



Meeting Expectations

The FSAI is fully committed to operating in an open and transparent manner and to providing its customers with an efficient, timely, professional and courteous service. Our customer charter outlines the standard of service that our customers can expect from us and requires that we evaluate our services regularly to ensure that we are meeting these standards.

During 2010, the majority of customers to the FSAI telephoned our advice-line (61%) and a further 25% chose to email us. To ensure we are meeting our customers' expectations and to improve our services, we carried out an evaluation of these two main areas of communication. An independent assessor carried out both telephone and email surveys, focusing on a range of issues to determine the ease of access to our services, the level of customer satisfaction and to establish how useful our customers found the information they received.

A total of 92% of telephone users found it very easy or quite easy to get through to our advice-line. Where queries cannot be answered immediately, we promise to respond within five working days. Our survey revealed that 93% of telephone queries were answered within the five working days. 77% of those who emailed the FSAI advice-line stated that their emails were always/usually acknowledged straight away and 83% of email users confirmed that they received a response to their query within five working days. Our survey also revealed that 97% of email users would recommend the FSAI advice-line as a source of information to others.

Overall, 87% of those surveyed (telephone and email users) felt that their questions were answered in full and 84% of telephone users and 100% of email users found the information clear or fairly clear. The majority (92%) of those surveyed stated that they acted fully or partially on the information provided.

We would like to thank everyone who took part in the customer surveys and will use the information gathered to strive to continually improve our services.



Vanessa Cooling, FSAI Customer Advisor

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Dioxin in Animal Feed – Reducing the Risk of Reoccurrence

The New Year was hardly up and running when the food supply in Europe was threatened once again by the uncovering of another major food incident caused by the dioxin contamination of animal feed. To those in Ireland and Belgium especially, this was all too familiar a situation and an unwelcome case of *déjà vu*. This time Germany was at the centre of the crisis.

The cause of the problem was contaminated recycled vegetable oil destined for industrial manufacturing, but inadvertently diverted into the animal feed chain. The result was the distribution of about 300,000 tonnes of dioxin contaminated compound animal feed to farms across eight of the sixteen German states. At the height of the incident, about 4,700 cattle, pig, dairy, poultry and rabbit farms were placed under restriction and movement of animals off these farms was prohibited. Lengthy investigations, recriminations and repercussions followed and still continue.

There are stringent food regulations in place in the EU in order to limit human exposure to dioxins. The longer a person is exposed to dioxins, the greater the chance of serious adverse health effects. Toxicity is related to the build up of these toxins in the body and the focus of food safety controls is on efforts to reduce the body burden. In this latest incident, the levels of dioxins were low when compared to levels reported in the Irish dioxin incident in 2008. Maximum levels reported in eggs from poultry fed with contaminated feed were about four times higher than the legal limit and poultry meat, about twice as high as legal limits. Considering the short time of exposure and the low levels of dioxins, thankfully there was very low risk to consumer health from this incident. However, the impact on the food and feed chain was still severe in Germany and this rippled across many other countries.

While the bulk of the animal feed and animals fed the contaminated feed were not exported from Germany, some of the dioxin contaminated feed was exported to Denmark and France; contaminated pig meat was exported to Poland and the Czech Republic and contaminated eggs were exported to the Netherlands. Ireland was affected by the crisis when some of the contaminated eggs were then exported to the United Kingdom as pasteurised liquid eggs where they were used as ingredients for cakes and other bakery products. This resulted in a range of products being voluntarily recalled from the market, which included a range of cakes from supermarket shelves in Ireland.

Needless to say, the incident gave rise to large financial losses in the food industry, with large drops in farm prices in Germany and demand for compensation in the order of millions. Serious reputational damage was also done to the German agri-food sector. The adequacy of traceability systems in place was also questioned because of the length of time taken to identify contaminated products and to remove them from the market.

Twelve years after the first dioxin crisis in Belgium and only two years after a similar, albeit much shorter lived event in Ireland, it seemed unthinkable that Europe should find itself faced with another potential major threat to its food supply and consumer health centred on contaminated animal feed. It seems that the lessons of recent history are hard learned.

Once again, the vulnerability of the food chain to inadvertent or deliberate adulteration of the animal feed chain has been highlighted. A crisis in any country in Europe soon becomes a crisis for all countries in Europe. In the wake of this latest incident in Germany and previous incidents, it is imperative that we examine what can be done to reduce the chance of a reoccurrence. To us in the Food Safety Authority of Ireland, we believe that, at a minimum, some straightforward steps to control the recycling of waste in animal feed should be taken across Europe (Table 1).



Alan Reilly

Alan Reilly
CEO

Table 1: Recommendations for new controls on the recycling of waste in animal feed

Separation of waste from feed/food stream during recycling
Where recycled materials are used in the process of manufacturing food or feed, these should be recycled in designated, separate production streams, completely separate from processes involving the recycling of all components that are not intended to enter the food and feed chain.
Approval/licensing by competent national authorities
All businesses operating at any stage of the food and feed production chain, whether as producers of final product or suppliers of raw ingredients or other components used in the manufacturing process, should be approved (licensed) and audited against food and feed safety requirements. This applies equally to businesses involved in recycling of any waste materials used in the process of manufacturing of food or feed.
Dioxin monitoring of feed chain
There is a clear need to introduce a requirement for the feed manufacturers to monitor raw materials and ingredients for dioxins and to have a mandatory requirement for industry to report positive results to control authorities.

Europe-wide Control on Bisphenol A in Infant Feeding Bottles

Bisphenol A (BPA) is a chemical that is mainly used in combination with other chemicals to manufacture plastics and resins. For example, BPA is used in the manufacture of polycarbonate, a high performance transparent, rigid plastic which is used to make food containers, including infant feeding (baby) bottles. Residues of BPA are also present in epoxy resins used to make protective coatings and linings for food and beverage cans. As a result, it is possible that small amounts of BPA can migrate into food and beverages stored in materials containing the substance.

BPA is currently permitted for use in food contact materials in the European Union, under Commission Directive 2002/72/EC, relating to plastic materials and articles intended to come into contact with foodstuffs. It is also permitted for use in food contact materials in a large number of Third countries, including the USA and Australia. However, in response to ongoing concerns over the safety of the substance, certain countries (notably Denmark, France and Canada) have recently introduced national measures to restrict the use of BPA, particularly in food contact materials intended to be used by infants and young children.

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) reviewed the safety of BPA in 2006 and again in 2008. However, in light of the recent publication of several new studies on the safety of BPA, including studies on the effects of the substance

at low doses, the European Commission asked EFSA's Panel on food contact materials, enzymes, flavourings and processing aids (CEF) to reconsider the safety of the substance when used for food contact material applications and on 30 September 2010 the panel published a further updated Opinion. The Panel concluded that it could not identify any new evidence which would lead to the revision of the current Tolerable Daily Intake (TDI) for BPA of 0.05 mg/kg body weight set by EFSA in its 2006 opinion. In addition, the Panel stated that the currently available data did not provide convincing evidence of neurobehavioural toxicity of BPA. However, whilst maintaining the TDI for BPA, the Panel also noted that some uncertainties were identified in several new studies, but these studies were not considered suitable for assessment of possible effects on human health because of methodological deficiencies.

In light of the uncertainties identified in the EFSA Opinion, along with the introduction of national measures to restrict the use of BPA in certain European countries, meaning controls were no longer harmonised, Member States voted on 25 November 2010 to introduce Europe-wide controls on a precautionary basis to prohibit the manufacture and sale of BPA-based infant feeding bottles. The ban on manufacture of the bottles within the EU will come into effect on 1 March 2011, with import and sales of the bottles prohibited from 1 June 2011.

