

# FOOD STANDARDS NEWS



The Newsletter of Food Standards Australia New Zealand

October 2002



FROM THE  
MANAGING  
DIRECTOR'S  
DESK

Elsewhere in this newsletter is an article on the development of primary production and processing standards for Australia. This is an important new task for FSANZ and one which has the potential to make important improvements to the food regulatory system.

Over a long period, there has been discussion about the need to have a single mechanism for the development of food standards covering primary production as well as processing, manufacture, labelling and sale of foods. The primary reason for this is that the nature of primary produce, particularly its safety, has a major bearing on the safety and other characteristics of foods which appear on supermarket shelves.

Initially we had expected many primary industry bodies to resist the imposition on them of production and processing standards as an unnecessary further burden. We are delighted to have been proven wrong. Industry associations from a number of major sectors have approached us seeking priority for the development of standards covering their sectors.

A major driver appears to be the growing recognition of the importance of safety in the maintenance and development of consumer confidence domestically and overseas. This is of course crucial to retaining and building market share. There is also recognition that a few poor performers can damage the reputation of an entire sector.

We are already well under way with a wine standard – but this is primarily to preserve the provisions from the old Food Standards Code which are critically important to maintaining and building on Australia's position as a major wine exporter. There are also, of course, important spin off benefits to domestic consumers. My key point here is that we are not starting out from scratch with wine.

We are however starting out fresh with the development of a new seafood standard in that there is no pre-existing standard in place. There has however been some good preparatory work done by the industry that will assist us in moving this project along.

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## New directions for primary production and processing standards

On 1 July 2002, FSANZ assumed sole responsibility for the setting of primary production and processing standards within Australia. Previously, this responsibility had rested with agricultural portfolios at various Commonwealth and/or State levels.

This new era of food regulation means that, for the first time, all food standards to be adopted nationally are considered through a whole of chain (paddock-to-plate) approach.

Responsibility for developing domestic food regulations and standards is now covered by a single national framework that operates as a partnership between the Commonwealth and the State and Territory Governments and the Government of New Zealand. The standards for primary production and processing developed by FSANZ will apply only to Australian products.

The new regulatory framework includes the recently developed Ministerial Guidelines, Model and Protocol for the Development of

Primary Product and Processing Standards in Australia. These documents ensure the standard setting process is thorough, effective and consistent with existing mechanisms governing food law.

A key component of the Protocol for the Development of Primary Production and Processing Standards is the establishment of commodity Standards Development Committees or (SDCs). A SDC will be appointed under the direction of the FSANZ Board and will consist of members from industry, government, research bodies and consumer organisations.

The role of each SDC will be to :

- inject primary production and processing expertise into the process;
- ensure stakeholders are actively involved in the development of recommendations on the standards;

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« From the Managing Director cont.

We are already getting a strong message that this will be a large and complex task. The complexity arises from the diversity of components in the seafood industry with major differences in the environment and hazards across the various sub-sectors including fin fish, crustacea and shellfish.

There are also different challenges facing aquaculture and different safety issues between harvest and processing stages. Further complexity arises from the diversity of environments and the need to ensure that the standards meet the requirements of the widely differing regions of Australia.

The size and complexity of the task will require a major effort not only from staff and Board members of FSANZ but also from representatives of industry, research groups, the consumer movement and State and Territory regulatory staff.

We will also need the active involvement of all parties in solving one of the major challenges we face – lack of reliable comprehensive published data on the safety of products and processes. We know that a great deal of raw data exists in many businesses and industry associations and State and Territory government agencies. The sharing of this will be critically important to making good progress on the new standard for seafood – and for other sectors now in the queue.

#### Compliance with the new Code

Finally, let me remind everyone affected by the transition to the new *Food Standards Code* on 20 December 2002 that there are fewer than 100 days left to achieve compliance for your food products.

Food that has been manufactured under the old rules prior to 20 December and is in the distribution system can remain on supermarket shelves until sold, but for no longer than 12 months or 24 months for long-life items.

However, it is in everyone's interests for supermarket foods to be fully compliant with the labelling requirements of the new Code as quickly as possible. Consumers have been waiting two years for the new labelling laws to come into effect and I believe they have every right to expect the information that they have been promised.

