code of practice no. 1 - revised

The first Code of Practice produced by the FSAI has now been revised and published as *Code of Practice No. 1: For the Health Service Executive on the Risk Categorisation of Food Businesses (Revision 1)*.

The Code of Practice (COP) applies to food premises which are covered by Regulation (EC) 852/2004 (on the hygiene of foodstuffs) and subject to inspections carried out by the Health Service Executive environmental health officers (EHOs). The COP has been revised and developed by a Working Group of EHO representatives and the FSAI.

The purpose of assigning food businesses a risk category is to allow the HSE area officers to prioritise inspections of food businesses by targeting those which pose the greatest potential risk to consumers, should a food safety control failure occur. Food businesses are broadly categorised as high, medium or low-risk and by establishing an agreed standard, similar types of businesses around the country will be subject to the same inspection regime. Having established the appropriate risk category for each establishment, the appropriate frequency of inspection is set out in the COP.

In revising the Code of Practice, greater flexibility was provided regarding the frequency of inspection by making provision for a reduced inspection rate where specific criteria are met. Where a food business demonstrates that the necessary prerequisite hygiene controls are in place, there is compliance with the legal requirements regarding HACCP and staff training, and that there is a good track record of compliance, then a reduced frequency regime is set out. This approach is consistent with the provisions of new Regulation (EC) 882/2004 on Official Controls. It is also possible, where a business poses an increased risk to public health, to increase the frequency of inspection on a case-by-case basis.

The COP is available on our website at www.fsai.ie/publications or by calling our advice-line on 1890 336677.

National implementation of COP No. 1

Work has been ongoing over the past months on a national implementation strategy to ensure consistent training and implementation of the revisions to Code of Practice (COP) No. 1. This has been a collaborative effort between the COP 1 Working Group and the National EHO Information Systems User Group (NEISUG). Both groups consist of members representing all areas and regions of the Health Service Executive. The implementation schedule varies according to planning in each region.

The FSAI would like to thank the COP 1 Working Group and NEISUG members for their time, expertise and effort in deliberating over the revisions.

NEISUG Members

Derek Bauer - Dublin/North East Region
Tim Coffey - Western Region
Sinead Flynn - Southern Region (Chair)
John Hanily - Western Region
Paul Hickey - Western Region
Aidan Jones - Southern Region
Deirdre Lavin - Dublin/Mid-Leinster Region
Emer McShea - Western Region
Attracta Meehan - Western Region
Rita Moloney - Western Region (Sec.)
Tara Woods - Dublin/North East Region

bacteriological quality and safety of loose, cooked

The National Microbiology Surveillance Programme was established in 2001 to examine the microbiological contamination of specific foods in Ireland in more extensive detail than the existing routine sampling programme. The surveillance programmes also promote inter-agency collaboration. This survey, which investigated the bacteriological quality and safety of loose, cooked, sliced ham was carried out in the first trimester of 2005 and brings the total number of food topics covered under the programme to 15. Comprehensive reports on the findings of all surveys carried out under the National Microbiology Surveillance Programme are available on our website at www.fsai.ie/surveillance.

Cooked, sliced ham is a popular, convenient, ready-to-eat food. The slicing process is carried out post-cooking in either the processing plant or in the retail premises (i.e. at the point of sale). Slicing poses a microbiological risk; firstly, because of the potential for the spread of microbial contamination via the slicing blade onto the

cooked product, and secondly, because of the resulting increase in the surface area (and thus the exposed area of the sliced product). The aim of this survey was to assess the microbiological quality and safety of cooked ham sliced at retail level. It follows a previous survey carried out under the 2003 National Microbiology Surveillance Programme, which investigated the bacteriological quality and safety of cooked ham, sliced and pre-packed in processing plants and sampled at retail level.

The microbiological quality of the samples was assessed by analysing for Aerobic Colony Count (ACC) and *Enterobacteriaceae*. ACC is an indicator of hygiene and freshness, while *Enterobacteriaceae* are an indicator of hygiene and post-process contamination of heat processed foods. These organisms give an indication of the likelihood of the presence of pathogens as well as providing information on the handling and storage of the foodstuffs. The microbiological safety of the samples was assessed by analysing for

Salmonella spp., *Listeria monocytogenes* and *Staphylococcus aureus*. The presence of these pathogens in ready-to-eat foods is a cause for concern because they are not eliminated from the food prior to consumption.

