

FOOD STANDARDS NEWS



The Newsletter of Food Standards Australia New Zealand December 2002/January 2003



FROM THE
MANAGING
DIRECTOR'S
DESK

The new *Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code* is about to become the sole food Code in Australia and New Zealand – on 20 December.

It has been very pleasing that so many food producers and importers have used the two-year transition period prudently to review their food labels and composition to bring them into line with the new requirements. There are, however, still some businesses that have left their run so late that some of their products will not be able to be sold lawfully in Australia and New Zealand from 20 December.

It appears that in almost all cases these problems relate to non-compliance with the labelling requirements. In some cases the problem can still be overcome through production of sticky labels, which will need to be applied to each individual product.

Many organisations have played an important part in spreading and reinforcing the message that all food businesses needed to take action to meet the requirements of the new Code. I pay particular tribute for this to food industry associations, food retail and wholesale companies, local government through their environmental health officers, public health professional associations, the food press and a wide range of government agencies across Australia and New Zealand.

With all major change to laws and regulations, there will be issues at the margin. That is, situations that are affected by change, although not central to the decision that prompted the change. Two such issues have been raised with us recently.

One of these relates to the **nutrition labelling of sausages**. Sausages which are sold in the butcher shop in which they are produced are exempt from nutrition labelling – in such cases it is expected that the staff will be able to answer questions from consumers about what is in the sausages, particularly in relation to fat.

Concerns have been raised with us that those same sausages, when supplied to the local supermarket, will need to carry a nutrition information panel and that this would then

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FSANZ holds its second Fellows Symposium

FSANZ must have access to advice of the highest calibre on a wide range of scientific issues in order to operate effectively as a food regulator. To this end we have made a strong commitment to fostering linkages with experts in a wide range of scientific, regulatory and legislative areas.

One mechanism that has been put in place to facilitate greater access to expertise is the FSANZ Fellows Program. Ten experts were appointed originally as ANZFA Fellows in September 2000 for a term of three years. The FSANZ Fellows Program, now in its second year, provides access to the expertise of these distinguished scientists and specialists.

Professor Ken Buckle resigned his Fellowship following his appointment to the FSANZ

Board. Four more FSANZ Fellows were appointed by the Board in 2002: Professor Jeff Borland, Dr Martin Cole, Professor John McNeil and Professor Roger Morris.

Over the past two years, the Fellows have contributed significantly to our activities. In particular, they played an important role on project reference groups including one working on *Listeria monocytogenes* and have participated in forums on specialised topics including work relating to allergies (including the effects of MSG), use of energy drinks and efficacy of methodologies to detect aflatoxins.

Two of the Fellows also provided input into the development of the equivalence determination

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framework and one provided expert advice on the evidence underpinning assessment of harmonised fortification requirements.

Fellows also provided us with valuable guidance on administrative law issues, participated in the steering/advisory groups for evaluation work and have accepted invitations to participate in FSANZ's seminar program and review our work.

The 2nd FSANZ Fellows Symposium was held at Old Parliament House, Canberra, on 6 December. In his forward to the symposium program, FSANZ Board Chairman the Hon Rob Knowles said:

'As an independent statutory authority, FSANZ needs the trust of the community and the respect of industry to perform effectively. Our research shows that public confidence in the safety of the food supply is currently high. But we can never take this trust for granted nor can we assume that past achievements are an indicator of future performance.

'We have witnessed, over the past year, the failure in regulatory systems both overseas and at home, some in the area of food regulation. We have seen what can happen to public confidence if a regulator fails to act appropriately or in a timely fashion. We have learned the value of a 'no surprises' approach to our work.

'This 2nd FSANZ Fellows Symposium has been designed to look at the food supply as a

whole, from production to consumption, and to identify emerging challenges that we need to explore together as regulators and stakeholders.

'It should go without saying that food regulation is a collaborative process, not simply the responsibility of the regulator.

'We also rely on consumer groups, scientific bodies, public health professionals and other government agencies, as well as the food industry, to provide feedback on proposed changes to the *Food Standards Code* and enforcement of the Code. Without these contributions, FSANZ would soon become isolated from the real world and unable to function effectively,' Mr Knowles concluded.

Information about the symposium is available on the FSANZ website.

Introducing the FSANZ Fellows...

Professor Jeff Borland

Professor Borland is Professor of Economics at the University of Melbourne. His main research interests are analysis of the operation of labour markets in Australia and applications of microeconomic theory. In 1997 he was awarded the Australian Academy of Social Sciences Medal for Excellence in Scholarship in the Social Sciences.