Manufacturers who procrastinate over the provision of this information will, at best, be guilty of short-changing their customers. At worst, they may be selling unlawful products and may well come to the attention of environmental health officers from local councils.

Our Parliamentary Secretary, the Hon Trish Worth, commenced a countdown on 20 August to the transition to the new Code as yet another reminder to those who have put off reviewing their products that they need to pull out the stops if they want to keep those products in the market.

Ian Lindenmayer  
Managing Director

## New user guides for the new Code

In the countdown to the joint Food Standards Code becoming the sole set of food standards for Australia and New Zealand, FSANZ is continuing to provide resources to assist the food industry interpret and comply with the new requirements. The backbone of advisory resources is the Advice Line for the new Code.

The Advice Line provides both an email and phone (local call rates) service for food manufacturers who have questions on specific standards. The Line has been under heavy demand in recent months and FSANZ has added two new staff, Ian Powick and Peter Keegan, to help answer on average 80-100 inquiries per day. Ian and Peter join Fiona Hodges who has been the mainstay of the Advice Line since its commencement in early 2001.

Complementing the Advice Line menu is a range of advisory services on the FSANZ website. These are listed under the Advice for Industry link and include the new Code, fact sheets and user guides on various aspects of the Code, a nutrition panel calculator, and

contact information for local food enforcement agencies.

The latest addition to this information resource are two new user guides: *Representations About Food*, which provides advice on voluntary claims made on food, and *Flavourings and Flavour Enhancers*, which is intended to help manufacturers and other users identify, interpret and apply information relevant to flavourings and flavour enhancers in the new Code.

Also new is an updated version of the user guide to Nutrition Information Labelling. It provides advice and examples on when nutrition information is required and the way in which it must be presented.

Fourteen other user guides are also available free of charge on the FSANZ website and together these explain all facets of the new Code. A hard copy version of the user guides and Code itself can also be purchased by subscription through ANSTAT (see FSANZ website for details).

#### « New directions for primary production and processing standards cont.

- report and make recommendations to FSANZ on technical issues;
- identify other relevant food and non-food related industry linkages; and
- maintain transparency throughout the standards setting process.

Food safety standards may be developed for a number of primary industry sectors, including seafood, meat, dairy, grains, horticulture, honey, poultry and egg production. Once completed, they will be incorporated into a new Chapter 4 of the *Food Standards Code* and will be adopted by reference and without amendment into State and Territory food law for the purpose of enforcement.

The primary production and processing standards will be developed through established FSANZ processes, utilising a scientific risk assessment to inform the most appropriate risk management solutions.

In keeping with the FSANZ's statutory requirements, the standards development process will involve public consultation with all primary industry sectors, stakeholders and interested parties and will take into account areas where primary production codes of practice currently exist.

The emphasis of the future standards will be on food safety and consideration will be given to the mitigation of food safety hazards by using a food safety plan approach. The new primary production and processing standards will be outcome-based and be consistent with Chapter 3 of the *Food Standards Code*.

The FSANZ Board has agreed in principle that the first primary production and processing food safety standard will be developed for seafood. The standards development process for seafood is expected to commence in October 2002, after the FSANZ Board has determined the membership of the Standards Development Committee for Seafood.

Two rounds of public comment will be sought from all interested parties. The first round of comments will be invited after the Initial Assessment stage of the process, seeking input about the nature of the issues which regulation of seafood may address. The second round will seek comments on the proposed Draft Assessment that will deal with the content of any proposed standard.

Access to information throughout each stage of the standards development process will be facilitated through a communication strategy that includes industry forums, public advertising and the posting of information for comment on the FSANZ website.

# Chairman Knowles presents FSANZ staff awards

Last month, FSANZ staff hosted a meet-the-Board function in Canberra, during which FSANZ Board Chairman Rob Knowles presented a number of Staff Achievement Awards.

These awards were started by the former ANZFA and have been continued into the new FSANZ organisation. They take the form of Certificates of Appreciation and a winner of the Staff Achievement Award itself.

**Fiona Hodges** won the Staff Achievement Award "for an outstanding level of client service through her personal commitment to delivering information to stakeholders through the FSANZ Advice Line".