The survey was carried out over four months (January-April 2005). A total of 923 samples were obtained by environmental health officers from retail premises (e.g. butcher shops, delicatessens, corner shops and supermarkets). Information on a variety of parameters including the location of cooking (at processing plant or at retail premises), the time of slicing (at sampling or before sampling) and the core temperature of the ham at the time of sampling were recorded. Samples were submitted to Official Food Microbiology Laboratories for analysis. The results were interpreted using the 2001 Irish microbiological guidelines 'Guidelines for the Interpretation of Results of Microbiological Analysis of Some Ready-To-Eat foods samples at Point of Sale' (FSAI Guidance Note No. 3)*.

The following were the main findings of the survey:

Microbiological Quality Results

- 24.6% (225/916) of the samples were classified as unsatisfactory for ACC, while 2.4% (22/923) were classified as unsatisfactory for *Enterobacteriaceae* (Figure 1).
- ACC and *Enterobacteriaceae* results from this survey were compared with the results obtained from the 2003 survey which investigated the microbiological quality/safety of cooked ham, sliced and pre-packed in processing plants. The comparison suggests that the location of slicing (retail premises or processing plant) did not have a significant effect ($p=0.05$) on the *Enterobacteriaceae* results; however the location of slicing had a significant effect ($p<0.05$) on the ACC results. Almost a quarter (24.6%) of all samples sliced in retail premises were unsatisfactory for ACC while 13% of samples sliced in processing plants were unsatisfactory.
- Information on the time of slicing was provided for 614 of the 923 samples. The results suggest that the microbiological quality of the samples was affected by the time of slicing. The quality of ham sliced in the retail premises at the time of sampling was significantly better ($p<0.05$) than the quality of ham sliced in retail premises prior to sampling.
- Information on the sample source (e.g. supermarket, delicatessen, corner shop) was provided for 603 of the 923 samples. Microbiological quality was not significantly affected by the sample source ($p=0.05$).
- Information on location of cooking (retail premises or processing plant), was provided for 566 of the 923 samples. Microbiological quality was not significantly affected by the location of cooking ($p=0.05$).
- Information on the core temperature at sampling was provided for 620 samples. Although 97.7% (606/620) of samples were stored in refrigerated conditions, core temperature of these samples ranged from -0.5°C to 13.7°C (refrigerated food should be maintained at $\leq 5^{\circ}\text{C}$). Of particular concern is the finding that the core temperature of 30.5% (185/606) of these 'refrigerated' samples was $>5^{\circ}\text{C}$.

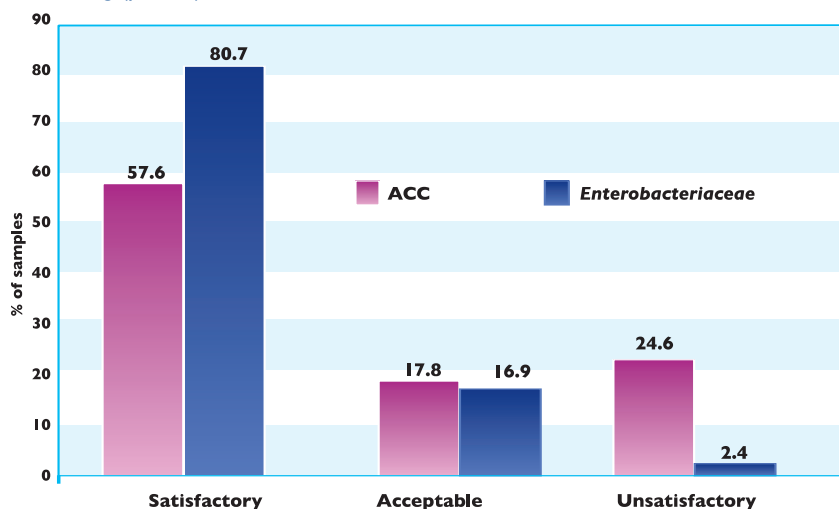


Figure 1: Microbiological quality* of loose, cooked, sliced ham

*Quality was determined using the 2001 Irish microbiological guidelines 'Guidelines for the Interpretation of Results of Microbiological Analysis of Some Ready-To-Eat foods sampled at Point of Sale'.

ked, sliced ham

Microbiological Safety Results

- All samples tested were satisfactory for *L. monocytogenes* (n=919) and *Salmonella* spp. (n=923).
- 99.1% (915/923) of samples were satisfactory for *S. aureus*, while 0.6% (5/923) and 0.3% (3/923) were classified as acceptable and unsatisfactory, respectively (Figure 2).