Dr Martin Cole

Dr Cole is Food Science Australia's Group Manager for Food Safety and Quality. He has published and presented over 50 papers on many aspects of food microbiology including predictive modelling, risk assessment and food preservation technology. Dr Cole is a member of the Australian delegation to the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene.

Dr David Hill

Dr Hill has been the Director of the Department of Allergy, Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne, since 1983. He has developed clinically based research projects on allergic diseases of childhood, publishing more than 100 scientific papers in this field. In 1998 he became a Member of the Pacific Basin Region of the American Academy of Asthma, Allergy and Immunology.

Dr John Huckerby

Dr Huckerby is the director of Power Projects Limited, a consultancy that provides strategic decision-making, business development and operational project management services to the energy industry. His clients have included overseas energy companies interested in investing in New Zealand and a range of government and public sector agencies.

Professor Jim Mann

Professor Mann is Professor of Human Nutrition and Medicine at the University of Otago. He has been involved in research related to nutritional aspects of cardiovascular

disease and diabetes for 30 years and has an interest in many aspects of public health nutrition. He chairs the Food and Nutrition Advisory Committee to the New Zealand Ministry of Health.

Dr Geoff Marks

Dr Marks is Head of the Nutrition Program of the University of Queensland. His work has focussed on aspects of 'evidenced based planning' in nutrition program/ policy development and evaluation, and food and nutrition monitoring and surveillance. Dr Marks' recent work has focussed on the Australian Food and Nutrition Monitoring project, funded by the Department of Health and Ageing.

Professor Tom McMeekin

Professor McMeekin is currently Professor of Microbiology at the School of Agricultural Science, University of Tasmania. He is also Director of the Centre for Food Safety and Quality. He directs a research group of 30 microbiologists split equally between Food and Antarctic Microbiology. In 2002, he was the recipient of the International Association of Food Protection's inaugural International Leadership Award.

Professor John McNeil

Professor McNeil is the Head of the Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine at Monash University. His principal interests include cardiovascular epidemiology, drug safety and toxicity. He retains a clinical involvement as a vascular physician on the Vascular Medicine Unit at the Monash Medical Centre.

Emeritus Professor Nancy Millis

Emeritus Professor Millis AC MBE has had an active career since her first academic appointment as a lecturer to the University of Melbourne in 1953. She is currently Chancellor of La Trobe University, consultant to Parks Victoria, chair of the Research

Advisory Committee, Murray-Darling Freshwater Research Centre, CRC for Water Quality and chair of the Gene Technology Technical Advisory Committee.

Professor Roger Morris

Professor Morris is Gilruth Professor of Animal Health at Massey University and Director of the Massey University EpiCentre, which comprises about 25 staff and over 40 postgraduate students. He trained as a veterinarian and an agricultural economist. Professor Morris has undertaken over 300 consultancies worldwide for international organisations, governments and other bodies.

Professor Paul Moughan

Professor Moughan heads the Institute of Food, Nutrition and Human Health at Massey University, New Zealand – a research-led Institute, with 160 staff dedicated to improving health through better foods, nutrition and lifestyle. His research has encompassed the fields of human and animal nutrition, food chemistry, mammalian growth biology and digestive physiology.

Dr Chris Reynolds

Dr Reynolds teaches constitutional law and environmental law at Flinders University Law School and public health law at the University of Adelaide's Department of Public Health. He is also Director (Research) at the Centre for Public Health Law based at LaTrobe University. Dr Reynolds is interested in the development of food laws across Australia.

Professor Tony Worsley

Professor Worsley is Professor of Population Health at Deakin University. He is a health psychologist who has published extensively on the social behavioural influences on human food choice. He is particularly interested in consumers' use of food label information, consumer food and health concerns, children's and adolescents' food education and the influence of nutrients on behaviour.

The new Food Standards Code finally harmonises Australian and NZ food regulations.

On 20 December, the *Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code* will become the sole Food Standards Code for both countries.

The *Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code* (the new Code) came into effect in December 2000, with a two-year transition period ending on 20 December 2002. During this transition period, the pre-existing *Australian Food Standards Code* (the old Code) and the *New Zealand Food Regulations* (the NZ regulations) have remained in effect. In Australia, manufacturers and importers could legally sell food if it complied with either the new Code or the old Code. In New Zealand, food had to comply with the new Code, the old Code or the NZ regulations.