Certificates of Appreciation for "high level of client service" and/or "high level of corporate achievement" were presented to:

**Sandra Buick** (presentation of major briefing papers)

**Vicki Pow** (setting up the new FSANZ website)

**Tracey Rumble** (providing advice to stakeholders on general labelling)

**Tony Singer** (developing and implementing the streamlining project for assessment reports)

**Julie Teague** (setting up the new FSANZ website)

**Luisa Trevisan** (developing and maintaining the nutrition panel calculator)



Winner of Staff Achievement Award, Fiona Hodges, with FSANZ Chairman, Rob Knowles.

# Sponsorship opportunities for Food Safety Week

Would your organisation like to be associated with reducing the millions of cases of food poisoning in Australia each year?

Food Safety Week is part of an education campaign which puts out simple messages to educate the public about how to handle food safely. Managed by the Food Safety Information Council, the six key messages are

- Keep hot food steaming hot
- Keep cold food refrigerated
- Cook food properly
- Separate raw and cooked food
- Keep kitchen and utensils clean
- Wash hands with soap and dry thoroughly.

As well as publicising these messages, the campaign each year concentrates attention on a particular aspect of food safety.

Last year's campaign 'Chill out this summer', concentrated on correct fridge temperatures and storing food properly in the fridge. The campaign was a great success, achieving very wide spread television and newspaper coverage, as well as over 100 hours of radio time.

The 2002 campaign (11-17 November) is aimed at 'Food Safety at School' and will target senior primary and secondary school students. It will draw attention to safety measures such as correct temperature control, food handling and hand washing. As this age group will be the professional and domestic cooks of the future, now is a great time to get food safety messages to them.

The Food Safety Information Council is a non-profit group of government, industry and professional associations. The Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing has committed to the campaign over the next few years as a major sponsor but additional sponsorship is needed to ensure that the Council can achieve the maximum publicity for its messages.

Sponsorship opportunities are specifically designed to deliver mutually beneficial business opportunities for the Council in partnership with industry.

Would you like to know more about sponsorship opportunities? Contact: Tania Bradley, Project Officer, Food Safety Information Council on 0407 626 688 for more information.



Food Safety Information Council (FSIC) recently participated in the Amazing World of Science exhibition in Canberra as part of National Science Week. Brigitte Cox from Food Science Australia (far right) is pictured demonstrating the 'Glitter bug'.

# Nutrition labelling could save up to 460 lives a year

Food manufacturers who have not finalised food labelling changes have only four months to do so, Parliamentary Secretary to the Commonwealth Minister for Health and Ageing, Trish Worth, warned last month.

Ms Worth said the new labelling changes must appear on packaged foods made on or after 20 December 2002.

It is estimated that 320 to 460 lives could be saved each year in Australia and New Zealand with the introduction of mandatory nutrition labelling.

Ms Worth said that while most food businesses have indicated they have made the necessary changes to their food labelling or have a process in place to achieve this soon, a few businesses will have to work hard to meet the 20 December deadline.

"I congratulate the vast majority of food businesses, large and small, that have already made these labelling changes," Ms Worth said.

"However, preliminary research on labelling issues by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ -formerly ANZFA) shows that a number of small to medium food businesses would not make the required labelling changes by 20 December. This is despite the two-year

implementation period given to food businesses to make these important changes.

"These labelling changes are not cosmetic. They have major public health implications. Diet related risk factors, including high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, obesity (in both adults and children) and Type 2 diabetes, account for 13 per cent of Australia and New Zealand's burden of disease. This costs the health system between \$32 million and \$42 million each year – with much more in terms of personal costs for people suffering diet-related disease.

"Experience in the United States shows that, when mandatory nutrition labelling was introduced, a significant proportion of consumers began to make healthier food choices.

"I strongly urge those remaining food businesses that are not ready to seek advice from FSANZ as soon as possible and make the changes. This is also a timely opportunity for professional and food industry organisations to remind their members of the need to make the labelling changes," Ms Worth said.

The new labels must include, where appropriate, nutrition information and the percentage of the characterising ingredient

(such as the percentage of strawberries in strawberry yoghurt), new date markings and full disclosure of major allergens.

Ms Worth said Ministers at the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Council meeting in May agreed that the labelling deadline would not be extended. However, Ministers did agree to allow food products without the labelling changes made before 20 December 2002 to remain on the supermarket shelves until used up. This period must be for no longer than 12 months for most products and 24 months for long life products.