Manufacturers of infant feeding bottles have already taken steps to remove BPA from their products and very few BPA-containing bottles remain on the European market, including Ireland. The new measures will ensure, however, that a consistent approach is adopted in all Member States and the FSAI will be working with its official agencies to ensure the ban is fully implemented in Ireland.

To view the most recent EFSA Opinion, see: www.efsa.europa.eu/en/scdocs/scdoc/1829.htm.



Students from UCD visit FSAI

A group of Food Science Masters students from University College, Dublin visited the FSAI recently to attend a seminar which focused on the exposure to chemicals in the food chain. Dr Rhodri Evans, Chief Specialist Toxicology, FSAI and Ms

Christina Tlustos, Technical Executive, FSAI, presented on areas such as contaminants in food, the Irish dioxin incident, the total diet study in Ireland and estimation of exposure to chemical contaminants in food.



Pictured here are the UCD students with Dr Rhodri Evans, (back, left) and Ms Christina Tlustos (back, second from left).

Presence of *Listeria monocytogenes* on Cooked Meat Slicers in Retail and Catering Premises

Listeria monocytogenes is a bacterium that is commonly present in the environment and can cause infection, listeriosis, in humans. *L. monocytogenes* infection is typically foodborne and outbreaks of listeriosis have been linked to a wide variety of foods including soft ripened cheese, salads, unpasteurised milk, ready-to-eat (RTE) foods such as sliced cooked meat/poultry products, smoked salmon, coleslaw and sandwiches. *L. monocytogenes* is of particular significance to food businesses producing RTE foods because of the bacterium's ability to establish itself and persist in the food processing environment.

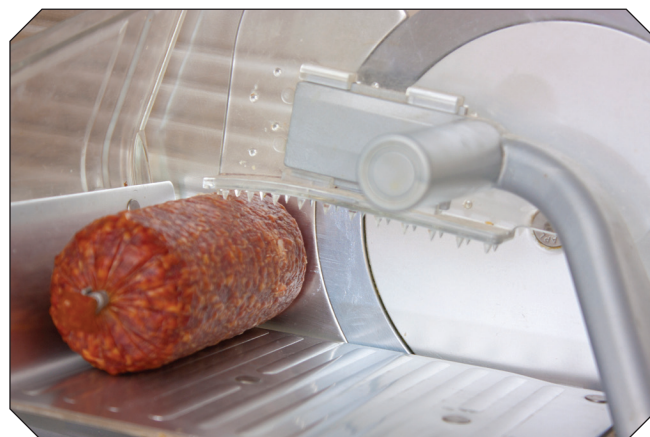
Due to their construction, meat slicers can be difficult to clean and therefore may become probable contamination sources for food products. Contamination may be increased as slicing machines are often held at room temperature and cleaned infrequently. As a result, meat slicing machines may harbour bacteria, including *L. monocytogenes*. *L. monocytogenes* can also rapidly adhere to surfaces such as stainless steel, commonly used in the construction of this equipment, which may then also act as a reservoir for further contamination.

In 2009, a national survey entitled "Establishing Baseline Data on the Presence of *Listeria monocytogenes* on Cooked Meat Slicers in Retail and Catering Premises" was coordinated by the FSAI. The isolation of *Listeria* species from surveyed cooked meat slicers was low. Only 0.71% of samples were positive for *Listeria* species, with only 0.23% positive for *L. monocytogenes*. However, while the isolation of *Listeria* species from this type of equipment was low, the fact that *L. monocytogenes* in particular, was detected, demonstrates the importance of its control in food businesses using this type of equipment.

The survey also highlighted a poor understanding and knowledge of the importance of cleaning and sanitation of this type of equipment by food businesses. While over 63% of food businesses had a cleaning/sanitation schedule for their cooked meat slicer, only 52% documented the schedule and only 27% provided specific information on how the meat slicer should be disassembled.

From the findings of this national survey the following recommendations are given to food businesses using this type of equipment:

- The food safety hazards associated with the use of meat slicing machines should be considered. Procedures outlining the precautions and actions to be implemented should be documented in all food businesses food safety management systems.
- Meat slicers have numerous surfaces that come into contact with food. Food businesses should document a cleaning and sanitation procedure for equipment of this nature, as per the manufacturer's instructions, if available. The slicer should at a minimum be thoroughly cleaned and sanitised each day prior to and after use. The frequency of cleaning should be documented.



- Throughout continuous use at room temperatures, the contact surfaces of the equipment should be cleaned and sanitised at least every 2-4 hours. This time interval may be longer if the equipment is used at refrigerated temperatures.
- The efficacy of cleaning and sanitation of meat slicing machines should be verified.
- Training for staff in disassembling, cleaning and sanitising this equipment should be provided.
- As the risk of contamination of this equipment and cross-contamination of products is high, separate slicing machines for raw and cooked meats should be considered.
- All meat slicing equipment should have regular maintenance checks.
- Records of all routine and maintenance checks or repairs, cleaning and sanitation, staff training etc. should be kept.
- When purchasing a meat slicer, ensure the equipment is hygienically designed to facilitate easy disassembly, cleaning and sanitation. Ensure the equipment design and materials used in its construction are safe and durable.



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

At Your Service

One of the main functions of the FSAI is to provide information to interested parties on all aspects of food safety and hygiene. We also encourage consumers to contact us with any food safety issues they may have. This two-way communication is facilitated by our advice-line, website and library. Most recently we have developed a facebook page and YouTube channel to allow us to communicate with a wider audience.

Advice-line

Our advice-line (1890 336677; info@fsai.ie) operates Monday to Friday, from 9am to 5pm, and is staffed by trained advisors and supported by food scientists. Queries to the advice-line cover a large range of topics, including starting a food business, importing food, making a complaint about a food or premises, labelling, training requirements and HACCP.

In 2010, a total of 10,897 queries were dealt with, representing an increase of 15% from the previous year. The majority of queries came from the food industry (49% - to include caterers, retailers, manufacturers, distributors etc.) and consumers (25%) (Fig 1).

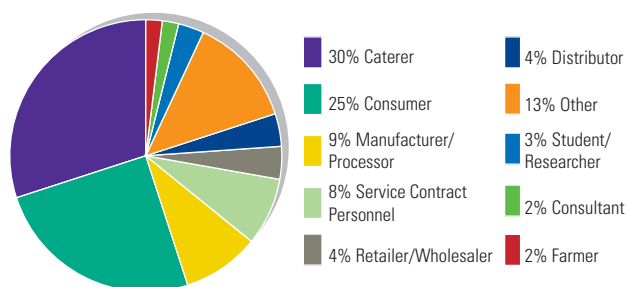


Figure 1: Category of caller to the advice-line, 2010

The most popular category of request to our advice-line was for general information and publications (29%) (Fig 2); the safe catering pack proving very popular with food businesses. 'Complaints' was the second highest category of call received (20%). The majority of consumers who contacted us reported issues with food and food establishments, such as low hygiene standards, unfit food and suspected food poisoning. In 2009, we noticed an increase of 50% from the previous year in requests for guidance on how to set up a new food business; these requests increased by a further 13% in 2010 (Fig 3). A key strategy for the FSAI is to make it easier for food businesses to comply with regulations and to reduce the barriers for companies setting up new food businesses.

