

EFSA's 10th Anniversary Celebrated in Dublin

The Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) and the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) jointly hosted an international conference in Dublin on 4 October last. The conference, which marked EFSA's 10th anniversary, brought together EU regulatory and parliamentary representatives, together with stakeholders in the food chain, to discuss the current state of food safety in Europe and to examine emerging threats and risks.

The conference provided an opportunity to look back over the past ten years at the evolution of food safety in the EU, to assess current matters and to look forward to what food safety issues may be on the menu in 2022. Since its establishment ten years ago, EFSA has evolved as a credible and trusted organisation that delivers independent scientific advice, which underpins European food safety policy. Safeguarding its core values of openness and transparency and building trust among all stakeholders has been central to the activities of EFSA over its short lifetime. Responding to new demands of evaluating regulated products, harmonising risk assessment approaches, protecting the independence of its scientific advice and strengthening collaboration with EU Member States are just some of the challenges facing EFSA over the next decade.

The conference was opened by Simon Coveney, T.D., Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, who welcomed EFSA to Dublin on the occasion of its 10th anniversary.

Speaking at the conference, Prof. Alan Reilly, Chief Executive of the FSAI, welcomed the progress made by European food regulators over the last ten years, particularly the role played by EFSA in times of food crises, providing rapid responses to Member States in the form of scientific expertise and evaluation. He stated that closer cooperation



Pictured at the conference are (l-r): Prof. Alan Reilly, Chief Executive of the FSAI; Ms Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle, Executive Director of EFSA and Simon Coveney, T.D., Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

and coordination of activities is key to ensuring the safety of Europe's food chain. This has been central to EFSA's mission, providing the highest possible standards of independent scientific advice and risk assessments. Ms Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle, Executive Director of EFSA, stated that she believes that EU food safety policy must continue to be underpinned by the highest standards of scientific evidence. By working together with Member States, a European risk assessment community can be built, with its top priority to protect consumers.

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EFSA@10: A Decade of Science at the Heart of EU Food Policy

Ireland's David Byrne, our European Commissioner in 2002, led the way in the reform of the food safety control structure in Europe. Central to his legacy was setting down in legislation key principles which would govern a new approach to consumer protection. Amongst these was risk analysis, meaning that protection measures must be based on a risk assessment, which in turn must be based on the available scientific evidence, undertaken in an independent, objective and transparent manner.

For this purpose he ensured the establishment of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), giving it a clear mandate and charging it to be diligent, transparent and independent and to produce high quality work. Today, over ten years later, EFSA continues to live up to the ideals set for it, serving the scientific needs of the European Community and becoming an essential part of our food regulatory process.

To mark EFSA's ten years of service, the FSAI hosted a conference in Dublin in October with speakers drawn from academia, science and the three pillars of the European Union that are collectively responsible for food regulation - the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission. With an audience representative of a broad cross-section of stakeholders, the event provided an opportunity to look at the evolution of food safety in Europe, to assess what EFSA has contributed and to weigh up the challenges of the next decade.

Today, over ten years later, EFSA continues to live up to the ideals set for it, serving the scientific needs of the European Community and becoming an essential part of our food regulatory process.

The overall consensus was that EFSA is performing well, has a high impact and consistently delivers high-quality scientific advice. EFSA has added value to the current EU system of protecting consumer health by enhancing cooperation and networking with Member States, harmonising risk assessment, delivering much needed independent scientific opinions, authorising products and developing databases on food intakes, contaminants and zoonoses. In a relatively short period, EFSA has evolved a unique ability to draw on a very wide range of scientific expertise as well as national organisations in Member States, to assist in assessing risks associated with complex chemical and biological hazards impacting on the food chain. It also has a strong track record in supporting many of the smaller EU Member States that, because of their size, do not possess the critical mass of scientific expertise or data necessary to carry out sophisticated risk assessments. In times of food crisis EFSA has rapidly responded to urgent requests for sound scientific advice.

Operating in an environment of openness and transparency, while essential, has its disadvantages. Ease of access to knowledge of EFSA's scientists, methods and research, makes criticism by detractors all the easier, and in our view, is often unjustified. Criticism comes from different sources including politicians for whom disparagement of EFSA seems to serve a political rather than a scientific agenda;

dissatisfied industry representative bodies who do not agree with some EFSA opinions and non-government organisations who allege EFSA lacks independence and transparency.

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In contrast, EFSA has received an overwhelming vote of confidence from EU countries for its work in underpinning European food safety policy over the past decade. The competent national food safety bodies in the 27 Member States of the EU that make up the EFSA Advisory Forum are of the opinion that the Authority has made a key contribution to enhancing consumer protection, providing vital support and has proved to be a crucial resource in times of food crises. At no time was this more evident than in 2011 when the European market for fresh salad vegetables collapsed due to contamination with a deadly strain of *E. coli*. The Advisory Forum has stated publicly that it has confidence in the independence and scientific decision-making process of EFSA and has worked in cooperation with the Authority over the past ten years to strengthen EU risk assessment and all measures to ensure the objectivity of scientific advice.

