

FOOD STANDARDS NEWS



The Newsletter of the Australia New Zealand Food Authority

November 2001



FROM THE
MANAGING
DIRECTOR'S
DESK

Food Labelling

The recent Newpoll study commissioned by the Sanitarium food company confirms that most Australians want nutrition information on food labels and do pay attention to this information, particularly when buying a new product.

We recognise that, in a survey, respondents will often say yes to any question asking if they want more information. But the strength of the consumer demand shown by this study provides very clear indication of genuine consumer interest in this information. This is also in line with the feedback ANZFA has received and continues to receive from consumer and public health organisations around Australia and New Zealand.

The study also showed a lack of consumer confidence in their ability to fully understand all the information provided. A poster which ANZFA has developed should help clarify the purpose and interpretation of the information required on food labels under the new Food Standards Code.

I would like to thank Coles, Woolworths, the Dietitians Association of Australia, Nutrition Australia, the Australian Medical Association, the Australian Retailers Association, the National Association of Retail Grocers of Australia and the Australian Food and Grocery Council for their help in developing and distributing the poster. The partnership between ANZFA and these organisations has improved the quality of the information on the poster and will be invaluable in ensuring that it reaches the maximum number of consumers.

Food Safety

I am pleased to see a growing emphasis within the market place, on the safety of food. There also seems to be a growing recognition of the importance of regulators and businesses working in partnership to enhance food safety, not only in the interests of the consumer, but also in the interests of enhancing world confidence in the safety of our food.

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ANZFA releases nutrition panel calculator to assist food businesses

The Australia New Zealand Food Authority (ANZFA) announced today, the release of its new on-line Nutrition Panel Calculator (NPC) to assist food businesses to calculate nutrition information panels for their food labels.

Mr Ian Lindenmayer, ANZFA's Managing Director said that almost all packaged foods must have a nutrition panel on the label by December 2002 listing energy (kilojoules), protein, total fat, saturated fat, carbohydrate, sugars and sodium (salt) in order to comply with the new Food Standards Code.

"This calculator is a free service for food businesses. It allows them to enter their recipe and related information and a nutrition information panel will be automatically calculated for inclusion on the product label or packaging", Mr Lindenmayer said.

"The calculator uses the Australian nutrition data base (AUSNUT) containing 4,500 commonly used foods and food ingredients.

The final development of the NPC, reflects the Food Standards Ministers' decision to permit the carbohydrate values of food to be calculated in one of two ways for inclusion in Nutrition Information Panels on food labels.

This gives accurate information to consumers about the carbohydrate content of their food, while retaining flexibility for manufacturers to select the method of calculating carbohydrate best suited to their food product.

The calculator may be accessed from ANZFA's website www.anzfa.gov.au. It is available in two easy-to-use formats, a "plug-in" version or an "accessibility" version and is accompanied by explanatory notes.

« From the MD's desk cont...

Food Safety Week

The safety of the food we eat not only depends on the producers, manufacturers and vendors of food, it also depends on how the food is stored, prepared and cooked by the consumer.

Food Safety Week this year will be from 19 to the 25 November. The theme for the week is 'Chill out this summer' and will highlight the importance of consumers using their fridges in the most effective way to reduce the risk of food poisoning.

Food Safety Week is organised each year by the Food Safety Information Council, of which ANZFA is a member. The Council is a partnership of State and Federal governments, the food industry and professional associations. It aims to improve the level of food safety awareness among consumers.

Ian Lindenmayer
Managing Director

Stock-in-trade provisions agreed for the labelling of GM food

Australian and New Zealand Food Standards Ministers, meeting by teleconference on

24 October 2001, established a transitional arrangement for labelling genetically modified foods.

From 7 December 2001, all food containing novel genetic material or protein in the final product must have its GM status identified on the package or, in the case of unpackaged foods, near the food.