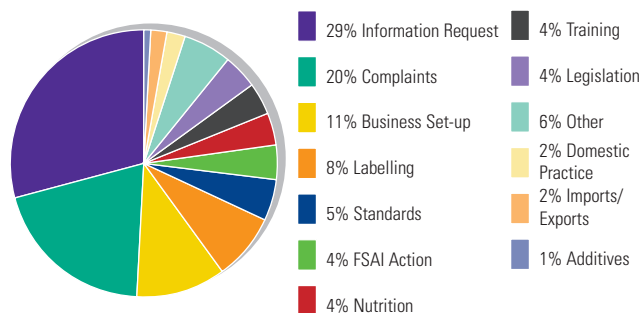


Figure 2: Category of request to the advice-line, 2010

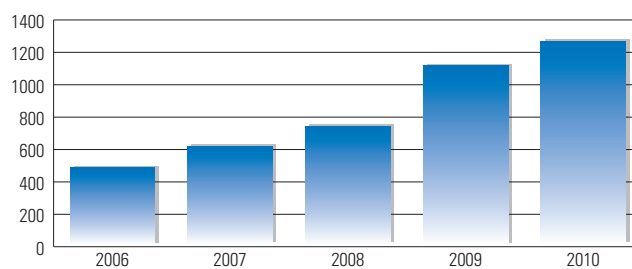


Figure 3: Number of requests for business start-up information, 2005-2010

Website

Our website is a comprehensive source of information on all aspects of food safety and related guidance and legislation. It is monitored and updated on a daily basis and is widely used by the food industry, consumers, consultants, students, trainers and by our official agencies.

In 2010, the website received almost 960,000 unique views, an increase of 11% from 2009. There were 160,872 absolute unique visitors and 1,307,821 pageviews recorded for the year. Visitors came to the site from 200 countries, with 70% coming from Ireland and 8% from the UK, followed by the US, France and Germany.

The most popular sections of the site were publications and resources, legislation and food businesses. All of our publications are available on our website and consumers who wish to make a complaint about a food or a food premises can fill out our online 'make a complaint' form.

Library

Our library contains a wide range of books, journals and online databases related to food safety. The library continued to develop its collection of resources in 2010, with 172 new titles added during the year, bringing the total collection of individual items to 7,117. The online Library Catalogue was upgraded to a new version, E-Library, during 2010. If you would like to come and use the facilities in our library, please contact us at library@fsai.ie or on 01 817 1354.

We're on facebook!

The FSAI now has an official facebook page, www.facebook.com/FSai, where users will find updates on the latest food safety news. Currently, 360 people are listed as liking the page, with 342 active users and over 37,000 post views last month.

YouTube

The latest communication tool we're using is YouTube. Our channel can be found at www.youtube.com/fsaiTV. We're just getting started but will be uploading new content in the near future.



The Infant Diet and its Importance for Later Life

The infant diet can have lifelong effects on physical and mental health. Healthy and safe food choices for infants in the early years of life are essential for optimal growth and development. The foods eaten during the process of weaning onto solid food may affect life-long eating habits and so the importance of this process cannot be underestimated in terms of both infant and lifelong health.

Dietary iron is essential for optimal infant development. However, a study conducted by the FSAI to assess the inclusion of iron-rich food into the diets of a sample of infants and to investigate the types and amounts of commercial infant food available on the Irish market, indicates that infants in Ireland may not be getting enough iron in their diet. It also indicates that parents need to be aware that infant food available in supermarkets may not reflect recommended infant feeding guidelines.

Iron

One important aspect of a healthy infant diet is to provide enough iron to avoid iron deficiency and iron deficiency anaemia. Iron deficiency can result in poor physical and mental development in an infant. From four to six months of age, the infant's iron stores from birth decrease and their iron requirements increase. From this time onwards, it is important that the infant's diet contains enough iron to meet their requirements. Haem iron, found naturally in foods such as red meat (beef, lamb and pork), is more easily absorbed by the body, therefore these foods are important from the early stages of weaning.

To find out what types of iron-containing foods are introduced into the infant's diet and at what age these foods were introduced, 195 mothers with infants less than 30 months old were surveyed in five shopping centres located across Dublin and Laois.

It was found that a quarter of infants did not receive any red meat in the first 12 months of life and almost 70% of mothers were unaware of the correct age at which iron becomes more important in the infant diet. Mothers who were aware of the correct age at which iron becomes more important in the infant diet introduced the recommended red meats at an average age of seven months. This is close to recommendations that red meat should be included in the infant's diet no later than six to seven months. On the other hand, mothers who were not aware of the age when iron-rich foods are important for babies, introduced these meats even later, at an average age of eight and a half months.

How mothers felt about introducing meat into their infant's diet can also affect the time that red meat is introduced. In this survey, 60% of mothers were concerned about their child choking on meat, half of mothers said that the texture of meat was an issue and a quarter of mothers believed that red meat was not a healthy food. The more concerns mothers had about introducing red meat, the later they gave it to their infant. The late or delayed introduction of iron-rich foods into the infant diet increases the risk of infants developing iron deficiency and iron deficiency anaemia.

Commercial Infant Foods

Manufacturers of commercial infant foods must comply with rigorous laws to ensure both the safety of this vulnerable group and fair consumer choice. The nutritional information provided for each infant food produced by seven main food brands was collected. In general, the 448 infant foods assessed complied with legislation. However, discrepancies did exist between some food products and best practice guidelines. Commercial foods that would not be recommended for consumption by infants include sweet desserts, baby biscuits and baby gravies and sauces, for example.

Infants are born with a natural preference for sweet and salty tastes. As such, it is important that staple foods with blander tastes (cereals, vegetables, potatoes, meat, fish, poultry) are offered instead, in an effort to decrease the child's preference for sweet and salty snack foods, which are not recommended for a healthy diet. Recent research has shown that a quarter of children aged four to sixteen in Ireland are overweight or obese. It is essential that our food environment reflects the healthy eating guidelines to help parents make better food choices on behalf of their children.

Conclusion

Educating parents on the recommended infant feeding guidelines is essential to encourage healthier eating behaviours. It is important that adults are motivated to adopt more positive feeding practices and follow healthy eating guidelines, as parents are best placed to influence their child's eating habits by setting a positive example.

To support our best intentions in achieving a healthier lifestyle for ourselves and our families, the food environment must be improved. International and national food laws have a powerful role to play in the availability of safe food to consumers, and manufacturers and national policies can influence the type of foods which are promoted and distributed to the consumer.

To effectively support parents, it is necessary to provide them not only with information, but with an environment that puts this information into practice in an accessible and enjoyable manner.



Pictured carrying out the survey were Anne-Marie Bennett and Nicola Canning.

Six Years of the Scientific Committee: 2005-2010

On 31 January 2005, the Minister for Health and Children appointed the second Scientific Committee under the Food Safety Authority of Ireland Act, 1998. This Committee came to the end of its term at the end of 2010 and on the eve of the establishment of the third Scientific Committee by the Minister, we would like to recognise the members and reflect on the achievements of the second Committee.

The Scientific Committee consists of 15 members from a range of scientific disciplines relevant to the work of the FSAI. The committee members perform a vital role for the FSAI, ensuring that risk management decisions taken by the Authority are underpinned by sound scientific advice and risk assessment.

The FSAI Act charges the Scientific Committee with the responsibility of providing scientific advice to the Board in three areas:

- Scientific and technical questions relating to food safety and hygiene
- The implementation and administration of the food inspection services
- The nutritional value or content of food.