As science and technology play an increasingly central role in shaping our world, the need for expert advice to inform the decisions of policy makers and the public has become ever greater. EFSA will continue over the next decade to play a central role in providing a sound scientific base for consumer protection. Member States will work in partnership with EFSA to ensure that scientific risk assessment evolves and develops to meet the critical challenges that lie ahead in an ever-changing environment. It is crucial to build upon the progress made since 2002 and continue to champion this partnership of trust to secure the safety of food and feed in Europe.



Alan Reilly

Alan Reilly
 Chief Executive

Salmonella Controls for Duck Flocks Working; Reptiles Remain a Source of Infection

Procedures put in place to control *Salmonella* in ducks and duck eggs are working, according to the National Salmonella, Shigella and Listeria Reference Laboratory (NSSLRL). In its Annual Report for 2011, the laboratory reports a decrease in the number of cases of illness caused by a particular strain of *Salmonella* which has been linked to duck eggs (*S. Typhimurium* DT8). Because duck eggs can occasionally contain *Salmonella*, they must not be eaten raw, but fully cooked until the yolk and white are solid.

Subtyping

If a clinical laboratory isolates *Salmonella* from a patient's faeces or blood, it sends the isolate to the NSSLRL for subtyping. Subtyping includes tests such as: serotyping; antibiotic resistance typing; phage typing; or genetic fingerprinting methods, such as pulsed-field gel electrophoresis (PFGE) and multi-locus variable number tandem repeat analysis (MLVA). Reading the test results, the reference laboratory can separate the isolates into smaller, closely related groups. This is extremely useful from a public health perspective because it may tell us where that isolate originated – for example, a particular food or animal. This information can be used to investigate outbreaks or to implement controls on the disease.

Duck Egg Outbreak

Sometimes, subtyping can actually detect outbreaks. In 2009, the NSSLRL noticed an increase in cases of illness caused by a particular strain of *S. Typhimurium* (phage type DT8) and alerted public health colleagues to the possibility of an outbreak. Over 30 cases were detected and investigations by the Outbreak Control Team pointed to the consumption of duck eggs as the source.

In order to control the outbreak, consumers were advised not to eat raw or undercooked duck eggs and to handle them hygienically. Also, new legislation setting down a legal basis for the control of *Salmonella* in ducks and duck eggs was introduced (S.I. No 565 of 2010). This legislation requires anyone keeping ducks (even a small 'backyard' flock) to register with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM). Also, anyone selling even small quantities of duck eggs must put in place a biosecurity plan to prevent *Salmonella* entering their flock and spreading. Guidelines are available on DAFM's website at: www.agriculture.gov.ie/farmingsectors/poultry.

According to the NSSLRL, these control measures have worked. The number of cases of human illness caused by *S. Typhimurium* DT8 has dropped from 28 in 2010 to nine in 2011.

Notifiable Disease

Salmonella infection is a notifiable disease in Ireland. All cases diagnosed by doctors or clinical laboratories must be notified to the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC), which manages the surveillance of infectious diseases in Ireland. The HPSC provisionally reported 314 cases of *Salmonella* infection in 2011, which follows a decline in numbers of cases since a peak in 1998.

According to the NSSLRL, *S. Typhimurium* and *S. Enteritidis* were the strains which caused most *Salmonella* illness in humans in 2011, as in previous years. Of the 320 *Salmonella* isolates from patients referred to the NSSLRL in 2011, 27% were identified as *S. Typhimurium* and 18% as *S. Enteritidis*.

Reptiles As a Source of Infection

Reptiles often carry *Salmonella* and can be a source of infection,

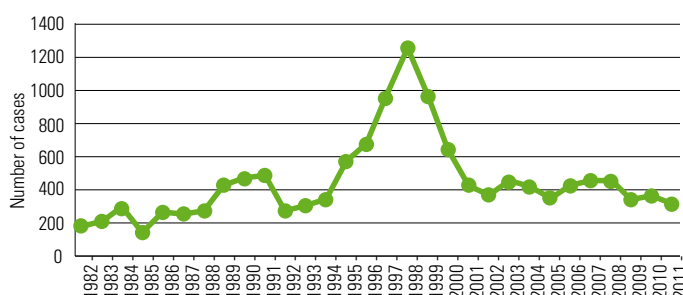


Figure1: *Salmonella* Infection in Ireland

especially for children. The HPSC advises that households with children under five years of age should not keep reptiles as pets; and neither should reptiles be kept in childcare facilities such as crèches. However, the NSSLRL is concerned that this public health message is not being heeded because reptile-associated cases in children continued to be reported in 2011. Subtyping of isolates from a number of these cases revealed that the strain which caused illness in the child or children was the same as that carried by the household's pet reptile.



Travel Associated

Around 43% of people who fell ill with *Salmonella* in 2011, picked up the infection abroad, according to the NSSLRL. Turkey, India, Thailand and Spain were the most commonly recorded travel destinations. Forty-one percent of patients contracted the infection in Ireland, while the country of infection was not recorded for 16% of patients.

NSSLRL annual reports are available at:
www.nuigalway.ie/salmonella_lab/

E-Learning – A New Way to Learn

The FSAI recently launched **Safetynet Learning**, an online learning management system designed to support the professional development of the FSAI and official agency personnel. **Safetynet Learning** is available to official agency staff involved in the enforcement of food safety legislation and can be accessed through our extranet, **Safetynet**.