This situation will change on 20 December, when the old Code and the NZ regulations are expected to be repealed. After this date, food sold in Australia and New Zealand should comply with standards in the new Code.

Provisions have been introduced into the new Code to allow foods manufactured and packaged **before** 20 December 2002 ('stock-in-trade') to continue to be sold legally after this date, as long as they comply with the requirements set out in the old regulations with some conditions (see below). This allowance is regardless of whether these foods are in warehouses/storage, in transport (including being imported into Australia or New Zealand) or on supermarket shelves or for sale in other food outlets.

There are three specific stock-in-trade conditions:

- 1. A 12-month stock-in-trade provision** for food products manufactured and packaged prior to the 20 December 2002 date in compliance with all applicable food standards at that time. Such foods may continue to be sold lawfully until 20 December 2003. Due to the rapid turnover of a high proportion of foods and short shelf life of many others, most foods offered for sale should be compliant with the new Code within two or three months after the 20 December 2002.
- 2. A 24-month stock-in-trade provision for long shelf-life products.** Foods that have a shelf life of more than twelve months and which are manufactured and packaged prior to the 20 December 2002 date in compliance with all applicable food standards at that time (e.g. canned fruit, vegetables, meats, fish and packaged herbs, spices and sauces) may continue to be sold lawfully until 20 December 2004.
- 3. A 12 month extension of the transition period for most labelling requirements on food labelled on the retail premises from which it is sold** 'In-store' packaging and labelling is usually confined to relatively few foods, but they tend to be staple items (such as meats and breads). A 12-month extension to the transition period for the labelling requirements has been provided to allow retailers sufficient time to install the necessary machinery to appropriately label these foods. This exemption does not apply to labelling

requirements under Standard 1.2.3 - Mandatory Warning and Advisory Statements and Declarations, 'use-by' date or best before date requirements under Standard 1.2.5, and all requirements under Standard 1.2.6 Directions for Use and Storage

Further information

Electronic versions of the **Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code**, user guides and fact sheets can be obtained from the FSANZ website at www.foodstandards.gov.au or www.foodstandards.govt.nz.

Hard copies of the Code and the complete set of user guides may also be purchased from Anstat on 03 9278 1144. Hard copies of fact sheets are available from FSANZ's Information Officer in Australia on 02 6271 2241 or in New Zealand on 04 473 9942.

Businesses may currently obtain specific advice on standards in the new Code through the Industry Advice Helpline on 1 300 652 166 (Australia) and 0 800 441 571 (New Zealand) or by e-mail at advice@foodstandards.gov.au

As the implementation period for the new Code ends and responsibility for enforcing it is taken up by the States and Territories, the Industry Advice Helpline service will begin winding down in the first half of 2003. We are also examining options for the continuing operation of the Nutrition Panel Calculator, which may involve it being taken over commercially.

« From the Managing Director cont.

impose an obligation on the butcher to undertake laboratory tests on each batch of sausages produced.

In fact, that is not necessary. We had anticipated such a need for a wide range of small businesses and took some steps to greatly reduce the problem. As a result all businesses have the option of using national average figures on food composition, instead of commissioning tests on each product. This can be based on:

- a free nutrition panel calculator to determine the content of their NIPs; this is available on our web site; or
- the published food composition tables, also available on our web site.

There had also been a concern that the use of average figures would lead to very serious discrepancies between the label and what was actually in the food. I acknowledge that that could be the case – but it shouldn't be.

The food composition data is highly disaggregated – there are over one hundred

entries for beef and beef products alone and these distinguish between raw and cooked, lean and full fat, and between different percentages of fat trimmed beef. Different values are also shown for different cuts such as topside, round and chuck steak. With a little care and judgement, a good approximation should be achieved every time.

Another such marginal issue is the allergen-labelling obligation for **isinglass**. Isinglass is a processing aid used for clarifying many beers, wines and other liquid foods. While, like most processing aids, it is substantially removed from the food during processing, small levels of residue remain. Isinglass is produced from fish. All products containing fish must carry that information on the label, to alert those consumers who have an allergy to fish.

Manufacturers who have used isinglass over a long period of time have sought an exemption from labelling on the basis that they have seen no evidence that this processing aid has caused allergic reactions in consumers. Unfortunately they, and we, lack scientific evidence that it does not have that effect.

We are aware that some research is under way, but until we have conclusive evidence that it is not allergenic we cannot responsibly consider exempting it. With the increasing prevalence of allergies in our population and the potentially serious effects of anaphylactic reactions, we simply cannot grant exemptions without knowing that we are not exposing a part of our population to a potentially life threatening risk.