Ministers discussed, and agreed to, a transitional arrangement for those genetically modified foods which may be on the shelf prior to 7 December 2001 when the new labelling requirement comes into effect. Ministers recognised that there is a very rapid turnover in most foods on supermarket shelves and other food outlets and the majority would be sold and consumed within one or two months. Ministers agreed that the remaining small minority of foods, which have both low rates of turnover and long 'use by' or 'best before' periods, would be allowed to remain on the shelves until used up, but would not be permitted to remain for more than 12 months.

All products manufactured or packaged for retail sale on or after 7 December must be labelled.

ANZFA invites public comment

The Australia New Zealand Food Authority (ANZFA) released for public comment a number of proposals to amend the Food Standards Code. Submissions should be received by 21 November 2001. Copies of the applications and proposals can be obtained from the ANZFA website at www.anzfa.gov.au.

Food for special medical purposes (P242) - Initial Assessment

The proposed standard would apply to formulated food products for use under the supervision of medical, dietetic or other health professionals. They include specialised 'complete nutrition' and supplementary formulas used for the dietary management of people unable to eat a normal diet, and very low energy diet formulas used for weight loss.

At present, foods for special medical purposes are not specifically regulated and, because of their formulated nature, most fail to comply with the general provisions of the Food Standards Code. The proposal seeks to establish a standard for Australia and New Zealand and comment is invited, especially from health professionals, the medical food industry and groups representing particular types of patients as well as from the public in general.

The standard is intended to ensure the quality and safety of such foods for a vulnerable population group, without impeding the capacity of health professionals to adjust food intakes to meet the special needs of individual patients.

Plant sterols derived from tall oils (A417) - Draft Assessment

Tall oil plant sterols are chemicals obtained from coniferous trees. They are structurally related to cholesterol and occur naturally at low levels (up to 0.9%) in common vegetable oils. Tall oil plant sterols are reported to reduce plasma cholesterol levels.

A food manufacturer has sought approval for the use of tall oil plant sterols in edible table spreads (margarines) at a level of 8%, by weight, of the product. ANZFA has performed an extensive scientific risk assessment (including expected dietary exposures to plant sterols) and concluded that consumption of tall oil plant sterols is safe up to the level that would be likely to occur from the fortification level proposed. Mandatory advisory

statements would be required indicating, for example, that the product is not recommended for infants, children, and pregnant or nursing women.

In June 2001, the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Council approved the use in margarines of plant sterols derived from vegetable oils.

Maximum residue limits for antibiotics (A422) - Draft Assessment

A number of amendments to the Food Standards Code have been proposed by the National Registration Authority for Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals, including the addition of new maximum residue limits (MRLs) for the antibiotics avilamycin in poultry meat and poultry offal and oxytetracycline in honey; and the deletion of MRLs for benzyl G penicillin, procaine penicillin and erythromycin in a number of products.

A scientific risk assessment by ANZFA has concluded that the proposed changes to MRLs do not represent an unacceptable risk to public health and safety.

In relation to the development of antibiotic resistance, ANZFA has routinely sought the advice of the National Health and Medical Research Council Expert Advisory Group on Antimicrobial Resistance (EAGAR) or its predecessor, the Working Party on Antibiotics (WPA). These experts believe that the proposed MRLs for avilamycin and oxytetracycline do not appear to pose a risk of increasing the development of resistance to antibiotics.

A new GM source of lipase (A435) - Draft Assessment

Currently, food manufacturers are permitted to use the enzyme lipase as a processing aid when derived from several sources, including a genetically modified strain of the source organism *Aspergillus oryzae*. An application has been made for approval to use a different strain of genetically modified *A. oryzae*. Lipase produced in this way has technological advantages in the production process.

Because the use of lipase from the new GM source is technologically justified and poses no additional risks to public health and safety, ANZFA is proposing to recommend that the Food Standards Code should be amended to permit its use.

Australian Launch of ANZFA's Information poster 'Food Labels What Do they Mean?'