Safetynet Learning will provide learners with a variety of learning resources such as e-learning courses, factsheets, videos and other digital resources that will be developed over time as the training needs arise. The online materials can be used to get up-to-date information on a topic relevant to a particular work area, refresh on a topic that was covered at recent training, or in some cases just to broaden the knowledge base of a particular subject.

The FSAI has traditionally provided training workshops to official agency personnel and has moved to develop online materials in recognition of recent trends in the area of learning and development. These include a move towards informal and self-directed learning, growth in the importance of the internet and online learning resources and an increasing focus on the need for continual professional development in all areas of work. Moreover, the development of e-learning resources has become even more relevant in today's climate, with changes in legislation and other issues which impact on food safety, declining staff numbers and restricted travel.

There are many potential benefits of using online learning. They include:

- A larger number of agency staff will now have an opportunity to avail of training on key aspects of food safety legislation
- More flexible access to learning materials, as they can be accessed from any internet connected computer, at any time
- It is cost effective as it reduces the time and expense involved in delivering and attending face-to-face training
- It can more readily meet some of the needs for training and it can be quicker to update programmes and/or provide training on an urgent issue
- Information can easily be updated based on changes in legislation and user feedback

Online Content

The first programme launched through **Safetynet Learning** is an introductory course on food additives. The course is designed to take 30-45 minutes to complete and covers areas such as key terms and definitions, labelling requirements and the legislation governing food additives. The e-learning course is easy to use and self paced, and it includes short quizzes and assessments to test learners' understanding of the areas covered. To allow for questions and to clarify issues relating to the content of e-learning materials, users can also submit questions to the FSAI by email.

Further training programmes and resources are currently being developed and will be launched over the coming months. The FSAI will now review every training need and determine the most appropriate methods and means of delivery. Face-to-face training and workshops will continue. However, in some cases it may be possible to have training delivered purely online. Other cases may require a blended approach, using both online and face-to-face workshops, to allow for discussion of more complex issues on the practical implementation of food safety legislation.

Although the materials are currently only available for use by official agency personnel who have a role in enforcing food safety legislation, the FSAI recognises that they will also prove beneficial to the food industry and is currently looking at making some programmes available on its website.



Test in Emergency Outbreak Preparedness

The FSAI and the Health Service Executive (HSE) coordinated an outbreak simulation exercise, otherwise known as Exercise Clea, on 19 September last. The exercise tested how staff in food control and public health agencies would respond to a major food poisoning outbreak in the country. The storyline for the exercise involved contamination of lettuce with VTEC on a farm in the north east of the country, which was distributed nationally, resulting in illness and deaths of consumers.



Pictured is the 'control room' during Exercise Clea

The exercise involved:

- Public health medical specialists
- FSAI
- HPSC
- Environmental health officers
- Laboratory personnel
- Microbiologists
- Veterinary inspectors
- Horticulture inspectors
- Dept of Health
- Dept of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

All participants became engrossed in the exercise, resolving to determine the offending food item, remove it from circulation, communicate the risk to consumers and ultimately ensure public health and restore public confidence in the food chain.

Following the day-long exercise, the participants completed a short online questionnaire which captured their thoughts on how the exercise went, what the pitfalls were, and what improvements could be made when dealing with potential future outbreaks. The results of the survey and the findings of the exercise in general will be reported to all participants by the end of October. It is hoped that this report, and the collective experience of Exercise Clea, will be used to facilitate a review of the current outbreak control protocol and ultimately lead to an improved coordinated outbreak response in Ireland's public health system.

Update of Safe Catering Pack

In early 2009 the FSAI launched the *Safe Catering Pack*. The pack, which consists of a workbook, a set of record books and a DVD, was designed to help food businesses develop and implement a system to manage food safety and comply with food hygiene legislation. It was developed with help and expertise from environmental health officers (EHOs) and the food service sector and is based on the principles of HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point).

The pack was originally designed for caterers and retailers who have a catering function within their businesses. Since its launch in 2009, over 4,000 copies have been sold and are being used in a range of businesses preparing and serving food, including crèches and nursing homes. The pack is ideal for businesses that have not yet developed their own food safety management system and is also being used by businesses to improve existing systems.

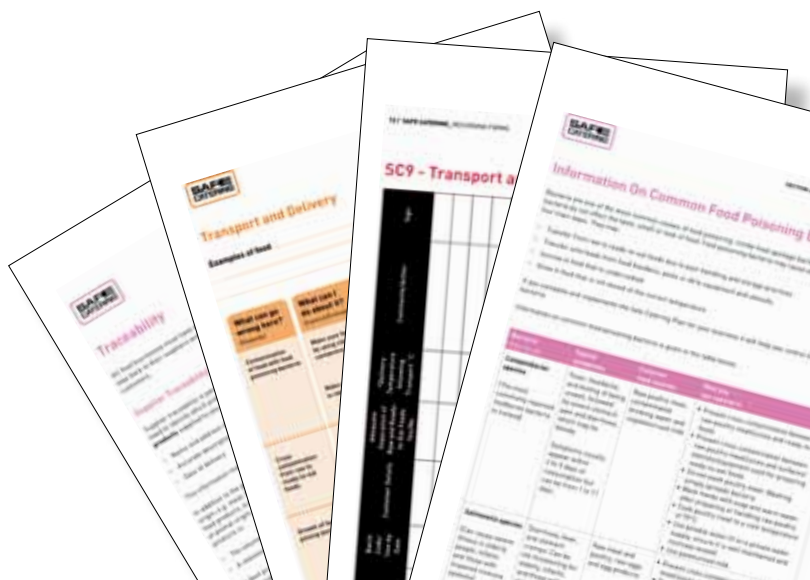
The pack was updated this year to take onboard feedback received over the past three years from regulatory and food business users. The main changes include:

- An extra step to allow businesses to control hazards during transport and delivery. This step is designed for businesses who are delivering products to outside catering operations or other retail/catering businesses. A new record has been added to the pack to help with monitoring controls during this step
- New guidance in the preparation and handling step on the use of complex equipment (e.g. vacuum packers, slicers and mixers) that can be very difficult to clean
- Additional information on supplier and customer traceability requirements
- Information on common food poisoning bacteria, including typical symptoms and common food sources
- Minor edits to the current set of records. The most requested update was the inclusion of a column to record the batch code for food deliveries

The DVD has also been updated to reflect these changes.

The workbook element of the pack has been successful in helping food businesses design a customised food safety management system. The guidance and advice in the workbook helps them to decide what options are best for their business. In addition, the DVD and workbook are being used by businesses to train staff.

For more information on the *Safe Catering Pack* or if you already have the pack and would like to see what's new, please view our website at www.fsai.ie. The pack is available to purchase from the FSAI and costs €60 plus €10 postage. It can be ordered online or through our advice-line on 1890 33 66 77 or by email at info@fsai.ie.



Legislation Update

Irish legislation

Food Safety Authority of Ireland Act, 1998

The Food Safety Authority of Ireland Act, 1998 (Amendment of First Schedule) Order, 2012 (S.I. No. 346 of 2012) has been published by the Department of Health following consultation with the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

This Statutory Instrument (S.I.) amends the First Schedule to the Food Safety Authority of Ireland Act, 1998. The FSAI Act places responsibility on the FSAI to enforce food legislation which is either:

- specified in Part I, II or III of the First Schedule to FSAI Act or
- is an Act or Statutory Instrument made under the European Communities Act, 1972, and deemed to be food legislation

The S.I. amends the list of legislation which is specified in the FSAI Act in order to reflect newly published EU Regulations or Irish S.I.s which have been published since the last update to the Schedules to the FSAI Act in 2011

Certain Contaminants in Foodstuffs

European Communities (Certain Contaminants in Foodstuffs) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2012 (S.I. No. 348 of 2012) was published by the Department of Health in September.

The S.I. gives effect to Commission Regulation (EU) No. 594/2012 of 5 July 2012 which amends Regulation (EC) 1881/2006 as regards the maximum levels of the contaminants Ochratoxin A, non dioxin-like PCBs and melamine in foodstuffs.

EU Legislation

Increased Level of Official Controls on Imports of Certain Food

Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No. 889/2012 (OJ L263, p26, 28/09/2012) of 27 September 2012 amending Annex I to Regulation (EC) No. 669/2009 implementing Regulation (EC) No. 882/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards the increased level of official controls on imports of certain feed and food of non-animal origin was published in the EU Official Journal on 28 September 2012 and applied from 01 October 2012.

Commission Regulation (EC) No. 669/2009 lays down rules concerning the increased level of official controls to be carried out on imports of food of non-animal origin listed in its Annex. As a result of the occurrence of food incidents notified through the Rapid

Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF), the findings of missions to third countries carried out by the EU Food and Veterinary Office, as well as the quarterly reports on consignments of food of non-animal origin submitted by Member States to the Commission, it has been agreed that the list should be amended.

As a result of a degree of non-compliance with relevant safety requirements, an increased level of official controls have been introduced in this amendment, for consignments of *Brassica oleracea* ('Chinese broccoli') from China.

Food Flavourings

The European Commission has published Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No. 872/2012 adopting the list of flavouring substances provided for by Regulation (EC) No. 2232/96 and Commission Regulation (EU) No. 873/2012 on transitional measures concerning the Union list of flavourings and source materials set out in Annex I to Regulation (EC) No. 1334/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

For the purposes of this legislation, flavourings are defined as products which are not intended to be consumed as such, which are added to food in order to impart or modify odour and/or taste. They are made or consist of the following categories: flavouring substances, flavouring preparations, thermal process flavourings, smoke flavourings, flavour precursors or other flavourings or mixtures thereof.

All flavouring substances used in foodstuffs placed on the market in the European Union (EU) must be evaluated and authorised. This new legislation provides a list of

flavouring substances that may be used in food in the EU and the list contained in the Annex to Regulation (EU) No. 872/2012 contains the following:

- Column 1 (FL No.): the unique identification number of the substance
- Column 2 (Chemical Name): the name of the substance
- Column 3 (CAS No.): the Chemical Abstracts Service (CAS) registry number
- Column 4 (JECFA No.): The Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food additives (JECFA) number
- Column 5 (CoE No.): The Council of Europe (CoE) number
- Column 6 (Purity of the named substance at least 95% unless otherwise specified): The purity of the named flavouring substance has to be at least 95%. If less, the composition of the flavouring substances is given in this column
- Column 7 (Restrictions of Use): The use of flavouring substances is permitted in accordance with good manufacturing practices unless specific restriction is given in this column. Flavouring substances with restrictions of use may only be added to the listed food categories and under the specified conditions of use. For the purpose of the restrictions the food categories, as laid down in Annex II of Regulation (EC) No. 1333/2008, are referred to

The published legislation also allows flavouring substances for which the evaluation still has to be completed to remain on the market until the evaluation and authorisation processes have been finalised. Regulation (EU) No. 872/2012 will apply from 22 April 2013.