Christmas and New Year

As I mentioned in last month's edition of *Food Standards News*, I have decided to stand down as CEO and Managing Director of FSANZ. This will therefore be my last opportunity to leave a Christmas greeting with you.

I wish you and your families a safe festive season, free from food poisoning and the scourge of obesity, and a nutritious New Year, with healthy diets to provide us all with the energy and wellness to pursue our goals.

Ian Lindenmayer
Managing Director

New Zealand Foodsafe Week – cool down, chill out this summer

Foodsafe Week was held in New Zealand on 2-8 December. The summer campaign was launched by the Minister for Food Safety Annette King at a picnic and barbecue in the grounds of Parliament in Wellington. The New Zealand Foodsafe Partnership was formed in 1998 out of growing concern at the increasing number of cases of food-borne illness in New Zealand. The Partnership comprises representatives from the food industry, consumer groups, public health groups, the New Zealand Food Safety Authority and the Ministry of Health. The main messages are - clean, cook, cover, chill.

For more information their website is www.foodsafe.org.nz

Australian Food Safety Week 2002 – beating the food bugs

The Food Safety Information Council launched Food Safety Week in Australia on 11 November with survey results which showed that school-aged children are failing even in the most basic of hand washing methods.

Chair of the Food Safety Information Council, Mr Barry Shay, said that, with 7 million cases of food poisoning in Australia every year, parents should make sure their children knew the basics about food safety and hand washing.

'The Food Safety Information Council recently commissioned a national telephone poll by Newspoll which found that 36% of people thought it was safe to handle food after just rinsing their hands under water without using soap or drying thoroughly', Mr Shay said. 'Another observational survey of people using public facilities at a suburban shopping centre food court was carried out by the Food Safety Information Council. Of the 200 people observed, 8% of females and 29% of males did not wash their hands at all.

'We all know that hands should be washed after going to the toilet and before handling food but only 20% of females and 7% of males observed used the correct procedure of



ACT Health help the public at one of their Food Safety Week displays.

washing their hands for at least 10 seconds, rubbing soap all over their hands, rinsing and drying for 10 seconds with a clean towel or 20 seconds with a hand drier. The most common problem was washing hands for less than the required ten seconds, failing to use soap and not drying hands for sufficient time. Drying hands thoroughly is important as bacteria love to travel on damp hands.

'You would think that parents and grandparents would take responsibility for ensuring that children wash their hands correctly. In fact, the opposite sometimes seemed to be the case as some younger children were observed trying to do the right thing but were hurried by their parents,' Mr Shay said.

Contaminating food caused by poor hand washing is one of the factors that, mixed with other food handling errors can cause food poisoning. Other factors that can lead to food poisoning are:

- Handling food for others when you have diarrhoea.
- Leaving high risk foods such as meat, poultry, fish, seafood, cream, cooked rice and pasta out in the temperature danger zone (between 5 °C and 60 °C)
- Letting high risk foods especially meat, chicken and seafood come in contact with raw foods such as salad or fruit, for example by using the same chopping board and then not washing the board,

hands and the knife.

- Running your fridge at or above 5 °C.
- Not putting leftovers in the fridge or freezer as soon as possible after eating.
- Not cooking food properly, for example not cooking sausages, hamburgers, rolled or stuffed roasts and chicken all the way through until the juices run clear.

'When you add Australia's hot summers and catering for larger number of people when we are entertaining to these errors, the risk of food poisoning increases considerably. Food poisoning is not a minor illness as it can be fatal for children under 12, for older Australians and for the immuno-compromised. It can also have long terms effects such as reactive arthritis even in fit, young people.

'There are new national food regulations to ensure that food businesses do the right thing but we mustn't forget that consumers have a role to play in protecting themselves and their families. 20% of food poisoning cases are estimated to be caused through poor food handling by consumers. The Food Safety Information Council promotes six simple messages for food safety. These are simple but effective ways of avoiding food poisoning,' Mr Shay concluded.

You can get more advice on food safety from the Food Safety Information Council website www.foodsafety.asn.au. Food Standards Australia New Zealand is a founding member of the Food Safety Information Council.

Food features in free trade negotiations with the United States

The announcement on 14 November that Australia and the United States would commence negotiations to conclude a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) was a breakthrough for Australian trade policy and offers a unique opportunity to expand access for Australian exporters to the world's largest economy.