Conclusions and Recommendations

The finding that 24.6%, 2.4% and 0.3% of samples were unsatisfactory for ACC, *Enterobacteriaceae* and *S. aureus*, respectively, suggests that more emphasis must be placed on control measures (e.g. hygiene practices, handling practices and temperature control) at retail premises. In particular, this survey highlights the need for retailers to be aware of the appropriate storage temperatures for refrigerated food and to ensure that refrigerated food is stored at the correct temperature. The finding that all samples were satisfactory for *Salmonella* spp. and *L. monocytogenes* is very encouraging; however retailers should not become complacent as these pathogens have been associated with cooked ham and consumption of contaminated food can have serious consequences for certain sectors of the population.

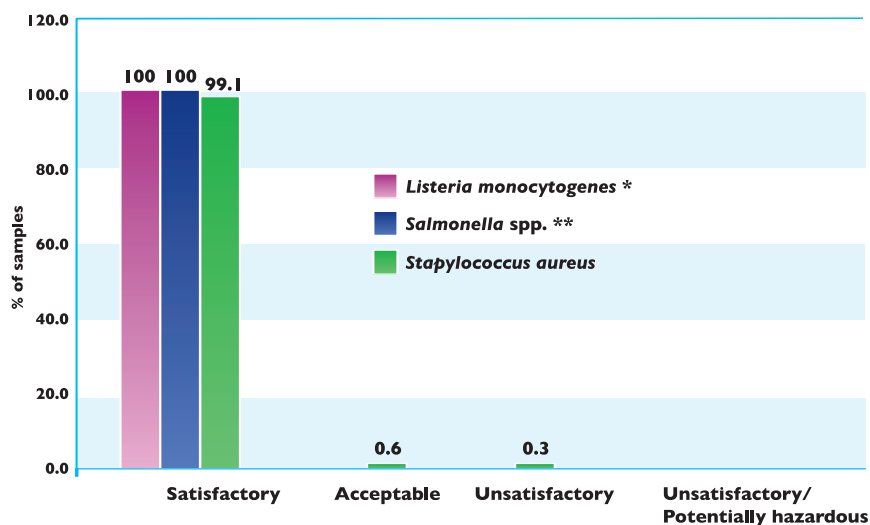


Figure 2: Microbiological safety*** of loose, cooked, sliced ham

* Unsatisfactory category does not apply to *Listeria monocytogenes*

** Acceptable and Unsatisfactory categories do not apply to *Salmonella* spp.

*** Microbiological safety was determined using the 2001 Irish microbiological guidelines 'Guidelines for the Interpretation of Results of Microbiological Analysis of Some Ready-To-Eat foods sampled at Point of Sale'.



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

S.I. No. 121 of 2006

European Communities (Avian Influenza) (Precautionary Measures) Regulations, 2006

S.I. No. 123 of 2005

European Communities (Avian Influenza) (Protection Measures in Relation to Avian Influenza) Regulations, 2005

S.I. No. 139 of 2006

European Communities (Plastics and other Materials in Contact with Food) Regulations, 2006

S.I. No. 144 of 2006

European Communities (Sampling Methods and Methods of Analysis for the Official Control of the Levels of Certain Contaminants in Foodstuffs) Regulations, 2006

S.I. No. 190 of 2006

European Communities (Control on Imports of Products of Animal Origin from Madagascar) Regulations, 2006

S.I. No. 191 of 2006

European Communities (Avian Influenza) (Control on Imports from Croatia) (Amendment) Regulations, 2006

S.I. No. 216 of 2006

European Communities (Avian Influenza) (Control on Imports from Israel) Regulations, 2006

S.I. No. 217 of 2006

European Communities (Avian Influenza) (Control on Imports from Bulgaria) Regulations, 2006

S.I. No. 228 of 2006

European Communities (Avian Influenza) (Control on Imports from Switzerland) Regulations, 2006

S.I. No. 257 of 2006

European Communities (Avian Influenza) (Amendment of Regulations) Regulations, 2006

S.I. No. 258 of 2006

European Communities (Safeguard Decisions) (Miscellaneous Revocations) Regulations, 2006

Act No. 3 of 2006

Irish Medicines Board (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2006 (includes amendment of Section 54 of the Health Act 1947)

regional meetings of the local authority veterinary service

The first of this year's Local Authority Veterinary Service regional meetings took place at the end of May in Carrick-on-Shannon and in Cashel. Both meetings were well attended with over 40 staff from the Local Authorities participating overall. At the meetings, presentations were given by FSAI staff and Local Authority Veterinary Inspectors on a broad range of topical issues, which led to much discussion and debate.