Wednesday 17 October 2001

Until recently, packaged dog food carried nutrition information on the label — human food did not, according to Dr Rosemary Stanton. She was speaking at the launch of an information poster developed by ANZFA to help consumers understand new food labelling, and a new nutrition advice service made available by Sanitarium.

Dr Stanton pointed out that the cost of diet related health problems amounted to billions of dollars and was increasing. 'For instance, we had to change the name of adult-onset diabetes to type two diabetes as it is now occurring in children. Incidences of type two diabetes in Australia has doubled in the last twenty years. Obesity, high blood pressure, gall stones and many types of cancer and osteoporosis are also increasing. Australia faces a huge blow out in health care costs if we don't do something about the poor diets many people choose —largely, I believe, under the influence of persuasive advertising.

'Today, I'm pleased that something is being done to help Australians know more about what is in their food. I'm delighted to launch a consumer information campaign designed to help people understand the new labelling laws which are going to make it mandatory for the important ingredients to be listed under percentages of defining ingredients. Many people will ignore the nutrition information panels, but for the many people who care about the nutritional value of what they're eating, the information will be a revelation.

'Many people try to do the right thing when choosing foods, but if they don't have the right information at their fingertips, it can be difficult.

'Many of those who have high blood cholesterol, for instance, try to do something about it by avoiding animal fats which they know are a source of saturated fat. Many of them read ingredient lists searching for things that say 'vegetable', as in vegetable fat, vegetable oil or vegetable shortening, because they're trying to follow their doctor's instruction to give diet a go before they turn to expensive cholesterol reducing drugs. Many of these people fail, because they did not know that some of the vegetable fats have more saturated fat than beef dripping or lard. The new nutrition information panels, which includes saturated

fat, will help these people make appropriate and wise choices', Dr Stanton said.

She also paid tribute to ANZFA's efforts to make life easier for small food companies in particular, by introducing an automated internet-based calculator so that companies can calculate the nutrition information panels by entering the recipe for the product into the calculator. 'I think this will be enormously helpful', she said.

Dr Stanton said that often when she wrote to food companies asking if they realised that the information on their label was totally wrong, many of them wrote back to say they didn't know that. She said that this applied not only to food labels, but also to some of the media releases that the fresh food companies put out which relied for their information on unreliable sources such as magazine articles.

'It is very appropriate that this launch is held during National Nutrition Week', Dr Stanton concluded. I think its up to all of us to help Australians choose a healthier diet and lifestyle. The advent of better labelling on packaged foods and the widespread dissemination of information through Woolworths and Coles and also through doctors surgeries will make it much easier for the growing percentage of people who are interested in food and good nutrition to make wise choices. I believe better health will follow.'

ANZFA's Managing Director, Ian Lindenmayer, joined Dr Stanton at the launch in praising the high level of cooperation between retail, manufacturing and import sectors of the food industry, along with public health, consumer and other organisations helping

ANZFA develop material to go into the food labelling poster and in bringing the poster to consumers.

Mr Lindenmayer said he was delighted that Sanitarium had organised the launch and that it was informing its consumers about the labelling changes. 'Sanitarium has also carried out some valuable market research into what consumers think about the importance of food labelling', Mr Lindenmayer said. 'This research will complement a study recently commissioned by ANZFA'

The Manager of Sanitarium's Nutrition Education Service, Ms Kathy McDonald said that the company had produced a range of free nutrition brochures and fact sheets in response to the changes in food labelling. 'The research shows that there is a gap in consumer access to knowledge and to tools to allow them to understand and use the important information on food labels', Ms McDonald says. 'So the company decided to equip people with tools they need to better understand food labels in a way that would enable them to make informed choices about the food they eat.'

The research was conducted by Newspoll and was in the form of a random telephone questionnaire to primary grocery buyers in main capital cities of Australia. It was in two phases. The first phase in November last year showed that people wanted more information on food labels. The second phase in September this

year, confirmed that finding and also showed that people needed help in understanding all the information.