The Scientific Committee may also undertake other or further investigations, assessments, research or examination into a matter referred to it whilst taking into account budgetary and resource constraints. It may also initiate any investigation, assessment or examination of a food safety and hygiene issue providing it first informs the Board.

The FSAI Act allows the Scientific Committee to establish Sub-committees to advise and assist in conducting its work. The second Scientific Committee created five Sub-committees, each chaired by a member of the Scientific Committee. The Sub-committees are subject-specific and comprise between nine and fifteen scientists. In total, the Scientific Committee structure provides the FSAI with the advice of 56 scientists, all working in a voluntary capacity. This represents an invaluable resource for the FSAI and an important service to the Irish public.



Pictured at the first meeting of the second Scientific Committee. Back row (l-r): Prof. Colin Hill, Dr Mark Lynch, Mr Cathal Kearney, Prof. John Daniel Collins, Dr Philipp Hess, Dr Mary Flynn, Prof. Brian McKenna
Front row (l-r): Ms Paula Barry-Walsh, Dr Catherine Adley, Mr Michael O'Keeffe, Prof. Albert Flynn (Chair), Dr Eibhlin Connolly, Dr Paul McKeown, Prof. Michael Ryan

Second Scientific Committee Members

Prof. Albert Flynn, Prof. in Nutrition, UCC (Chair)

Prof. Dan Collins, Prof. Emeritus of Farm Animal Clinical Studies, UCD

Mr Ray Parle, Principal Environmental Health Officer, HSE

Dr Terry McMahon, Shellfish Safety Manager, Marine Institute

Dr Colette Bonner, Deputy Chief Medical Officer, DoHC

Prof. Michael Ryan, Dean, Doctoral Studies/ Post-doc Training, UCD

Ms Paula Barry-Walsh, Senior Superintending Veterinary Inspector, DAFF

Prof. Martin Cormican, Prof. in Bacteriology, NUIG and Consultant Microbiologist, HSE

Dr Paul McKeown, Consultant, Public Health Medicine, HSE

Dr Catherine Adley, Head of Chemical and Environmental Sciences, UL

Prof. Colin Hill, Professor of Microbial Food Safety, UCC

Prof. Brian McKenna, Prof. Emeritus of Food Science, UCD

Dr Michael O'Keeffe, Retired Senior Principal Research Officer, Teagasc

Dr Iona Pratt, Retired Chief Specialist Toxicology, FSAI

Dr Dan O'Sullivan, Head of Residues Division, DAFF

Former members:

Dr Eibhlin Connolly, DCMO, DoHC

Mr Cathal Kearney, PEHO, HSE

Dr Philipp Hess, Former Team Leader Biotoxin Chemistry, MI

Dr Mark Lynch, Retired Head of the Pesticide Control Service, DAFF

Dr Mary Flynn, Consultant Dietician

FSAI Scientific Committee Secretariat

Dr Wayne Anderson

Ms Eileen Lippert

Six Years of the Scientific Committee: 2005-2010

Since 2005, the Scientific Committee has published 14 reports (Table 1). In addition, scientists in the Scientific Committee structure have also peer reviewed work developed by scientists in the FSAI and provided advice on a range of diverse food safety issues such as BSE, GMOs and novel foods.

The Chief Executive and staff of the FSAI would like to recognise the contribution of each and every scientist who has advised us over the past six years. We wish to thank them wholeheartedly for their dedication and professionalism.

Table 1: Reports of the second Scientific Committee

Published

2005: The control and management of *Listeria monocytogenes* contamination of food

2005: Salt and Health

2006: Risk assessment of Azaspiracids (AZAs) in shellfish

2007: Recommendations for a national policy on vitamin D supplementation for infants in Ireland

2008: Gluten free foods

2008: Food safety implications of land-spreading agricultural, municipal and industrial organic materials on agricultural lands used for food production in Ireland

2008: The relevance for food safety of applications of nanotechnology in the food and feed industries

2008: Zoonotic Tuberculosis and food safety

2009: *Mycobacterium avium* subsp. *Paratuberculosis* and the possible links to Crohn's disease

2010: Guidance on food additives

2010: The prevention of Verocytotoxic *Escherichia coli* (VTEC) infection: a shared responsibility (2nd Edition)

For publication in 2011

Campylobacter control programme in poultry

National infant feeding policy (2nd Edition)

Review of the sampling and microbiological examinations undertaken by the HSE, 2007 & 2008



Nicola Canning, a delegate at a seminar on food additives, holds a copy of the 2010 report, 'Guidance on Food Additives' produced by the Food Additives, Chemical Contaminants and Residues Sub-committee of the Scientific Committee.

Sub-committees of the Scientific Committee

Sub-committees of the Scientific Committee

- Food Additives, Chemical Contaminants and Residues
- Microbiology
- TSE
- GMO
- Nutrition and Novel Foods
- Nanotechnology (Ad-Hoc Sub-committee)

Food Additives, Chemical Contaminants and Residues Sub-committee

The Food Additives, Chemical Contaminants and Residues Sub-committee (FACR) provides the Scientific Committee with advice on the chemical safety of food. Since 2005, the Sub-committee has drafted opinions on many diverse issues.

In 1995, Ireland was the first country to identify a new marine biotoxin called azaspiracid (AZA). Human intoxication, termed azaspiracid poisoning (AZP), is associated with the consumption of shellfish contaminated with AZAs. An updated risk assessment for AZAs in shellfish was prepared by the Sub-committee in August 2006. This work featured heavily in a more recent opinion on marine biotoxins issued by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA).

In the food additives area, the Sub-committee adopted a guidance document

giving information to the food industry and enforcement officers on controls on the use of additives in food in Ireland. Food additives are used to preserve food, or enhance its quality or appearance. The use of such substances in food is controlled by a comprehensive legislative framework that has been put in place across the European Community. This legislation, together with legislation on flavourings and enzymes used in food, has recently been updated with the adoption of the package of regulations covering the use of food improvement agents. Guidance on such complex legislation is valuable to support increased levels of industrial compliance as well as consistent enforcement during official controls.

The Sub-committee also drafted an opinion on gluten and gluten-free foods in 2008. This report addressed a number of issues concerning gluten-free foods including their nutritional quality and the need for Irish standards for levels of gluten in food suitable for people who are intolerant to it. The report made recommendations on safe levels for gluten in gluten-free and reduced-gluten foodstuffs, and the labelling of such products.

Members of the Sub-committee on Food Additives, Chemical Contaminants and Residues:

Prof. Michael Ryan (Chair), Dr Michael O'Keeffe, Dr Dan O'Sullivan, Dr Claire Chambers, Dr Edel Healy, Dr Evin McGovern, Mr John Moriarty, Mr Padraig Burke, Dr Thomasina Barron, Dr Iona Pratt, Dr Terry McMahon.

FSAI Scientific Secretary: Dr Rhodri Evans

Additional Scientists: Dr Fiona Stevens, Dr Gavin Ryan

Microbiology Sub-committee

Since 2005, the Microbiology Sub-committee has drafted opinions on the risk of foodborne transmission of *Listeria monocytogenes*, *Mycobacterium bovis* (which causes tuberculosis) and Verocytotoxigenic *E. coli* (VTEC). These opinions identified foods at risk of contamination and included guidance on how these microorganisms can be controlled by relevant sectors in the food chain. They also presented guidance on measures required by regulatory authorities and public health bodies to help safeguard the consumer.

The Sub-committee has continued to keep a watching brief on the international debate surrounding a possible link between *Mycobacterium avium* subsp.