Dr Bernard Hegarty, Contracts Manager, FSAI, gave updates on the Hygiene Package, the premises database currently under development, and Safety Net, the FSAI/official agency extranet. A presentation on enforcement issues encouraged a variety of contributions on the practical difficulties and pitfalls that can occur when enforcing food law. Aileen O'Sullivan and Eamonn Horgan, Contracts Executives, FSAI, presented on the difficult issue of the removal of bovine backbone, and on the results of the 2005 National Residue Control Program, respectively. John Coady, Chief Audit Manager, FSAI, gave a detailed presentation on various aspects of official audits, the past, present and the future. Dr Micheál O'Mahony, Chief Specialist in Veterinary Public Health, FSAI,

presented some veterinary updates on a diverse range of topics including small poultry slaughter, microbiological criteria, trichinella and approvals.

Garrett Shine, County Veterinary Inspector (Co. VI), Louth County Council, and Dan Crowley, Veterinary Inspector, Cork County Council gave updates on the important work of the Local Authority Standardisation Work Group and the priorities for the future. Sean O'Laoide, Co. VI, Westmeath County Council and Alan Mooney, Co. VI, Kildare County Council, gave presentations on the recent Food and Veterinary Office mission to Ireland on official controls giving the views of participants in the mission and as agencies that underwent inspection. Rita Gately, Co. VI, Galway County Council, and Conall Calleary, Co. VI, Sligo County Council, updated the attendees on the work of the Cross Agency Hygiene Package Implementation Working Group highlighting areas of difficulty that the group was working to address.

With a broad range of subjects discussed, the regional meetings prove an invaluable forum for updating colleagues and initiating debate on the issues of the day.

local authority veterinary service annual conference

The Local Authority Veterinary Service Annual Conference was held in Dublin on 31st March last. The conference was well attended and addressed a range of topical and interesting issues including surveillance, antimicrobial resistance and strategies for control and prevention of infectious diseases, the Zoonosis Directive, avian influenza, and case studies in outbreak control.

Pictured at the conference were, from left to right: Dr John O'Brien, CEO, FSAI; Professor Patrick Wall, Geary Institute, University College, Dublin; Dr Ann Marie O'Brien, Health Service Executive; Dr Patrick Raleigh, Central Veterinary Laboratory; Dr Mae Mannix, Health Service Executive; Dr Patrick Rogan, Chief Veterinary Officer, Department of Agriculture and Food; Dr Joan O'Donnell, Health Protection Surveillance Centre; and Dr Brian Redahan, Director of Consumer Protection, FSAI.



open consultation

Revision of Technical Issues in Council Directive 90/496/EEC on Nutrition Labelling for Foodstuffs

Council Directive 90/496/EEC on Nutrition Labelling for Foodstuffs provides for the possibility of amending specific aspects of this legislation via the Standing Committee procedure. Whilst the European Commission continues to reflect on some of the more fundamental issues related to the revision of the Nutrition Labelling Directive, it has been decided that it would be timely to address some aspects which can be considered under the broad heading of 'technical issues'; particularly as they may be an important and necessary support for other related Community legislation in

force, such as the Directives on food supplements and dietetic foods and for the regulatory proposals nearing final adoption regarding nutrition and health claims made on foods and the addition of vitamins and minerals and of certain other substances to foods.

The consultation paper focuses on the following technical aspects of Council Directive 90/496/EEC:

- Reference values for vitamins and minerals
- Nutrient definitions (e.g. definition of fibre)
- Energy conversion factors
- Tolerances for nutrient declaration.

This consultation is currently open on our website at www.fsai.ie/ consultation. Further details are also available on the site.