The following is a summary of the research results.

- 94% of main grocery shoppers for their household are aware of Nutrition Information Panels on food products.
- 75% of main grocery shoppers (which represents approximately 4.6 million people) say they pay a lot, or a fair amount, of attention to the nutritional content of the food they purchase.
- Females place more importance on nutritional content of food with 82% saying they pay a lot or a fair amount of attention to it, compared to 61% of men.
- More than nine out of 10 main grocery shoppers (96%) believe it is important to have Nutrition Information Panels on food products.
- 86% of women rate displaying Nutrition Information Panels on food packaging as of very high importance, compared to 68% of men.
- 60% of grocery shoppers claim to read the Nutrition Information Panel when they purchase a product for the first time. Far more females than males read Nutrition Information Panels all or most of the time when buying a new product.
- Only one in five main grocery shoppers who read the Nutrition Information Panel claim to understand all the information.
- 86% of main grocery shoppers would find information explaining Nutrition Information Panels helpful.
- 90% of female shoppers would find information on how to read Nutrition Information Panels helpful, compared to 77% of men.
- 70% of grocery shoppers support the idea of Sanitarium providing an information helpline where you can contact a nutritionist — again this was in particularly high demand among females.

Newspoll study conducted September 25-27

The full text of talks delivered at this launch are available on the ANZFA website at <http://www.anzfa.gov.au/mediareleasespublications/speeches/speeches2001/launchofeducationpac1100.cfm>

New Zealand launch of the Food Labelling poster

The Hon. Annette King, Minister for Health will launch ANZFA's information poster 'Food labels – What do they mean?', at the New Zealand Nutrition Foundation Seminar – The Carbohydrate Advantage on 14 November 2001.

More details of the launch will be in the next issue of Food Standards News.

ANZFA's new process for applications

One of the major challenges for ANZFA this year, has been to improve our processes for dealing with applications to better balance the information we provide for different audiences, consult effectively with stakeholder groups and keep people better informed while at the same time reducing our workload.

ANZFA's General Manager (Strategy and Operations), Claire Pontin said 'We have been criticised in the past for going through the motions of consulting with stakeholders while having already made up our minds and, therefore, not really listening.

'This year, we re-examined our entire process and have made changes which, we are confident, will vastly improve our relationships with stakeholders in the future and will have a lot of benefits for ANZFA.

'We are going to consult with stakeholders a lot earlier in the process. When we get an application we will put out a discussion paper to stakeholders which will provide background information on the application and seek input on the issues. This will allow us to share our developing thoughts on an issue so that stakeholders have the opportunity to help shape our thought processes. This will also allow us to be more responsive and to acknowledge that we've picked up stakeholders' ideas. We believe that, although this will mean more work early in the process, it will save a lot of work to fix problems later. It

will assist our stakeholders in helping us to identify and analyse our options.

'When we complete our detailed assessment of the issue, taking stakeholder submissions into account, we will prepare a draft amendment. When endorsed by the Board this will go out again for consultation.

'In the past, papers relating to applications have had to be re-written a number of times — when they went to the Board — when they went to ministers — when they went out for consultation. This was considered necessary because different audiences needed to know different things and sometimes needed different types of language. When we really thought about this problem, we realised that we could save a lot of work by writing one set of papers for everyone which would mean that stakeholders have fuller information and more insight into the logic we used to come up with our recommendation.

'The new style papers will have three components.

- A detailed scientific risk assessment — looking at the application from a scientific viewpoint.
- A risk management decision paper — outlining what the problem is that we are trying to fix, what our options are for fixing it, and the likely impacts and risk of each option.

- The executive summary — giving our recommendation and explaining our reasoning for that recommendation. We will use as plain English as possible.

'The paper will also have, as an attachment, a summary of the submissions we have received on the issue. This will allow stakeholders to check that we have fairly summarised their position, and that we have taken their submission into account in forming our recommendation.