Six Years of the Scientific Committee: 2005-2010

paratuberculosis (referred to as MAP) and Crohn's disease. An updated opinion was drafted for the Scientific Committee in 2009. The Scientific Committee reiterated its previous opinion that the available evidence did not support a causal relationship.

Increased public awareness and concern in relation to environmental issues and significant changes in the regulatory requirements for the protection of the environment, such as the European Communities Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters Regulations 2006, provided the background to a report on land-spreading of organic material on agricultural land used for food production. The report specifically addressed the risks associated with the long established practice of land-spreading of organic agricultural and the more recent practice of spreading organic municipal and industrial materials.

Following a national survey of bottled water in which 7.2% of samples tested failed to meet European microbiological standards or guidelines, the Sub-committee drafted an opinion on the food safety risks posed by such water.

In the final act of its term, the Microbiology Sub-committee signed off on two reports which were subsequently adopted by the Scientific Committee in December 2010. One of these presents a proposal for a national control programme for *Campylobacter* species in the broiler (chicken) supply chain. The other report reviews the sampling and microbiological analysis undertaken by the HSE to advise FSAI on the strengths and weaknesses of the current approach. These reports will be published in 2011.

Over the past six years, the Microbiology Sub-committee has examined a range of microbial risks and provided an invaluable voluntary resource to the FSAI. Sadly one of its members, Helen Cowman, passed away in 2010. Her enthusiastic, considered and practical contributions have been missed.

Microbiology Sub-committee Members:

Prof. Martin Cormican (Chair), Dr Bill Doré, Dr Cyril Carroll, Mr David Nolan, Dr Geraldine Duffy, Prof. Dan Collins, Mr Ray Parle, Ms Paula Barry-Walsh, Dr Paul McKeown, Dr Catherine Adley, Prof. Colin Hill, Dr Neil Rowan, Dr Michael Fallon, Prof. Seamus Fanning, Dr Tom Beresford, Ms Helen Cowman, RIP

FSAI Scientific Secretary: Dr Lisa O'Connor

Additional Scientists: Dr Declan Bolton, Mr Kilian Unger, Dr Paul Whyte, Dr Kieran Jordan, Dr Monserrat Gutierrez, Dr Niall Delappe, Dr Mary Murphy, Mr Cecil Alexander, Mr David Smith, Dr Jimmy McLaughlin, Dr Owen Carton, Prof. William Magette, Mr Vincent Young, Dr Vera Nicholson, Dr Patricia Garvey.

TSE Sub-committee

The Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy (TSE) Sub-committee was formed by the Scientific Committee to keep the FSAI up-to-date with scientific knowledge on nv-CJD in humans and to maintain a review of the progress of Irish controls on BSE in cattle. Over the last five years, the Sub-committee advised the FSAI via the Scientific Committee on hazards associated with TSEs and related risks, on national monitoring and controls for consumer protection and also on new legislative requirements. The Sub-committee commissioned and reviewed FSAI audits on



Pictured at the launch of the Scientific Committee report on Food Additives were Dr Iona Pratt, Scientific Committee member and Dr Rhodri Evans, Chief Specialist Toxicology, FSAI.

the control of specified risk materials (SRM) in meat plants and butcher shops to ensure minimum consumer exposure to TSE prions.

Contingency plans for the development of BSE-like prions in sheep and goats were drawn up to control human exposure should findings in continental Europe be discovered in Ireland. The Sub-committee also reviewed the decline of BSE in cattle in Ireland and advised on the applicability of a targeted cull. Since 2005, the number of cases of BSE in cattle has significantly reduced with only two cases reported in older cattle in 2010. As cases have decreased, changes to controls have been necessary and the TSE Sub-committee has been at the forefront in providing scientific advice to underpin these new controls.

TSE Sub-committee Members: Prof. Dan Collins (Chair), Dr Colm Henry, Mr Declan Mulhare, Dr John Griffin, Dr Margaret O'Sullivan, Prof. Mark Rogers, Mr Michael Sheridan, Mr Sean O'Laoide

FSAI Scientific Secretary: Mr John Matthews

GMO Sub-committee

The authorisation process for GM food and feed is based on Regulation EC No. 1829/2003 and begins with a safety assessment carried out by EFSA. Member States have opportunities to comment on the application dossier and the subsequent EFSA safety opinion. The FSAI is the Competent Authority in Ireland for enforcing GM food legislation and is assisted by the GMO Sub-committee in assessing the safety of GM food on a case by case basis. Utilising the expertise of plant biologists, botanists, microbiologists and



Pictured at the launch of the report 'Food Safety Implications of Land-spreading Agricultural, Municipal and Industrial Organic Materials on Agricultural Land used for Food Production in Ireland' are (l-r): Prof. John Daniel Collins, University College, Dublin, Chair of the Scientific Committee Working Group on Land-spreading and Prof. Martin Cormican, National University of Ireland, Galway, Chair of the Microbiology Sub-committee.

Six Years of the Scientific Committee: 2005-2010



Prof. Albert Flynn, Chair of the second FSAI Scientific Committee, pictured here with Prof. Alan Reilly, Chief Executive, FSAI.

animal scientists, the FSAI is in a position to make informed scientific comment on the application dossiers submitted, as well as review the assessments carried out by the GMO panel of EFSA. In the last five years, the GMO Sub-committee has reviewed 24 applications relating to GM maize, two relating to GM cotton and one each for potato, rice, soya, sugar beet and oilseed rape. With the exception of the GM potato, which targeted the starch production industry, all of these GM plants are engineered to resist attack by certain pests and/or tolerate applications of select herbicides.

GMO Sub-committee Members: Prof. Colin Hill (Chair), Dr Brendan Lynch, Prof. Douwe van Sinderen, Dr Eddie Walsh, Mr Ewen Mullins, Mr Gerry McMahon, Mr John O'Neill, Prof. Matt Harmey, Dr Philip Dix, Mr Tom McLoughlin, Dr Tommy Gallagher, Dr Liam Hyde

FSAI Scientific Secretary: Dr Patrick O'Mahony

Nutrition and Novel Food Sub-committee

This Sub-committee considers the scientific aspects of nutritional issues affecting public health in Ireland and drafts opinions for the Scientific Committee in the area of public health nutrition. In many cases, these opinions are directly relevant to the Department of Health and Children when developing national policy in this important area. Over the past five years the Nutrition Sub-committee has investigated vitamin D deficiency in infants, best practice in infant feeding throughout the first year of life and healthy eating for the prevention of diet-related diseases (such as heart disease and cancer) and health promotion for the population of Ireland.

Novel foods are foods or food ingredients that were not available on the EU market to a significant degree prior to May 15, 1997, which is when the legislation came into force (Regulation EC No. 258/97). A food business that wishes to market a novel food or food ingredient for the first time in the EU must submit an application for authorisation to the competent Authority in the Member State where the food shall be first marketed. In Ireland, the FSAI is the competent Authority for novel food.

The FSAI consults with its Nutrition and Novel Food Sub-committee when reviewing safety assessments submitted by other Member States. Since 2005, the Sub-committee has evaluated 34 novel food applications and safety assessments that include a wide range of novel foods and food ingredients. These include lycopene, Antarctic krill oil, kiwiberry, chewing gum base, ice structuring protein, honey with bee venom and magnolia bark extract. The expertise and experience of scientists from a variety of nutritional and dietetic settings available to the FSAI through the Nutrition and Novel food Sub-committee has enabled high quality contributions to the novel food authorisation process by Ireland, which has one of the best response records amongst the 27 Member States.