"The changes have been well publicised and a wide range of material to assist industry has been made available by FSANZ, including an easy-to-use nutrition panel calculator on their web site and a toll-free advice line," Ms Worth said.

"Previous FSANZ research shows that consumers value the new information available on labels and I am sure that they will use it to make healthy and informed food choices."

Information about the labelling changes can be obtained from the FSANZ website [www.foodstandards.gov.au](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au) or by calling 1300 652 166 or emailing [advice@foodstandards.gov.au](mailto:advice@foodstandards.gov.au).

## FSANZ meets NZFSA



Recently in Sydney Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) met members of the newly formed New Zealand Food Safety Authority (NZFSA).

Pictured Left to right (front row) Jim Sim (NZFSA), Carol Inkster (NZFSA), Dr Andrew McKenzie (NZFSA) and Sandra Daly (NZFSA); (second row) Peter Lihne (FSANZ), Dr Marion Healy (FSANZ) and Tim Knox (NZFSA); (back row) Debbie Morris (NZFSA), Dr Hugh Baber (FSANZ) and Neil McLeod (NZFSA).

# Risk assessment training in Vietnam

FSANZ's Regional Projects Program recently planned and managed a two-week training course in Vietnam on the scientific risk assessment of chemical contaminants, natural toxicants, pesticide levels and additives in food.

The course was delivered by a number of FSANZ's scientific experts.

The training was conducted in Hanoi with financial assistance from AusAID and the APEC Trade and Investment Liberalization Fund. The Vietnam Ministry of Science Technology and Environment and the World Health Organization (WHO) also provided professional and logistical assistance.

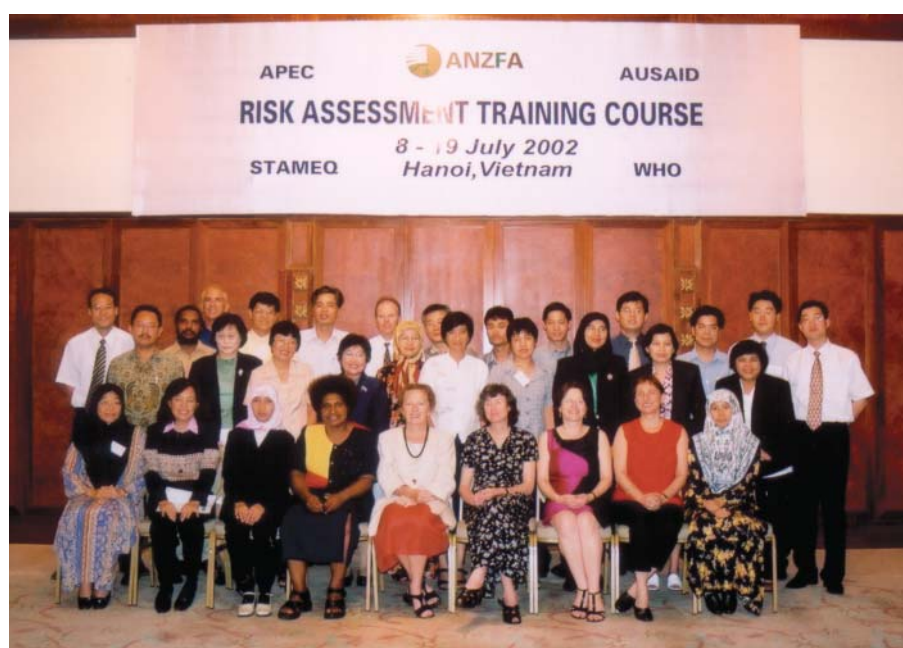
The training focused on:

- the importance of scientific risk assessment of chemicals in food as an integral part of the whole food safety framework and how it can be used as a tool in ensuring a safe food supply;
- the consistent risk assessment methods in the Asia Pacific region; and
- the assistance in providing a scientific basis for food regulatory decisions.

Participants were drawn from the public health, agriculture and fisheries portfolios from 12 countries in the Asia Pacific region: Brunei Darussalam, Chinese Taipei, Hong Kong,

Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, People's Republic of China, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. On completion of the training, each participant gained a solid foundation in the chemical risk assessment of food.

The course was well received by participants and accorded considerable praise by WHO officers involved. A second training course is to be conducted in Ho Chi Minh City in early 2003 and will concentrate on microbiological risk assessment.