EU Proposed Rules

Labelling of Honey

The European Commission has published a proposal to amend rules on honey to clarify the true nature of pollen following a European Court of Justice (ECJ) preliminary ruling last year, in case C-442/098, which concluded that pollen in honey was to be considered as an ingredient. This EU proposal will amend the legislation governing honey (i.e. Directive 2001/110/EC) and it defines pollen as a natural constituent of honey and not as an ingredient within the meaning of Directive 2000/13/EC (General Labelling Rules). While the ECJ ruling argued that pollen is found in honey mainly due to intervention by the beekeeper, the Commission's proposal recognises that pollen is a natural constituent and not an ingredient of honey; it enters into the hive as a result of the activity of the bees and is found in honey regardless of whether the beekeeper intervenes. Therefore, EU labelling rules requiring a list of ingredients would not apply.

The Commission's proposal will not alter the ECJ's conclusion that honey containing GM pollen can be placed on the market only if it is covered by an authorisation under the legislation. Furthermore, the labelling rules on GMO in food will also be applicable.

Link to draft document:
<http://bit.ly/V4pEOS>

Date for your Diary:

Food Labelling Conference: Provision of Food Information to Consumers

Date: Tuesday, 4th December 2012

Time: 9am to 4pm

Location: Gibson Hotel, Point Village, Dublin 1

Details: The publication of the Food Information to Consumers Regulation (EU No. 1169/2011) in November 2011 was the first

major overhaul of food labelling legislation in 25 years. This conference, hosted by the FSAI, aims to provide direct information on the details and impact of this legislation and its implementation. Issues such as the new requirements regarding allergen labelling, the introduction of a minimum font size and mandatory nutrition labelling will be amongst the issues discussed. The interactive conference, which is targeted at agency staff and all sections of the food industry, will also look at the current status of health claims legislation. The conference will provide an opportunity to discuss and debate issues regarding food labelling with speakers representing the FSAI, enforcement agencies, Bord Bia, the Consumers' Association of Ireland, food producers and retailing sectors.

To view the full agenda and to register online, see the events section of our website, www.fsai.ie/events.



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

S.I. No. 262 of 2012

European Communities (Animal Remedies) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 (Amendment) Regulations, 2012

S.I. No. 263 of 2012

European Communities (Control of Animal Remedies and their Residues) (Amendment) Regulations, 2012

S.I. No. 276 of 2012

European Communities (Certain Contaminants in Foodstuffs) (Amendment) Regulations, 2012

S.I. No. 318 of 2012

National Beef Assurance Scheme Act 2000 (Approval) Order 2012

S.I. No. 362 of 2012

European Communities (Food and Feed Hygiene) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations, 2012 (relates to feed only)

S.I. No. 346 of 2012

Food Safety Authority of Ireland Act 1998 (Amendment of First Schedule) Order, 2012

S.I. No. 348 of 2012

European Communities (Certain Contaminants in Foodstuffs) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations, 2012

Audit of Food Allergens in Catering Establishments

The FSAI recently completed a small scale audit of catering businesses in Ireland to determine how food allergens are controlled and how information relating to food allergens is provided to customers. New EU food labelling rules, agreed in 2011, make it mandatory from December 2014, to declare the use of specified food allergens, regardless of whether the food is pre-packed or not pre-packed. The primary purpose of this audit was to determine the level of preparedness by the catering industry to implement the new labelling rules as they relate to food allergens.

Twelve catering businesses were selected for site visits as follows: canteens – 3; hotels – 2; fast food outlets – 3; restaurants/cafés – 3; bars/restaurants – 1. The businesses were selected based on the type of catering services provided and the food allergen information displayed to consumers. The businesses provided a relatively broad picture of allergen controls in the catering industry on a nationwide basis.

There are many thousands of catering establishments in Ireland and because the requirement to declare the use of allergenic food ingredients applies only to pre-packed food for now, many people with food allergies or intolerance, and/or their carers, either avoid dining out or do so with some trepidation. Consumers are generally becoming more aware of their rights and all caterers interviewed in this audit reported an increasing customer demand for information regarding allergens, most noticeably gluten.