Following a 90-day notification period required by US Congress, the first round of discussions are expected to be held in March 2003, with both Governments eager to move the negotiations forward as quickly as possible.

Central to Australia's interests in the FTA negotiations will be increasing market access for agricultural exports, including processed foods and beverages. It is encouraging to note that – despite sensitivities in some agricultural sectors – the US Administration has signalled it wants a comprehensive agreement from which no major sector is excluded.

Australia already exports large amounts of agricultural products to the US market, more than \$3 billion in 2001. Despite the successes, many Australian agricultural exports continue to face a wide range of tariffs and other barriers in the US, including:

- Meat products - tariff rate quotas for beef.
- Dairy products - tariff rate quotas on cheese, butter, skim milk powder and butteroil, and tariffs on ice cream
- Sugar – quota and tariff barriers on raw and refined sugar

- Grain and oilseed products - tariffs on wheat gluten, rice, vegetable oils and margarine
- Horticulture - tariffs on a range of fruit, vegetables and nuts
- Other foods and beverages - tariffs on wine, chocolate products, processed fruits
- Other trade barriers including high levels of domestic support and subsidies.

A background paper on the Australia-United States FTA proposal can be found at <http://www.dfat.gov.au/trade/negotiations/us.html>. This includes links to studies outlining barriers facing Australian exports and a link to the USTR notification letter to the US Congress with proposed US objectives for the FTA negotiations.

The Australian Government is undertaking extensive consultations in developing its objectives and approach to the negotiations and welcomes further advice from the public about trade barriers or issues that could be addressed in the FTA negotiations.

Views on relative priorities on particular issues or sectors, including non-tariff barriers, are also important. Formal submissions have been requested from industry and the public, details of which can be obtained at the DFAT website above. Submissions must be lodged by 15 January 2003.

Fighting the fat

There is considerable community and professional debate about obesity at present. FSANZ strongly supports the growing impetus to reduce diet related-disease. The mandating of nutrition panels on nearly all packaged foods from 20 December 2002 is expected to save between 320 and 460 lives in Australia and New Zealand every year.

But much more can be done to improve our health through improving our diet.

FSANZ was pleased to be asked to contribute to the New South Wales Childhood Obesity Summit held in Sydney on 12 September 2002 and the Obesity Forum in Victoria on 23 October 2002.

Food Safety Tips for Christmas



- Avoid temperature danger zone between 5C and 60C where food poisoning bacteria grow.
- Keep hot foods steaming hot over 60C.
- Keep cold foods refrigerated under 5 degrees C.
- Food should always be defrosted in the fridge or microwave, never on the bench top.
- If you are going to defrost a large turkey remember it will take several days to defrost in the fridge. Always make sure that it is thoroughly defrosted, even in the centre.
- If you cannot defrost the turkey in your fridge you could ask your butcher to defrost it in his coolroom. Defrosting a turkey on the benchtop is ok but you must make sure it is thoroughly cooked all the way through to make sure any bacteria are destroyed – so use a meat thermometer to check.
- Before preparing your food for Christmas make sure that there is enough room in the fridge to keep cold food under 5 degrees C.
- If there is not enough room in the fridge remember that soft drinks and alcohol can be kept cool with ice in another container.
- Prepare foods as close as possible to eating time.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm water and dry thoroughly.
- Use separate cutting boards and utensils for raw meats.
- Cook foods properly.
- If you cook large amounts divide into smaller portions, cover and place in fridge or freezer.
- Refrigerate leftovers immediately after the meal (as soon as it stops steaming).
- Never leave leftovers to cool on the kitchen bench and use the refrigerated leftovers within 2 to 3 days.
- When reheating food ensure that it is steaming hot all the way through (over 60 degrees C).

Your Christmas ham will keep several weeks with proper handling by removing it from its plastic wrap, covering with clean cloth so it doesn't dry out, and following any instructions on the wrapping.

Australia and New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council

Joint Communiqué (4 December 2002)

FOOD MINISTERS APPROVE A NUMBER OF FOOD STANDARDS INCLUDING TRANSITIONAL STANDARDS ISSUES FOR NEW ZEALAND

It was announced today that Australia and New Zealand Food Regulation Ministers who met via teleconference on 3 December 2002, have agreed on a number of important food issues.