Comments and views on the consultation should be submitted by 5pm on Friday 30th June 2006 as follows - email: consultation@fsai.ie; fax: +353 1 8171301; or post: Consultations, Food Safety Authority of Ireland, Abbey Court, Lower Abbey Street, Dublin 1.

consultation on regulation 258/97 on novel foods and novel food ingredients

The European Commission has launched a consultation for all interested parties on the revision of the Novel Food Regulation (EC No. 258/97). The food industry and consumers alike have an interest in how new or 'novel' foods gain a place on the EU market and for this reason the Commission is carrying out a public consultation to gauge the response to proposed revisions with a view to developing a more efficient and functioning novel food authorisation process.

Individuals or organisations can visit the European Commission website at <http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/ipm/forms/dispatch?form=novelfood> to record their views. The consultation will run until 1st August.

audit to determine compliance with labelling and traceability requirements

In 2003 and 2004 the FSAI carried out a nationwide audit to determine whether food business operators in the poultry, beef and fish sectors had in place adequate traceability systems in advance of the coming into force of Article 18 of Regulation EC 178/2002, which lays down the general principles of food law. The audit also determined whether labelling requirements as defined in national and EU legislation were being complied with. During the audit a total of 90 premises were visited and the findings from these visits were communicated to the official agencies and businesses concerned.

Following on from the work carried out in 2003 and 2004, the FSAI will soon commence a programme of audits to

determine compliance with labelling and traceability legislation and will concentrate primarily on meat and fish products. The audit is designed to determine how the relevant food sectors are meeting their responsibilities with respect to labelling legislation and to ensure that the consumer is not being misled by false or misleading declarations. It will also determine whether traceability systems are in place as required by national and EU legislation.

The audit is being carried out by the FSAI in conjunction with the Health Service Executive, the Department of Agriculture and Food, the Local Authority Veterinary Service and the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources. Food businesses involved in

import, slaughtering, wholesaling, retailing and distribution will be audited. The audit will also assess how businesses in the hotel, catering and related sectors are complying with this legislation. The aim is to ensure that consumer interests are protected by ensuring that food business operators comply with all labelling and traceability legislation appropriate to their business.

On completion of the audit, a report will be prepared on its findings. It is the intention of the FSAI to publish the report with an attachment containing the names of premises visited and an assessment of their compliance with the relevant labelling and traceability requirements at the time of the audit, subject to any legal constraints.

aquaculture workshop, athens

The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) is an informal arrangement between the 25 EU Member States, the European Commission and 13 Asian countries (Brunei, Burma/Myanmar, China, Cambodia, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Laos, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam). It is designed to facilitate the discussion of political, economic and cultural issues between the two regions, and at another level foster closer economic, educational and trade links.

Under its aegis, an aquaculture workshop was held in Athens recently. The objective of the workshop was to identify areas of cooperation and research between international partners which would facilitate access to European markets by aquaculture producers in Asia. The FSAI was invited to participate and to facilitate a session on the microbiological safety of aquaculture products.

The importance of aquaculture in the context of the relationship between Asia and Europe is underlined by the fact that fish is one of the world's most traded commodities. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, the value of world fisheries production in 2001 was US\$56 billion, with developing countries producing most of the fish and fishery products being sold internationally.

In China, for example, it is estimated that the aquaculture industry employs almost four million people full-time. In Vietnam, employment in aquaculture is estimated at over 700,000 people, and in recent years it has provided an average annual household income of over US\$1,000 in a country where the average annual household income is about US\$400.

The increased globalisation of the trade in aquaculture products has put food safety front and centre in international debates. Fish products in general, and in particular, products of aquaculture origin, have been subject to close scrutiny for their safeness and environmental impacts.

The workshop identified a number of areas for future co-operation, particularly the area of method development. From a food safety perspective there was a salutary reminder of the need to consider developing and emerging countries when developing standards and regulatory regimes. Excessively complex or complicated regulation tended to exclude such countries from accessing important markets and could potentially lead to consumer protection being criticised and undermined, as well as affecting food security and livelihoods in the source countries.



Pictured are delegates at the recent ASEM aquaculture workshop in Athens

aspartame: efsa opinion

Aspartame has been used as a sweetener in foods and as a table-top sweetener for more than 20 years in many countries throughout the world. In 2005, the European Ramazzini Foundation (ERF), Bologna, Italy, a scientific institute involved in research into cancer, published the results of a new animal carcinogenicity study it had carried out on the artificial sweetener aspartame. The ERF considered that the results of their study indicated that aspartame is a 'multipotential carcinogenic agent'.