Nutrition and Novel Foods Sub-committee Members: Prof. Albert Flynn (Chair), Dr Celine Murrin, Prof. Helen Roche, Prof. Helene McNulty, Dr Maureen McGowan, Prof. Ivan Perry, Ms Ita Saul, Dr John Kearney, Dr Mairead Kiely, Prof. John Scott, Dr Sinead McCarthy, Ms Ursula O'Dwyer

FSAI Scientific Secretary: Dr Mary Flynn

Additional Scientists: Prof. Barbara Livingstone, Ms Catherine Murphy, Dr Clíodhna Foley Nolan,

Ms Margot Brennan, Dr Claire O'Brien, Ms Patricia Lee, Prof. Patrick Wall, Dr Philip Crowley, Ms Fiona Dunlevy, Ms Maureen Fallon, Dr Marion Faughnan, Ms Mary O'Connor, Dr Colm O'Donnell, Ms Sheilagh Reaper-Reynolds, Dr Margaret Sheridan-Pereira, Ms Aisling Wilson

Ad-Hoc Sub-committee on Nanotechnology

The Scientific Committee also has the option to create an ad-hoc Sub-committee to draft opinions of issues not covered by the standing Sub-committees. During the term of the second Scientific Committee, only one such group was created to draft an opinion on the food safety implications of nanotechnology.

Nanotechnology is a term used to describe the production and use of very small particles (nanoparticles) to produce new structures (nanoforms) and materials (nanomaterials) that can be used in a wide variety of applications such as medicine, engineering, food and feed production and biotechnology. Nanotechnology is a major area of academic and industrial research and has the potential to provide huge benefits to the economy. The developments in the field are not without associated controversy, however, particularly in relation to applications of nanotechnology in the production of food.

In 2008, the Scientific Committee issued a report on the issue, entitled *'The Relevance for Food Safety of Applications of Nanotechnology in the Food and Feed Industries'*. The report concluded that the general principles applied to assessing the risk of any hazard can be applied to nano-based food. There are, however, gaps in the knowledge base about the possible hazards of nanoparticles and how to assess them, which need to be addressed. Since little is currently known about the possible effects of applications of nanotechnology in food production, there is a need to ensure that regulatory (or legislative) controls are adequate to safeguard human health.

Ad-Hoc Sub-committee on Nanotechnology

Members: Dr Iona Pratt (Chair), Dr Mark Fenelon, Mr Thomas Harty, Dr Iseult Lynch, Dr Maria Davoren, Dr Sandy Lawrie, Dr Gordon Chambers, Prof. Kenneth Dawson, Prof. Marek Radomski

FSAI Scientific Secretaries: Dr Rhodri Evans, Dr Patrick O'Mahony, Dr Wayne Anderson

Seminar on Product Shelf-Life and Microbiological Criteria

Determining the shelf-life of a food product is important for ensuring the microbiological safety of food. In particular shelf-life is important for those foods which are perishable, ready-to-eat and/or support the growth of pathogens. The shelf-life of food products depends on a number of factors particularly the nature of the food itself, the processing it has received and how it is packed and stored.

Under Article 3 of Regulation (EC) No. 2073/2005 on microbiological criteria for foodstuffs, food businesses are obliged to ensure that the food safety criteria applicable throughout the shelf-life of their products can be met under reasonably foreseeable conditions of distribution, storage and use. As necessary, food businesses responsible for the manufacture of a food product may have to conduct studies to demonstrate compliance with the food safety criteria throughout the products' shelf-life. In particular, this applies to ready-to-eat foods that are able to support the growth of *Listeria monocytogenes* and that may pose a *L. monocytogenes* risk for public health.

The FSAI is planning to hold a one-day seminar on product shelf-life and microbiological criteria in autumn 2011. To better tailor this seminar to the requirements of attendees, we are now asking for suggestions on topics which could be covered as part of the seminar. If you have a topic suggestion you can make that suggestion on our website at www.fsai.ie/events/seminar_shelf_life_2011.html, or you can send your suggestions by email to: shelflife2011@fsai.ie. Please submit all suggestions by **Thursday 31 March 2011**.

Food Safety in a Global Market

The International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) was developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) in cooperation with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, with around 177 Member States, to promote the exchange of food safety information and improve collaboration among food safety authorities at national and international levels.

The first ever global meeting of INFOSAN was hosted by the Abu Dhabi Food Control Authority and was held in Abu Dhabi from 14-16 December 2010. Prof. Alan Reilly, Chief Executive, FSAI had the honour of delivering the keynote address. Under the patronage of H.H Sheikh Mansour Bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, Deputy Prime Minister of the UAE, Minister of Presidential Affairs and Chairman of Abu Dhabi Food Control Authority, the event proved successful in bringing the world together to champion the shared goal of food safety.

The global nature and growing complexity of the food chain means that risks posed by unsafe foods have the potential to quickly evolve from a local problem to an international incident in a short period of time. While global trade in food brings many benefits for consumers and contributes significantly to economic development, it also brings fresh challenges to food authorities around the world. Experience over the past number of years shows that with the increased volume of foods traded globally comes an increased risk of spreading foodborne pathogens and contaminants across national borders, thereby

creating new challenges for food authorities and necessitating more efficient global sharing of food safety information.

The need to build closer links among food safety authorities internationally is well recognised by the WHO and the FAO. Establishing INFOSAN has provided an important platform for rapidly exchanging information in the case of food safety crises and for sharing data on both routine and emerging food safety issues.

This meeting brought together approximately 200 officials and experts in food safety from around the globe, and discussed ideas to consolidate food safety initiatives on information sharing, particularly in food emergencies around the world, in addition to identifying ways and means of securely sharing information on food hazards and risks among Member States. It also encompassed discussions over the structure and function of INFOSAN, case studies to identify ways to enhance coordination and information sharing during global food safety emergencies, better information sharing platforms, emerging food hazards and risks and ways to improve interaction between network members to share best practices in food safety.



Staff of the Abu Dhabi Food Control Authority are pictured here with Prof. Alan Reilly, FSAI. From left to right are: Ali Omar Belfaqeh (Director of Regulations and Standards Division), Mohammad Jalal Al Reyaysa (Director of Public Relations and Communications Office), Khalifa Ahmed Khalfan Al Ali (Executive Director of Strategic Planning) Dr Andrea Ellis (Food Safety Department, WHO), Prof. Alan Reilly (FSAI), H.E. Rashed Al Shariqi (Director General of Abu Dhabi Food Control Authority) and Adel Khalfan Al Zaabi (Executive Director of Corporate Services).

Origin Labelling of Food

Country of origin labelling is about providing consumers with information on the country or countries where their food was grown, produced, manufactured or packed. Some product specific legislation requires that origin is indicated on the label and the criteria for determining origin is set out in the relevant legislation e.g. the legislation for beef and beef products requires that the country where the animal is born, raised and slaughtered must be indicated. An indication of origin is also required for fish, olive oil, honey, fruit and vegetables. In some product specific rules, an indication that the product 'originated in the EC' is permitted e.g. honey.

Where product specific rules do not apply or where they do not include mandatory origin labelling requirements, the general labelling regulations apply. Under these rules, country of origin or place of provenance is only mandatory where its absence might mislead the consumer. Under these general rules, the country or place of origin of a food can be considered to be the place in which it last underwent a substantial change, for example, potatoes grown in Cyprus but processed into crisps in Ireland could be labelled 'Made in Ireland'.