New Zealand Transitional Standards Issues

The Ministerial Council noted New Zealand's proposed transitional food regulations. New Zealand Food Regulations within the scope of the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code (the joint Code), established under the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Agreement (ANZ Food Treaty) are due to be revoked on 20 December 2002. In the context of its review of Food Regulations in preparation for the implementation of the joint Code, New Zealand has identified four specific issues which it proposes to retain on a transitional basis. These areas relate to mutton birds, fluoridated water in food, caffeinated artificial drinks and the use of hemp seed oil as a food or food ingredient. Ministers noted that Australian and New Zealand officials were exploring appropriate regulatory mechanisms for preventing the import into Australia from New Zealand of caffeinated artificial drinks and hemp seed oil as a food or food ingredient.

Listeria Risk Assessment Risk Management Strategy

The former Australia New Zealand Food Standards Council requested in November 2000 that the microbiological limits for *Listeria monocytogenes* be reviewed. Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) undertook to review the *L.monocytogenes* limits set for cooked crustacea and ready-to-eat processed finfish in Volume 2 of the Food Standards Code. FSANZ recommended an amendment to Standard 1.6.1 to delete the microbiological limit for *L.monocytogenes* in cooked crustacea. After consideration, the Ministerial Council requested a first review based on public health and safety grounds. As required by legislation, FSANZ will complete the review within 3 months. Until the review process is completed, the existing limits on cooked crustacean and fish will apply.

Minor Omnibus No. 3

Since the gazettal of Volume 2 of the Food Standards Code, a number of errors or oversights of minor significance or complexity

including inconsistencies, misspellings, grammatical errors and omissions have been identified which require correction to ensure that the standards are strictly correct and enforceable, thereby protecting public health and safety. The Ministerial Council have agreed to these minor amendments being made.

However, the Ministerial Council requested a first review of one of the amendments under consideration in the omnibus. The Council requested that FSANZ review the proposed amendments to Standard 2.9.2 – Food for Infants to require the labelling of sodium (salt) in nutrition information panels. Given the complexities of this review, the Ministerial Council extended the normal three-month timeframe to nine months to ensure that the review is carried out thoroughly.

Safety Assessment of Raw Milk Very Hard Cooked Curd Cheeses

The Ministerial Council agreed to a new standard on the safety assessment of raw milk very hard cooked curd cheeses. Ministers have also agreed that FSANZ will undertake to complete a review of the new standard by December 2003, confirm that they support dairy authorities imposing food safety management systems or equivalent under jurisdictional regulations as a requirement for any domestic manufacture of raw milk very hard cooked curd cheeses and confirm with the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) the need to ensure that enforcement and compliance of the microbiological standards of the new joint *Food Standards Code* will apply to imported raw milk very hard cooked curd cheeses.

Amendments for the Labelling of Home Brew Kits

The Ministerial Council agreed to vary Standard 1.2.8 – Nutrition Information Requirements of the Food Standards Code to exempt kits that are designed to be used to produce alcoholic beverages from the requirement to include a Nutrition Information Panel on the label. The *Food Standards Code* exempts alcoholic beverages from requiring a Nutrition Information Panel on the label.

Anomaly with the Transitional Standard for Milk

The Ministerial Council agreed to Amendments for the Transitional Arrangements for Labelling

of Milk to address a labelling issue arising from transition arrangements put in place to facilitate implementation of Volume 2 of the Food Standards Code. The issue relates to the labelling of condensed milk, modified milk and skim milk, and the requirements for warning statements to be provided on those products and gives producers of this product a reasonable period of time to adjust their labels after 20 December 2002. The amendment will allow both countries to continue using either the current Australian wording or the current New Zealand wording for a further two years, up until the new Standard 1.2.3 - Mandatory Advisory Statement, becomes compulsory on 17 September 2004. This does not pose a public health and safety concern and will ensure equity and consistency for milk producers in the transition period.

Transporting the Caffeine in Soft Drinks Permission from the New Zealand Food Regulations

The Ministerial Council have agreed to a New Zealand only Transitional Standard for Caffeine in Artificial Drinks to permit, in New Zealand, the continued addition of caffeine at a level no higher than 200mg/kg to soft drinks after the transition to the Joint Code on 20 December 2002. This is a transitional arrangement to continue the permission contained in the New Zealand Food Regulations 1984 until such time as the policy guidelines on caffeine in food and any standards developed as a result have been fully considered by Ministers. This is a temporary standard and will only be in place for 12 months. Ministers noted that Australian and New Zealand officials were exploring appropriate regulatory mechanisms for preventing the import into Australia from New Zealand of caffeinated artificial drinks.