At the request of the European Commission, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) Scientific Panel on Food Additives, Flavourings, Processing Aids and Materials in Contact with Food (AFC) assessed the published reports on this new study, together with extensive data on the study provided to EFSA by the ERF, other recent studies and previous evaluations of the safety of aspartame. Dr Iona Pratt, Chief Specialist Toxicology, FSAI, is a member of the EFSA AFC Scientific Panel and chaired the working group that was responsible for the evaluation of the safety of aspartame.

The EFSA opinion was published on May 4th, 2006 and is available on the EFSA website, at www.efsa.eu.int/science/afc/afc_opinions/1471_en.html. EFSA concluded, on the basis of the information available from the ERF study, that there is no reason to further review the safety of aspartame at this time, or to revise the current Acceptable Daily Intake (ADI) of 40 mg/kg body weight. EFSA has noted that consumer intake of aspartame in a number of European countries (up to 10 mg/kg body weight), is well below this figure, even in high consumers.

The authors of the ERF study considered, on the basis of their results, that aspartame had carcinogenic potential, since rats fed

aspartame for a lifetime developed cancers at various sites, including tumours of the blood cells, kidney and peripheral nerves. EFSA, in carefully examining this information, has concluded that there were underlying explanations for the occurrence of the tumours seen in the study and that the study does not cause concerns about possible health effects for consumers of aspartame. EFSA has however recommended that the data on the peripheral nerve tumours should be re-evaluated in an independent review.

This latest opinion from EFSA adds to previous comprehensive evaluations by international scientific experts including the EU Scientific Committee on Food (SCF), the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) and the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA). These experts had previously agreed that aspartame is safe for use, and had established the ADI for aspartame of 40 (SCF) to 50 (JECFA) milligrams per kilogram of body weight per day (40 - 50 mg/kg bw/day). The most recent risk assessment of the EU Scientific Committee on Food, in 2002, can be accessed at http://europe.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scf/out155_en.pdf.

The FSAI reviews the current information on approved food additives such as aspartame on an ongoing basis. When scientific and medical information becomes available on possible adverse health effects which have not been previously reported, the FSAI evaluates the information and takes appropriate action.

On the basis of the latest EFSA evaluation, the FSAI considers that the use of aspartame as a high intensity sweetener in low calorie products does not give rise to concerns for the health of consumers.

survey on levels of benzene in soft drinks

The FSAI recently issued the results of a survey on the levels of benzene in soft drinks on the market in Ireland. Some 76 samples of soft drinks, squashes and flavoured waters available for sale on the Irish market were tested by the Galway Public Analyst Laboratory on behalf of the FSAI earlier this year. No traces of benzene were detected in 91% (69 of 76) of the samples; however two products (Club Diet Lemon and Rose's Diabetic Squash Concentrate) were found with levels over 10 parts per billion (ppb). Follow-up analysis of these two products took place and both were voluntarily removed from sale in the Irish market.

Benzene is a chemical that is also found in the environment and has carcinogenic properties. It can also be formed in certain

soft drinks during their shelf-life, depending on the composition and storage conditions. This is due to a chemical reaction between benzoates (preservatives) and vitamin C in the drink, rather than contamination of the drink from an external source. There is no legislative limit for benzene in soft drinks, but most EU Member States opt for the World Health Organization's limit for drinking water of 10 ppb.

During the survey, it was noted that the two soft drinks found to contain elevated benzene levels were past their best-before date. This is not an offence in food law, however the retailers involved were notified and have given assurances to the FSAI that stock procedures in the stores involved have been reviewed and strengthened.

The levels of benzene found would not have presented a risk to the health of consumers who may have consumed these products. However, the beverage industry must be vigilant and apply best practice guidelines on avoiding the formation of benzene in soft drinks. These guidelines are available from the Beverage Council of Ireland.

The FSAI will continue to closely monitor the levels of benzene in soft drinks but considers that the levels reported in soft drinks are generally very low, and hence present a very low risk to health. However, the levels of benzene should be maintained below 10 ppb and beverages with higher levels should not be placed on the market.

renewal of efsa's scientific committee and panels



In June, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) reconstituted its Scientific Committee and Panels. The Committee and Panels are comprised of leading independent scientists appointed for a three-year term following a public call for expressions of interest. Seven Irish scientists were among those to be appointed. The scientists were selected from almost 900 candidates emanating from all EU Member States as well as from around the world. A total of 191 scientists were appointed to the EFSA Scientific Committee and Panels. In addition to the Scientific Committee and eight Panels in place since June 2003, a new Panel on Plant Health was established.