At present, a draft Regulation on the provision of food information to consumers is under negotiation in the EU. This will replace the current general labelling rules and one of the areas being discussed is the country of origin labelling requirements.

In Ireland, a number of voluntary schemes exist under which food products carry logos informing consumers that the product is of Irish origin. The value of these schemes and whether they provide additional information for consumers or just add to the overall confusion is open for discussion.

Bord Bia

Bord Bia, the Irish Food Board, is responsible for promoting Irish food in domestic and international markets. It operates a number of quality assurance schemes (QAS) which cover beef, eggs, lamb, pigmeat, poultry products and horticulture.

In the majority of cases the QAS logo includes an indication of origin as part of its design. Where the Bord Bia QAS logo is used on a product, all links in the production chain must be QAS members. For example, with the Beef Quality Assurance Scheme, the farmer, the abattoir and processing plant must all be members of the Beef QAS in order for the meat at retail outlets to carry the QAS logo. Likewise, for horticultural produce, the grower and packer (and processor for prepared fruit and vegetables) must be members of the Horticulture Quality Assurance Scheme (HQAS).



Bord Bia has a number of QAS logos with slightly different wording in relation to origin:

- 'Origin-Ireland' logo (Figure 1) is used on products where activities occur in the Republic of Ireland (RoI) only. For meat this means animals born, reared and slaughtered in the RoI and for eggs it means produced and packed in the RoI.
- 'Origin-Northern Ireland' logo – as above except that all activities occur exclusively in Northern Ireland.
- Logos stating 'Produced and Processed in Ireland and Northern Ireland' or 'Produced and Packed in Ireland and Northern Ireland' can be used where some activities occur in the RoI and some in NI, e.g. an animal born and reared in the RoI but slaughtered in NI.
- Logos stating 'Origin-Ireland: meat content only' and 'Origin Northern Ireland: meat content only' can be used on packs where the total weight of QAS ingredients is less than 90% and the meat content from QAS product is less than 90% of the total content by weight.

Producers or processors can apply for membership of a Bord Bia QAS scheme. Once deemed to have complied with the requirements for that particular scheme they will be issued with a certificate and listed on the Bord Bia register.

It should be noted that imported product may also be eligible for inclusion in a QAS provided that it is sourced from a quality assurance scheme that has been deemed equivalent by the Bord Bia Technical Advisory Committee. In this case, the origin of the meat must be clearly identified on the label.

For more information on the Bord Bia QAS schemes, see: www.bordbia.ie/aboutfood/quality/Pages/default.aspx



Fig 1: 'Origin-Ireland' logo, which is used on products where activities occur in the Republic of Ireland only.

Guaranteed Irish



Fig 2: Guaranteed Irish Logo

operation of the scheme by a state funded agency, Guaranteed Irish Limited was formed and has operated the programme since 1984 as an independent non-profit company.

The Guaranteed Irish symbol can appear on anything from food to software packages. Use of the mark indicates that services provided by an authorised person and products produced by an authorised person or company, originate in Ireland. The mark consists of the Guaranteed Irish symbol and the words 'Guaranteed Irish' (Figure 2).

Love Irish Food

The 'Love Irish Food' scheme was established by the Irish Food and Drink Industry with the aim of promoting Irish manufactured food and drink brands to consumers.

A brand can only be classified as a 'Love Irish Food' brand and carry the 'Love Irish Food' logo (Figure 3), when it meets all of the following criteria:

1. At least 80% of the brand revenue is derived from the manufacturing process in the RoI. Some brands may have some of their pack variants produced outside of the RoI for various reasons e.g. a particular pack size or flavour etc. Where this occurs that particular item in the range cannot carry the 'Love Irish Food' logo.
2. Companies must use ingredients were possible from the RoI. In cases where Ireland does not grow the ingredients (e.g. tea-leaves, cocoa beans, oranges), the brand must be primarily derived from an Irish manufacturing processes.
3. The Member Company should qualify for manufacturing relief. Manufacturing relief is provided for in the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, Part 14 (sections 442-457) and is given to eligible companies who satisfy criteria demonstrating they manufacture in the ROI.

Some ingredients are only available seasonally in the RoI, or supplies may be limited and therefore it may be necessary to import replacement/additional supplies. There must still be value added to the brand in the RoI through the manufacturing process and the addition of other raw materials, packaging, labour etc.

Retailer own label brands are excluded from membership of the scheme.

Fig 3: 'Love Irish Food' logo



National Dairy Council

The National Dairy Council (NDC), an industry-financed organisation (funded directly by a farming levy), launched a packaging mark, 'Farmed in the Republic of Ireland' (Figure 4) in September 2009. The mark is used on milk and cream which has been farmed and processed in the Republic of Ireland. It can be used on various pack types and sizes across products including cream, whole milk, skimmed milk, semi-skimmed milk, buttermilk, lactose free milk, flavoured milk or fortified milk.

The NDC mark can only be printed on milk and cream products approved under licence by the NDC to carry it. Dairies or processors of milk and cream which is farmed and processed in the Republic of Ireland (and who are members of the NDC) are entitled to apply to the NDC for a licence to use this mark on specific products, as long as they meet the necessary criteria. Once the licence has been granted an annual independent audit is required in order to continue using the mark.



The NDC intend to review the potential expansion of the programme in the future to allow for the application for licenses related to other dairy products such as cheese, butter and yogurt.



Fig 4: The National Dairy Council 'Farmed in the Republic of Ireland' mark

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

S.I. No. 596 of 2010

Ethics in Public Office (Designated Positions in Public Bodies) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations, 2010

S.I. No. 609 of 2010

European Communities (Marketing of Fruit Juices and Certain Similar Products) (Amendment) Regulations, 2010

S.I. No. 12 of 2011

European Communities (Foot and Mouth Disease) (Restrictions of Imports from Bulgaria) Regulations, 2011

Ten Year Trend in Enforcement Orders

The FSAI enforces food safety legislation in Ireland through service contracts with official agencies. Enforcement powers provide a means of reacting to and dealing with situations posing a risk to public health. Enforcement is carried out by authorised officers appointed by the FSAI or its official agents under Section 49 of the Food Safety Authority of Ireland Act 1998.

Types of Enforcement

Enforcement under the FSAI Act, 1998

Applies to all food businesses

- An **Improvement Notice** is issued where in the opinion of the authorised officer:
 - any activity involving the handling, preparation etc of food, or
 - the condition of a premises (or part thereof) where this activity takes place is such that if it persists, it will or is likely to pose a risk to public health.
- An **Improvement Order** is issued by the District Court if an Improvement Notice is not complied with.
- A **Closure Order** is issued if in the opinion of the authorised officer, there is or there is likely to be a grave and immediate danger to public health at/or in the food premises. Closures Orders can refer to the immediate closure of all or part of the food premises, or all or some of its activities. The Orders may be lifted when the premises has improved to the satisfaction of the authorised officer. Failure to comply with an Improvement Order may also result in the issuing of a Closure Order.
- A **Prohibition Order** is issued if the activities (handling, processing, disposal, manufacturing, storage, distribution or selling food) involve or are likely to involve a serious risk to public health from a particular product, class, batch or item of food. The effect is to prohibit the sale of the product, either temporarily or permanently.