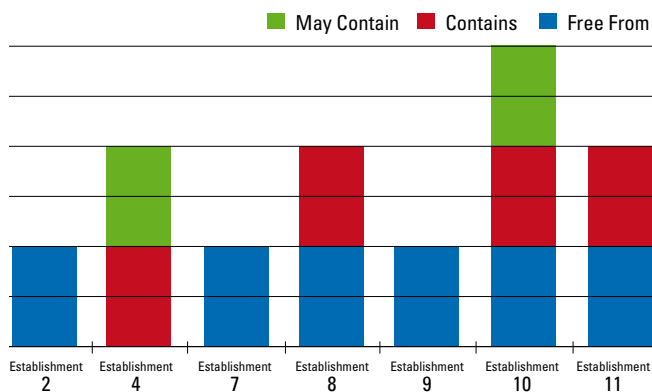


Figure 1: Allergen Information in Catering Establishments

Audit Findings

Allergen information was provided on menus or notices to customers in more than half (7/12) of the establishments visited and included positive (*contains allergen*), negative (*free from*) and precautionary (*may contain*) declarations (Figure 1).

Customer requests for allergen-free dishes are usually facilitated by removing the offending food allergen from the dish, where feasible. All of the businesses interviewed received queries regarding food allergens in dishes at least one to five times per week, and one establishment specialising in gluten-free dishes received between 40 and 50 requests per week. Enquiries about gluten and gluten-free dishes were cited as the most common by all caterers.

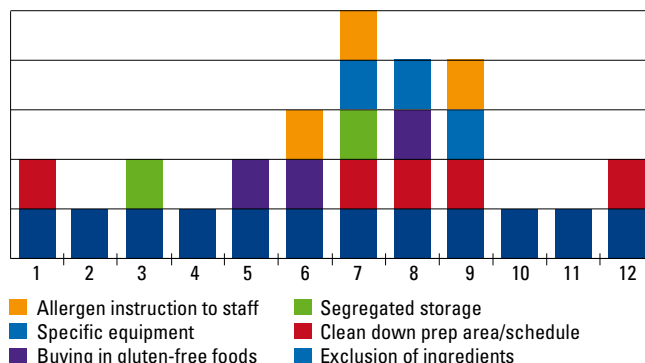


Figure 2: Allergen Controls in Establishments Visited

None of the 12 food business operators interviewed as part of this audit were familiar with all of the 14 allergens that require labelling under EU legislation, therefore only the food allergens with which they were familiar were controlled. The following types of kitchen control measures were identified:

- 1 Exclusion of allergenic ingredients from requested dishes
- 2 Clean down of work area before preparing allergen-free dishes
- 3 Adjust baking schedule to minimise the risk of cross-contamination
- 4 Purchase of gluten-free ingredients such as gluten-free bread or gravy mix
- 5 Separate storage area for allergenic ingredients
- 6 Specific equipment for allergen-free foods e.g. separate preparation equipment - knives, chopping boards, etc
- 7 Instructions for staff when they receive an allergen request or handle food allergens

The establishments which had implemented multiple allergen controls were best placed to manage the risks associated with providing safe food for vulnerable consumers (Figure 2).

The provision of information on 14 food allergens to consumers of non pre-packed food is stipulated in Article 44 of Regulation (EU) No. 1169/2011, and must be implemented from December 2014. However, it is the responsibility of individual Member States to establish the type of information to be provided and by what means.

The results of this audit suggest that while some caterers are conscious of and proactive to the needs of people with food allergies or intolerances, much needs to be done if the catering industry is to be in a position to comply with the extended labelling requirements by the end of next year. Labelling requirements can be applied in accordance with legislation, but systems, including staff training, should also be put in place to help manage the control of food allergens in catering establishments.

The FSAI will work closely with the food industry to establish best practices for the management and control of food allergens in the catering sector, but ultimately the responsibility is with food businesses to ensure products are labelled appropriately and controls to manage allergens are in place.

The *Audit of Irish Food Manufacturer Allergen Controls and Labelling* is available at <http://bit.ly/QQPjMH>.

Wild Mushroom Gathering

With the mushroom foraging season upon us and the incidence of a number of recent cases of food poisoning notified to the National Poisons Information Centre of Ireland related to wild mushroom consumption, the FSAI is advising consumers not to eat any part of a mushroom they have found in the wild.

In 2011, 22 cases of food poisoning related to wild mushrooms were notified and to date this year, there have been seven cases. Cooking does not kill the potentially toxic chemicals that can be found in some wild mushrooms. Eating a wild poisonous mushroom, raw or cooked, can result in people becoming very ill and in some cases, can be life threatening. Parents are advised to teach children not to eat wild mushrooms and to specifically watch children who may be playing in gardens or fields where wild mushrooms could be growing, in case they accidentally eat a poisonous mushroom.

There are 14 native species of mushrooms growing in Ireland that can cause gastrointestinal upset and a further 13 species that are highly dangerous and can cause hepatic (liver) and renal (kidney) toxicity and be ultimately life threatening. For the amateur mushroom hunter, it is extremely difficult to identify the safe mushrooms growing in the wild, as opposed to the poisonous varieties. Consumers who wish to gather their mushrooms in the wild need to be aware of the risks they are taking and should always seek the advice of an experienced mushroom forager.

Consumers with food safety queries about wild mushrooms can contact our advice-line on 1890 33 66 77, or the Poisons Information Centre of Ireland on 01 8092166. See also www.poisons.ie.

FSAI Attends Taste Council Summer School

The Taste Council is a voluntary representative group for the smaller food business sector and is made up largely of local, artisan and speciality food producers. The Summer School is the organisation's annual initiative, in conjunction with Bord Bia, to celebrate and discuss the contribution of artisan and speciality food producers to the Irish economy.