'The Executive Summary may well be the only part that most people will read on most issues. However, also providing the scientific information and the impacts and risks of the different options will allow those stakeholders who have a particular interest to get more detail if they wish.

'Along with our reports, the submissions will also be available on our website to allow stakeholders to see what other people have said. They will then be able to make any comments on these, also on the internet. We have increased our computer capacity to allow this.

'In the next year, these changes will make our processes more open and transparent and empower our stakeholders in the decision making process as well as saving us time and effort.'

For more information see the Fact sheet ANZFA's new process for application on our website.

Korean delegation visit ANZFA

An official delegation from the Korean Food and Drug Administration visited ANZFA on Monday 12 November 2001, as part of a study tour of Australia. The delegation included the Director of Food circulation Division, Mr Kim, Young Seon and the Deputy Director of Food safety Division, Mr Choi Seung Duk. The main objective of the delegation's visit to ANZFA was to learn about the mechanisms of food regulation in Australia including the control of distribution of illegal or unsanitary food products in the market, food recall system and operational guidance provided to imported food inspection. The ANZFA Chief Scientist, Dr Marion Healy presented an overview of ANZFA and ANZFA staff presented additional information specific to the various programs in ANZFA. Ms Fiona Jolly, Regional Programs Manager, chaired the visit program.



The Korean delegation that recently visited ANZFA. The group consisted of representatives from the Korean Food and Drug Administration and the Korean Health Industry Development Institute (KHIDI), the Ministry of Health and Welfare.

Acting Chief Scientist, Dr Chris Branson, discusses ANZFA's concern about some soy and oyster sauces sold in Australia and New Zealand

Soy and oyster sauces have been in the news again recently because of doubts over the safety of some, but not all, brands that are produced using a non-traditional method.

The use of acid-hydrolyzed vegetable protein (acid-HVP) is an alternative way of producing soy and oyster sauces. Traditionally, these sauces are made using a fermentation or brewing process.

Acid-HVP is produced by breaking down a vegetable protein, such as soy, with hydrochloric acid. Sometimes during this process, two undesirable chemical contaminants: 3-chloro-1,2-propanediol (3-MCPD) and 1,3-dichloro-2-propanol (1,3-DCP) may develop.

The possibility that these two related compounds, known as chloropropanols, may occur during the acid hydrolysis of vegetable protein has been known for some time. Although the way these compounds are formed is not completely understood, 3-MCPD is believed to be the precursor of 1,3-DCP. If these compounds are present, the level of 3-MCPD tends to be much higher than the level of 1,3-DCP.

In the past, 3-MCPD has been detected in a range of savory foods and ingredients but most notably in soy sauce and oyster sauce. The reason for this is thought to be due to the relatively high level of acid-HVP in these products.

1,3-DCP has also been detected in acid-HVP and in soy and oyster sauce but its presence in other foods and ingredients has not been investigated to the same extent as 3-MCPD. This is largely because even if 1,3-DCP is present, the level is typically very low and often close to the limit of detection of the current testing methods.

Both 3-MCPD and 1,3-DCP have been the subject of investigation for several years. The Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Contaminants and Food Additives (JECFA) in June of this year reviewed the latest toxicology data for both contaminants. The Committee's advice is widely accepted internationally and is used by many governments to establish food standards. While JECFA has found that the available data on 3-MCPD do not clearly indicate that this compound is carcinogenic, they do indicate that it may cause kidney damage and, for this reason, it is prudent to reduce the level of this contaminant in foods.

The available data for 1,3-DCP on the other hand suggests that this compound should be regarded as a genotoxic carcinogen. That is, it has the potential to directly damage genetic material and has been shown in laboratory tests to induce a variety of tumors in rats.

The potential to develop cancer is linked to the consumption of foods containing these

contaminants, on a regular basis and over a long period of time. The occasional consumption of soy and oyster sauces is unlikely to cause any adverse health effects.