Enforcement under the European Communities (Official Control of Foodstuffs) Regulations, 2010 (S.I. No. 117 of 2010)

Applies to retail and distribution premises, and manufacture of foods of non-animal origin

- A **Closure Order under S.I. No. 117 of 2010** may be issued if in the opinion of the authorised officer, there is non-compliance with food legislation by a food business operator. Closures Orders can refer to the immediate closure of all or part of the food premises, or all or some of its activities. The Orders may be lifted when the premises has improved to the satisfaction of the authorised officer.
- A **Prohibition Order under S.I. No 117 of 2010** may be issued if in the opinion of the authorised officer, there is non-compliance with food legislation by a food business operator, relating to a particular consignment, class, batch or item of food. The effect is to prohibit the sale of the product, either temporarily or permanently.

Other food legislation also contains enforcement powers, such as the serving of compliance notices under the European Communities (Feed and Food Hygiene) Regulations 2009 (S.I. No. 432 of 2009), which apply to establishments processing foods of animal origin. These are not included in the data reported in this article.

Enforcement Trends

Looking back over the last ten years, we can see that, overall, after a downward trend from 2001 through to 2006, an upward trend is emerging in recent years (Fig 1). The majority of enforcement orders issued each year continues to be Closure Orders. While 57 Closure Orders were served in 2010, the highest number recorded in any year to date, it is important to note that there are some 49,000 food businesses in Ireland, the majority of which operate to very high standards. However, we are urging all food businesses in Ireland to place a renewed focus on food safety and hygiene and to make it a key priority for 2011.

Since the introduction of Closure Orders under S.I. No. 117 of 2010, we anticipate some change in the pattern of enforcement orders used by authorised officers. Five of the 2010 Closure Orders included in our figures were issued under S. I. No. 117 of 2010.

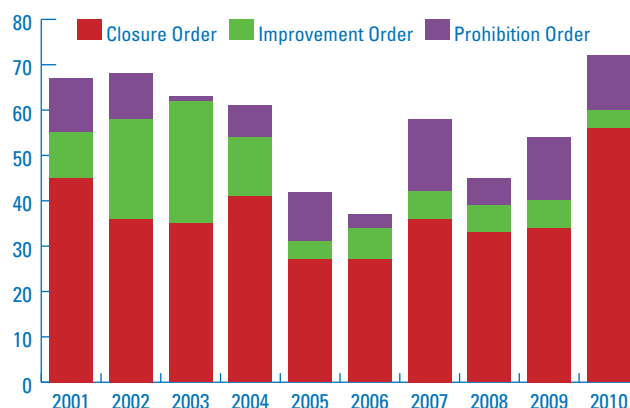


Figure 1: Ten year trend in enforcement orders, 2001-2010

Confidence in Food Safety

Consumers should be confident that the food they are eating is safe to eat and the FSAI and enforcement officers will continue to use a zero tolerance policy in relation to breaches of food safety legislation. Food businesses should take full advantage of the information and support made available by the FSAI and its official agencies to ensure a basic and consistent food safety management plan is developed and put in place in line with legislation.

Details of the food businesses served with Enforcement Orders are published on the FSAI website. Closure Orders and Improvement Orders will remain listed on the website for a period of three months from the date of when a premises is adjudged to have corrected its food safety issue, with Prohibition Orders being listed for a period of one month.

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 **FSAINNEWS**, we will feature a Frequently Asked Question. This issue's question is ...

What are the Rules for Importing Food into Ireland from Outside the European Union?

All food imported into Ireland from outside the EU must be fit for human consumption and comply with all relevant Irish and EU legislation such as hygiene rules, labelling, contaminants, use of additives etc. The products may be of animal or non-animal origin.

Importing foods of animal origin

Importers of animal products must be registered with the relevant agency (i.e. Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority; the Health Service Executive or the Local Authority) and provide notice in advance of their intended imports. Imports of animal products must be accompanied by a health certificate, which is issued by the competent authority in the exporting country and must also bear a health mark/identification mark to show that the product has been inspected at the establishment of origin and meets EU requirements.

The country from which these foods are imported must be on the EU list of recognised countries and the premises from which these products come must be approved by the EU Food and Veterinary Office. A list of recognised countries and approved premises can be found on the European Commission's website at: http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/biosafety/establishments/third_country/index_en.htm

All foods of animal origin enter the EU via Border Inspection Points (BIP) where they undergo documentary and identity checks. Physical checks are also carried out at a frequency set out in legislation. Once the product has met the required conditions it is released for free circulation within the EU. However, copies of the health certificate and the BIP clearance document must accompany the consignment to its destination.

Importing foods of non-animal origin

Foods of non-animal origin do not require a health certificate, but like foods of animal origin, they must comply with all relevant EU legislation. Importers must also be aware of specialised decisions that may exist for the importation of a particular food

commodity. These decisions are listed on our website at:

www.fsai.ie/legislation/food_legislation.html.

Importing food supplements

Imports of food supplements must comply with the requirements set out in European legislation (Directive 2002/46/EC on food supplements). In Ireland, vitamins, minerals and other substances are regulated as food unless the product is considered a medicine by virtue of its composition, concentration, labelling and presentation or when medicinal claims are made in relation to the product. Food supplements with vitamins at or above prescription levels are considered medicinal products and come under the remit of the Irish Medicines Board.

Any person placing a food supplement on the market in Ireland must notify the FSAl. The duty to notify falls on the importer. Notification can be submitted online at: <https://supplements.fsai.ie/Login.aspx>

Further Reading

More detailed information on importing foods can be found on our website at: www.fsai.ie/faq/import_export.html

Reflecting on the FSCC's Contribution to Food Safety

The Food Safety Consultative Council (FSCC) of the FSAl acts as a forum for debate on food safety issues and provides advice to the FSAl Board on areas of relevance. It is a constructive vehicle for consumers and industry to provide input to the agenda of the FSAl.

The FSCC came to the end of its term at the end of 2010. A new Consultative Council consisting of 24 members will be appointed in 2011. Twelve of these will be appointed by the Minister for Health and Children and 12 by the FSAl. Over the past five years, the FSCC met quarterly, and through the course of its meetings, examined segments of the food chain, from farm to fork; reviewed food safety initiatives already in place and examined those required to ensure consumers' interests were to the forefront.

As the FSCC came to the end of its term, a joint meeting was held between members of the Council and the FSAl Board. This meeting took place on 9 December last and was an opportunity to share views and reflect on the Council's contribution over the past five years to the food safety agenda and to the work of the FSAl.

Overall, the FSCC had a very successful term and public meetings of the Council raised awareness and helped communicate to the broader public some of the complex food safety issues that challenged the Authority over the past five years. Both Eamonn Ryan, Chairman of the Board and Alan Reilly, Chief Executive, FSAl, thanked members for their dedication and hard work over the lifetime of the Council.



Pictured at the joint meeting in December are (L-R): Prof. Alan Reilly, CEO, FSAl; Ms Veronica Campbell, Chair, FSCC and Mr Eamonn Ryan, Chair, FSAl Board.

FSAI Attends CATEX

The FSAI had an information stand at the recent Catex exhibition which was held in the RDS, Dublin, from 8-10 February. The exhibition is focused towards businesses in the food service and hospitality sector and offers a mix of trade stands, demonstrations and seminars. Over 9,000 people visited the exhibition this year.

Catex provided a valuable opportunity to the FSAI to meet those involved in the food service sector and offer advice and assistance to them on their legal requirements in relation to food safety. The main topics of interest to those who visited the FSAI stand were largely based on the FSAI Safe Catering Pack, business start-up information and food safety training. A competition was run each day giving the participants a chance to win a copy of either our Business Start-Up Pack or Safe Catering Pack. Congratulations to our winners!



Activity at the FSAI stand during Catex.



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