This year's Summer School was held on 30 August at BrookLodge in Macreddin Village, Wicklow. It was a day of discussion, debate and opinion sharing. Professor Alan Reilly, CEO of the FSAI, took part in a lively panel debate on food labelling, together with Raymond O'Rourke (food lawyer), Pat Lalor (farmer), Eddie O'Neill (Teagasc), Aoife Carrigy (media) and Kevin Sheridan (Taste Council).

The panel discussed the challenges for small food producers to obtain the specialist marketing terms such as Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) for their products. There are currently only four products registered in Ireland as PDO and PGI. Also discussed was the general public perception of terms such as 'artisan', 'organic', 'natural' and 'local'. These terms are not defined in food regulations and their use may end up confusing consumers. However, such products have certain qualities valued by consumers and a level playing field is required where producers will be able to better inform customers about the characteristics of their products and consumers will find it easier to identify the characteristics and the quality of products and make more informed choices.



Pictured at the Summer School are (l-r): Kevin Sheridan, Sheridan's Cheesemongers, and Vice-chair of the Taste Council; Professor Alan Reilly, FSAI and Evan Doyle, BrookLodge and Chair of the Taste Council.

Methanol Poisoning in the Czech Republic

In September, the FSAI became aware of serious incidences of methanol poisoning in the Czech Republic. As a result of consuming illegal counterfeit alcohol containing large amounts of methanol, 28 people have died, mainly in the Czech Republic, but also in Poland. The health authorities in the Czech Republic introduced severe restrictions, banning the sale and distribution of any form of liquor with alcohol content of 20% or greater.

Investigations are continuing, legislative changes planned and new identification marks are being introduced on alcohol produced since 26 September. Visitors to the Czech Republic are advised to avoid consuming locally produced beverages with alcohol content of 20% or greater and to conform to any restrictions on sales of alcohol drinks.

Safety of Dried Seeds and Nuts

The FSAI has published a new national survey examining the "Bacteriological and Chemical Safety of Ready-to-Eat Dried Seeds and Ready-to-Eat Nuts". The survey investigated the presence of *Salmonella* spp., *Escherichia coli* and aflatoxins in 891 pre-packaged ready-to-eat (RTE) nut and seed products on sale in the Republic of Ireland.

The survey revealed that 0.3% (3/891) of samples were categorised as 'unacceptable/potentially hazardous' for *Salmonella* spp., i.e. detected in 25g. *E. coli* was detected at 'unsatisfactory' levels, i.e. 100 colony forming units per gram (cfu/g), in 0.3% (3/891) of samples.

Escherichia coli was also detected at 'acceptable' levels, i.e. 20 to <100 cfu/g in 0.8% (7/891) of samples. All products with 'unsatisfactory' *E. coli* levels and 'unacceptable/potentially hazardous' levels of *Salmonella* were seed products. All of the samples analysed for aflatoxins were categorised as 'satisfactory'.

The findings of the survey highlight the potential public health risks associated with the consumption of RTE seeds due to contamination

with *E. coli*, but more importantly *Salmonella* spp. However, there is little published guidance on good hygiene practices for use by the RTE seed producing industry. From literature, it appears that critical control points for controlling the microbiological quality of RTE seeds are the cleaning and drying processes used in production.

There is a requirement for guidance on good hygiene and manufacturing practices throughout all stages of RTE nut and seed production, but particularly focussing on the critical processes of cleaning and drying of seeds. In addition, good hygiene practice is necessary when these products are being re-packaged into smaller packets for retail sale.

Waterford Harvest Festival

Waterford Harvest Festival (WHF) is a city-wide festival celebrating food heritage and culture in Waterford. The festival is all about good Irish food - growing it, cooking it and eating it. WHF brings together, involves and educates people in the appreciation of good, safe food and showcases all the region has to offer. The 2012 event took place from 9 to 15 September.

Anne Marie Boland, Senior Technical Executive in Regulatory Affairs, FSAI, addressed food producers at a labelling workshop on Friday 14 September. Anne Marie guided attendees through the key aspects of food labelling, focusing on changes in legislation affecting all food producers. This was a highly interactive session with many questions on the regulations in this area.

The FSAI also had an information stand at the event, which was visited by many food businesses and consumers seeking information on various aspects of food safety.



Pictured at the event were: Ciaran Cullen, CEO (Acting) of the Waterford Enterprise Board, Eddie O'Neill, Teagasc, Moorepark and Anne Marie Boland, FSAI.

Benchmarking of European Food Safety Agencies



Pictured at the assessment visit by the FSA, UK to the FSAI in October are (l-r): Bernard Hegarty, John Coady and Gail Carroll of the FSAI; Yvonne Robinson and Sally Hayden, FSA, UK; Michelle Riblet, FSAI, and Derrick Jones, FSA, UK.

The heads of the European food safety agencies have established, as a pilot project, a scheme of inter-agency benchmarking. The voluntary scheme includes participants from eight food safety agencies across Europe, including the FSAI and the Food Standards Agency, UK. Self assessment against a series of key performance indicators on official controls and management processes is followed by an external assessment by staff from a fellow agency. All assessors undertook some training to try to ensure a common approach and interpretation.