Survey results of soy and oyster sauces from Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States all show that the distribution of 3-MCPD is highly skewed with a large number of products having a low or undetectable level and a relatively small number having a high level. Brand loyalty may result in the regular consumption of a highly contaminated product so action to restrict the level of exposure is justified.

Some manufacturers of acid HVP and soy and oyster sauces have been making good progress to limit the development of the two contaminants. But soy and oyster sauces tend to have a long shelf life or "best before" period so not all products on the market will necessarily reflect these improvements.

ANZFA has approached the problem of the contaminants on a number of fronts: consumer health warnings; further testing of soy and oyster sauces; working with the States, Territories and major retailers to recall the contaminated products; and recommending that a maximum limit be set for both compounds in soy and oyster sauces.

A purported relationship between the level of the two contaminants has been the basis of regulation in some countries, that is, the maximum level of the more common contaminant (3-MCPD) is set low enough to limit the exposure to the other contaminant (1,3-DCP). The experts at ANZFA are not convinced that this relationship is sufficiently understood and have therefore decided to recommend that a maximum level be set in the Food Standards Code for both contaminants. In the case of 1,3-DCP, this level will be set at the current limit of detection which means, effectively, that any level of 1,3-DCP is unacceptable.

Questions remain however about what other products sold in Australia and New Zealand may contain the contaminants given that acid-HVP is a common ingredient in a number of savory foods. Few foods do contain acid-HVP at the level found in soy and oyster sauce so the potential exposure to the contaminants is likely to be limited. ANZFA plans to work with the States and Territories to test a range of other products containing acid-HVP for the contaminants. Should any other product prove to be of concern, the appropriate action will be taken.

More information

Chloropropanol test results for the soy and oyster sauces of concern to ANZFA are available on the web site <http://www.anzfa.gov.au/mediareleasespublications/factsheets/factsheets2001/>

ANZFA's electronic publications

ANZFA is now moving to electronic publication. With the redesign of our website, which is getting an average 20,000 users a day, we are finding that people can access our publications quicker through the web. All our publications, including brochures and fact sheets, will be available free of charge on the website. Hard copies of major publications, such as the Food Standards Code, Safefood Australia and the user guides, are also available on subscription through the publishers Anstat (see back page for contact details).

Renaming of Publication

The publication 'FoodWatch Australia New Zealand' has been renamed to "Food Surveillance Australia New Zealand".

Food Surveillance Australia New Zealand can be found on our website

www.anzfa.gov.au/mediareleasespublications/foods-surveillance

All contact details for the publication will remain the same.

2000-2001 Annual Report now available

ANZFA's Annual Report for 2000-2001 was tabled in the Australian Parliament on 31 October 2001.

Copies are available on the ANZFA website www.anzfa.gov.au or www.anzfa.govt.nz.

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ANZFA's **Food Code Hotline** provides information on the new standards.
 Call **1 300 652 166** Australia (local call cost), **0 800 441 571** New Zealand
 Email: advice@anzfa.gov.au

What is ANZFA?

ANZFA's role is to protect the health and safety of people in Australia and New Zealand through the maintenance of a safe food supply.

ANZFA is a partnership between ten governments: the Federal, State and Territory governments of Australia and the New Zealand Government. It is a statutory authority under Australian Commonwealth law and an independent, expert body.

ANZFA is responsible for developing, varying and reviewing standards for food available in Australia and New Zealand and for a range of other functions including coordinating national food surveillance and recall systems, conducting research, assessing policies about imported food and developing codes of practice with industry.

ANZFA staff include toxicologists, microbiologists, food technologists, nutritionists and a range of professionals who provide legal, communications, policy and administrative advice.

ANZFA contact details

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Call the **Food Code Hotline** for information on the new standards on **1 300 652 166** in Australia or **0 800 441 571** in New Zealand.
 Email: advice@anzfa.gov.au

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