Amendments to Standard 2.9.2 – Foods for Infants: Electrolytic Iron as a Permitted Form of Iron; and Clarification of 'Juice'

The Ministerial Council have agreed to reinstate permission to add elemental iron in the form of electrolytic iron or reduced iron to cereal-based foods for infants. The Ministerial Council also agreed to amendments to clarify the meaning of 'juice' in Standard 2.9.2 so it is consistent with its meaning in Standard 2.6.1 Fruit Juice and Vegetable Juice.

Help for people who suffer food intolerances and allergies

This is an extract of a speech delivered on behalf of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and Ageing, the Hon Trish Worth, by FSANZ's Managing Director, Ian Lindenmayer, at the Allergen and Food Safety Conference 2002 in October.

Adverse reaction to food can cause a wide variety of symptoms, from mild gastrointestinal discomfort, to skin rashes, asthma and anaphylaxis. A true food allergy is an immunological reaction induced by food.

However there are many more Australians who have food intolerances, usually caused by sensitivity to chemical agents, such as sulphites, or due to enzyme deficiencies, such as lactose intolerance. While food intolerances may not be life threatening, they impact upon the individual's health and quality of life.

Between ten and twenty people die in Australia each year from anaphylaxis. Many more have severe allergic reactions. In 2000/2001, 497 people were admitted to hospital with anaphylaxis and a further 441 with a severe allergic reaction. It is estimated that 1-2% of adults and 5-8% of children are affected by a food allergy.

Currently there is no cure. The only successful method to manage a food allergy or food intolerance is avoidance of foods containing the allergen. To do this consumers rely on accurate ingredient labelling. Unfortunately, the current reality is that a large percentage of allergic reactions occur due to incorrect labelling of food or cross contamination during the manufacturing process.

What does this tell us? It highlights two issues that need to be addressed: the need for clear and mandatory labelling of any allergens in foods and the prevention of contamination in the production lines with food allergens. The Government is helping to address the labelling issue directly through support for new mandatory allergen labelling. It is important

that industry do its part in eliminating its exposure to inadvertent contamination.

A key element of the review of food standards in Australia and New Zealand was the review of labelling provisions. The new labelling requirements are important initiatives to reduce diet-related disease, assist individuals with allergies, and enable consumers to make informed choices about the foods they purchase. Research has demonstrated that there is strong consumer support for more information on labels.

Under the new Code, almost all manufactured foods will carry a nutrition information panel with percentage labelling to provide consumers with information about the composition and nutritional value of the foods they eat. Experience in the United States shows that, when mandatory nutrition labelling was introduced, a significant proportion of consumers began to make healthier food choices.

The new requirements also represent good news for people who may have allergies or intolerances to foods or food additives. Currently, not all foods that affect people with allergies or food intolerances are labelled. Potentially, there are hidden ingredients in processed food.

Improving ingredient labels is a necessary first step to prevent deaths and serious illness from allergic reactions to food. The new requirements in the Code will make it much easier for consumers and nutritionists, both in terms of better protecting allergy sufferers as well as clarifying misinformation about allergies. It is giving people the opportunity to protect themselves more effectively.

The new Code will ensure all of the main foods which may cause allergies (including cereals containing gluten, crustacea, eggs, fish, milk, peanuts and soybeans, nuts and sesame seeds, added sulphites at certain levels, royal jelly and other specific bee products) must be

declared on the label on a packaged food in simple straightforward and common sense wording that consumers can understand.

For non-packaged foods this information must be shown with the food display or provided to consumers on request. This applies no matter how small the amount contained in the food. There are also stricter provisions ensuring warning or advisory statements on products that can cause other adverse reactions, such as unpasteurised milk.

Industry has been supportive of the labelling for allergens both now and during its development. They have developed a Food Industry Guide to Allergen Management and Labelling, which is a welcome demonstration of industry's commitment to complying with the standard.

These labelling changes are not cosmetic – they have major public health and safety implications. They could save lives. Manufacturers who have not finalised food-labelling changes have until 20 December 2002 to do so. I am pleased to say that most food businesses have indicated they have made the necessary changes to their food labelling.

Cross contamination is also a serious concern for people with allergies. Manufacturers have an important obligation – both moral and legal – to ensure the food they produce is safe for consumption. This extends to understanding which products contain potential allergens and taking steps to prevent cross contamination at all stages of production, packaging and serving.