The Scientific Committee and Panels will have responsibility for the scientific assessment of food safety issues. The independent scientific advice produced by EFSA provides risk managers (the European Commission, the European Parliament and EU Member States) with a sound foundation for EU policy and legislation on food and feed safety. Working Groups are created by the Panels when additional expertise in specific areas of competence is needed.

The Irish members are as follows:

Dr Iona Pratt, Chief Specialist Toxicology, FSAI, has been re-appointed to the Scientific Panel on Food Additives, Flavourings, Processing Aids and Materials in Contact with Food. Dr Pratt is the sole Irish appointee to the Panel and is one of 21 members. The role of the Panel is to deal specifically with the use of food additives, flavourings, processing aids and materials in contact with food and the safety of other deliberately added substances to food.

Professor Albert Flynn, Professor in Nutrition, Department of Food and Nutritional Sciences, University College Cork, has been re-appointed to the Scientific Panel on Dietetic Products, Nutrition and Allergies. Professor Flynn is also a member of the FSAI Board, Chair of the FSAI Scientific Committee and Chair of the FSAI Nutrition and Novel Foods Sub-committee.

Professor John Daniel Collins, Professor of Farm Animal Clinical Studies, College of Life Sciences and Veterinary Medicine, University College Dublin has been re-appointed to the EFSA Panel on Biological Hazards. He is a member of the FSAI Board, Member of the FSAI Scientific Committee and Chair of the FSAI TSE Sub-committee.

Dr Trevor Stewart Hastings, FRS Marine Laboratory, Aberdeen, Scotland, has been appointed to the Scientific Panel on Animal Health and Welfare.

Dr John Griffin, Department of Agriculture and Food, Dublin, has been appointed to the Scientific Panel on Biological Hazards.

Dr John Sean Strain, University of Ulster, Coleraine, has been appointed to the Scientific Panel on Dietetic Products, Nutrition and Allergies.

Dr James William Choiseuil, Department of Agriculture and Food, Celbridge, Co. Kildare, has been appointed to the Scientific Panel on Plant Health.

The remaining members of the Scientific Committee will be comprised of elected Panel chairpersons. These chairpersons will be chosen when the Panels meet; the process will be complete before the first Scientific Committee meeting in September. Previously, Professor Albert Flynn and Professor John Daniel Collins were Panel chairpersons of their respective Scientific Panels.



mailing list

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Pictured are some of the speakers at the IFSTI seminar, from left to right: Fiona Lalor, Maree Gallagher Associates; Darragh Page, Environmental Protection Agency; Don Collins, Food Industry Recruitment; Dan Smith, Global Spectrometry Solutions; Lisa O'Connor, FSAI and President of IFSTI; Wayne Anderson, FSAI, and Barry Bochner, Biolog Inc.



celtic food in a global economy

The Institute of Food Science and Technology Ireland (IFSTI) held its annual summer seminar on 8th June at the Boyne Valley Hotel, Drogheda, in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Branch of the IFST.

Proceedings began with a dinner on Wednesday 7th June, at which guest speaker Martin Higgins, CEO of safefood, the Food Safety Promotion Board presented his thoughts on 'The Dublin Coddle and the Ulster Fry - a North South Journey'.

The formal programme consisted of detailed technical updates on topics such as analytical methods, nanotechnology and labelling legislation. The implications of outsourcing for Irish based manufacturers and retailers were explored in addition to the employment implications for food scientists and technologists.

recent publications

The following publications have recently been produced by the FSAI:

- Leaflet: Safe Handling and Serving of Soft Ice-Cream
- Report: Safety of Potable Water in Ireland
- Food Safety Consultative Council Annual Report, 2004/2005
- Guidance Note No. 20 - Industrial Processing of Heat-Chill Foods
- Leaflet: Clean Livestock - Your Contribution To Clean Food Leaflet
- Poster: Farmhouse Cheesemakers

These publications are available on our website at www.fsai.ie/publications, or by calling our advice-line on 1890 336677.

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