The assessments took place over recent months and will result in a report and recommendations to the next Heads of Agencies meeting in December during the Cypriot Presidency of the EU. The aim of the pilot project is to test the feasibility and usefulness of benchmarking of food agencies, to identify best practice and to determine whether the project should continue in the longer term.

Many people contact our advice-line each month to ask questions on a variety of food safety issues. Some questions get asked time and time again – so in each issue of FSAI NEWS, we will feature a Frequently Asked Question. This issue's question is ...

What is the Legislation Regarding Labelling and Importation of Food Supplements?

Food Supplements Legislation

The legislation covering food supplements in Ireland is European legislation (Directive 2002/46/EC as amended) which is transposed into Irish legislation by European Communities (Food Supplements) Regulations, 2007 (S.I. No. 506 of 2007).

This legislation sets out the labelling and compositional requirements for food supplements marketed in the EU. In addition, the national legislation requires that anyone marketing a food supplement in Ireland for the first time must notify the FSAI, using our online notification system.

A food supplement is legally defined as *'foodstuffs the purpose of which is to supplement the normal diet and which are concentrated sources of nutrients or other substances with a nutritional or physiological effect, alone or in combination, marketed in dose form, namely forms such as capsules, pastilles, tablets, pills and other similar forms, sachets of powder, ampoules of liquids, drop dispensing bottles, and other similar forms of liquids and powders designed to be taken in measured small unit quantities'*.

Labelling

There is certain information which must appear on the label of a food supplement in addition to those required under the general labelling legislation (Directive 2000/13/EC). The label should declare the following:

- The category names of nutrients or substances that characterise the product or an indication of the nature of those nutrients or substances, e.g. multi-vitamins, probiotics, herbal substances, fish oils etc.
- The portion of the product recommended for daily consumption
- The amount of the nutrients or substances with a nutritional or



physiological effect that is provided by the daily recommended portion. This information must be provided in numerical form. The units for vitamins and minerals are specified in Schedule 1 of S.I. No. 506 of 2007. Information on the amounts of vitamins and minerals should also be expressed as a percentage of the RDA as specified in Directive 90/496/EEC, as amended. This information may also be given in graphical form

- A warning not to exceed the recommended daily dose
- A statement indicating that the product must not be used as a substitute for a varied, balanced diet
- A statement indicating that the products should be stored out of reach of young children

In addition, under the general labelling legislation, the name under which the products must be sold is 'food supplement'. Also, the labelling, presentation and advertising of the food supplement must not suggest in any way that food supplements can prevent, treat or cure a human disease; include any suggestion indicating that a balanced and varied diet cannot provide appropriate quantities of nutrients in general.

Importation

If you wish to import food supplements into Ireland from outside the EU there are a number of things you need to consider:

- Many herbal substances are considered medicinal substances in Ireland so you

should check with the Irish Medicines Board (IMB) first if in doubt, as it controls all products that contain medicinal ingredients. See: www.imb.ie.

- There are seven vitamins that are deemed to be medicines above particular levels. Products containing these vitamins at medicinal level are under the remit of the IMB. (See our publication *'Information on Nutrition and Health Claims and Food Supplements'* for more details.)
- Only certain vitamins and minerals are permitted in food supplements and only certain chemical formats of these vitamins and minerals are allowed. These are listed in Regulation 1170/2009/EC (amending Directive 2002/46/EC)
- Medicinal claims are not permitted on food supplements. A medicinal claim is defined as a health claim, which states or implies that a product has the property of treating, preventing or curing a human disease. Products with medicinal claims are considered medicines
- Only health claims authorised for use on the European Commission's Claims Register are permitted on food supplements. If you are importing a product into Ireland you will need to check if any health claims used are permitted in the EU and meet the conditions for use for that claim. You can access the register at: <http://ec.europa.eu/nuhclaims/>

Further Information

More information on this legislation can be found at: www.fsai.ie/legislation/food_legislation.html

The publication *'Information on Nutrition and Health Claims and Food Supplements'* is available at: www.fsai.ie/resources_publications.html

See also our FAQs on Food Supplements, Nutrition and Health Claims, and Import/Export at: www.fsai.ie/faqs/all_faqs.html

Cork/Kerry Food Forum

The fifth Cork/Kerry Food Forum took place on 1 October in the Rochestown Park Hotel, Cork. The event provided information and networking opportunities for those involved in food businesses in the area.

There proved to be keen interest in the FSAI information stand at the event, with visitors mainly seeking advice on starting a food business. Along with a showcase of over 50 Cork and Kerry food producers, there was an evening conference with Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Simon Coveney T.D., and topical workshops presented by Bord Bia and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine as well as local food producers.



Pictured at the event were: Simon Coveney, T.D., Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine; Vanessa Cooling, Information Assistant, FSAI and Tommy Tobin, UCC student.

Recent Publications

The following publications were recently produced by the FSAI:

- National Control Plan for Ireland 2012 – 2016 (MANCP)
- Official Controls on Import of Foods of Non-animal Origin supervised by the Health Service Executive
- Official Controls on Import of Foods of Non-animal Origin supervised by the Health Service Executive – Corrective Action Plan
- Report on Consultation for Ireland on Proposed Changes to Legislation Regulating Foods for Particular Nutritional uses (PARNUTs)

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



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