The new primary production standards and the whole-of-food chain approach to regulation are critical for the prevention of cross contamination. New Government initiatives to improve food safety also address this issue, both for manufactured packaged products and for foods prepared at the point of sale.

FSANZ Specialist Register - call for expressions of interest

FSANZ is seeking expressions of interest from highly skilled and experienced professionals, organisations or companies to potentially advise on areas of interest to the Authority including the assessment of applications and proposals to amend the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code. FSANZ will prepare a confidential register from these expressions of interest and registrants will

receive priority notification of tenders and/or contract work as they arise within different areas and programs.

Matters of immediate interest are the safety of foods requiring pre-market safety assessment (especially genetically modified foods and novel foods), food safety/hygiene, primary production standards, and nutrition and labelling issues.

If you or your organisation is interested in registering an expression of interest please complete the Registration Form available on the FSANZ website at <http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/aboutus/employmentopportunities/> and email to specialists@foodstandards.gov.au.

What is FSANZ?

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) protects the health and safety of the people in Australia and New Zealand by maintaining a safe food supply.

We are a bi-national independent statutory authority that develops food standards for composition, labelling and contaminants, including microbiological limits, that apply to all foods produced or imported for sale in Australia and New Zealand.

In Australia, Food Standards Australia New Zealand develops food standards to cover the whole of the food supply chain – from paddock to plate – for both the food manufacturing industry and primary producers.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand works in partnership with Australia's Commonwealth, State and Territory governments and the New Zealand Government. We also seek to engage industry, consumers and public health professionals in our work.

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Chief Scientist Dr Marion Healy looks at the safety of raw milk cheeses

Historically, the *Australian Food Standards Code* has required cheese to be produced from milk that has been pasteurised, subjected to a time and temperature combination that gives an equivalent level of pathogen reduction or has been thermised (ie. treated at a minimum temperature of 62°C) and the cheese aged for a minimum period of 90 days.

Microbiological limits on cheese are also specified in Standard 1.6.1 Microbiological Limits for Food, and the three food safety standards (Standards 3.1.1, 3.2.2 and 3.2.3) apply to all food businesses, including cheese producers. Additional requirements for domestically produced cheese are specified in state and territory based legislation and quarantine requirements apply to imported cheeses.

Over the past several years, ANZFA/FSANZ has recommended regulatory requirements that permit the sale of certain cheeses produced from 'raw', or non heat-treated, milk. In considering whether to permit these cheeses to enter the food supply, the pivotal question has been: do the production processes for raw milk cheeses achieve a level of safety equivalent to that of cheese produced using pasteurised milk, given that the broader regulatory requirements apply to all cheeses. If equivalent food safety outcomes can be achieved, an exemption to the requirement for heat treatment of milk has been recommended.

The first group of raw milk cheeses assessed included several hard and semi hard cheeses produced in Switzerland. The impact on pathogen levels of both the cheese manufacturing process itself, and the milk quality and safety assurance processes, were examined.

In order to reduce pathogen levels sufficiently in hard cheeses, both the cheese production process and the handling and storage of milk are important. Because of the importance of

both processes, the *Food Standards Code* lists the three varieties of hard cheese that are permitted (Gruyere, Sbrinz and Emmental), together with the Swiss Ordinance that specifies the milk quality and safety assurance procedures, which they must comply with.

In the case of the semi hard cheeses, it was not certain that pathogen levels could be reduced sufficiently, even if the microbiological quality of the milk is carefully managed. Therefore these cheeses may only be imported if they are produced using milk that has been subjected to the permitted heat treatments.

More recently, FSANZ has been considering the regulatory requirements for very hard cheeses produced from raw milk, such as Grana Padano and Parmigiano Reggiano. These cheeses are characterised by a curd cooking step, which contributes to a low moisture content, and long maturation times.

FSANZ considered five cheese varieties, representative of the very hard cheese class, and examined the level of pathogen reduction resulting from the cheese production process. The cheese production process itself was able to reduce pathogen levels such that the level of safety in very hard raw milk cheese is equivalent to that of cheese produced from heat treated milk.

The three parameters that have the greatest impact are curd cooking, moisture content and maturation time. It is the combination of these three parameters that reduces pathogens to acceptable levels, although the relative importance of each of these parameters will vary according to the variety of cheese being manufactured.

FSANZ's assessment of the raw milk cheeses, together with the draft guidelines for establishing equivalence of food safety outcomes, are available on FSANZ's website at www.foodstandards.gov.au or www.foodstandards.govt.nz.

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