Attendees at the Risk Assessment Training Course, Hanoi, Vietnam

## Maori input to FSANZ's work

In 2000, the former ANZFA set up a Maori Reference Group (MRG) to advise it on Maori culture and community participation in relation to food standards development and related issues. The MRG consists of Maori with expertise in public health, nutrition and food industry, with a kaumatua (tribal elder) and FSANZ staff.

Maori members of the MRG are:

Mr Rongo Wirepa (kaumatua)  
Ms Pania Hammond (food technologist)  
Ms Makuini McKerchar (dietitian)  
Ms Laurie Wharemate (dietitian)

FSANZ Board member Ms Hikihiki Pihema acts as a link between the MRG and the Board.

The MRG recently developed a framework to act as a foundation for effective relations between Maori and FSANZ. The document – *Involving Maori in FSANZ. A framework for action based on the Treaty of Waitangi* – was endorsed by the FSANZ Board last month.

Maori take a special interest in a number of food issues, including:

- technical and scientific interest, for example, food production, labelling issues and food export;
- food standards issues – such as GM foods – that impact on indigenous cultural and property rights;
- Maori public health issues, including safe food campaigns, diet, nutrition, additives, but with a local focus on issues affecting Maori;
- Maori environmental health interests; and
- a general Maori consumer interest.

The Treaty framework clarifies the respective roles and responsibilities of Maori and FSANZ, based on the Treaty of Waitangi principles, the intergovernmental agreement between Australia and New Zealand and legislative

responsibilities in relation to food standards development.

The MRG has already started work on an action plan to implement the Treaty framework, including:

- a work plan highlighting key meetings and activities for the MRG. A major activity proposed will be the MRG hosting two or three hui (meetings) in the latter part of 2002;
- a flow chart illustrating Maori consultation and involvement with key agencies and communities;
- an information brochure highlighting FSANZ's processes and decision-making framework; and
- priority areas for Maori involvement based on the FSANZ Standards work plan as a guide.

## 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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Call The **Food Code Hotline** for information on the new standards on **1300 652 166** in Australia or **0 800 441 571** in New Zealand or email: [advice@foodstandards.gov.au](mailto:advice@foodstandards.gov.au)

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# Chief Scientist Dr Marion Healy looks at FSANZ's safety assessment of BSE

The most challenging food-borne illness to emerge over the past decade is variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (vCJD). This is a rare and fatal neuro-degenerative disease that is characterised by neurological symptoms including psychiatric symptoms, difficulty in walking, involuntary movements and loss of speech. It is now accepted that vCJD and bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), or 'mad cow' disease in cattle, are caused by the same agent.

During 2000, BSE emerged in countries previously considered free of the disease and the incidence of BSE in low incidence countries increased. Consequently, the then ANZFA introduced requirements to address the human health risk from BSE in beef and beef derived products.

The *Food Standards Code* was amended on 18 July 2001, as an urgent measure, to require that beef and beef products must be derived from cattle free of BSE. ANZFA/FSANZ has now undertaken a comprehensive review of the available scientific evidence to assess the risk to human health from the consumption of various beef and beef products derived from cattle carrying the BSE agent.

The evidence suggesting that vCJD is caused by transmission of the BSE agent to humans is, in part, derived from the temporal and geographical association between the vCJD and BSE diseases. Biological strain typing and molecular characterisation also indicates that the same agent causes the two diseases.

An analysis of transmission routes indicates that the BSE agent is transmitted to humans via food, although the extent and frequency of exposure to the BSE agent that is required to cause vCJD is unknown. The current

evidence suggests that a single oral dose is sufficient to cause BSE in cattle. Furthermore, the BSE agent is very resistant to traditional physical and chemical methods used for inactivating micro-organisms.

The risk to human health from different beef derived products is therefore dependent to a large extent on levels of the BSE agent in the beef tissues from which the food products are derived. The so-called 'specified risk material' (ie brain tissue and spinal cord and mechanically recovered meat) contains the highest levels of the BSE agent, with an estimated 95% of the infectivity being present in the central nervous tissue. These risk materials may be used in products such as small goods and canned beef products and the methods used to prepare these products (eg heat sterilisation) reduce infectivity to a limited extent only. Such products therefore pose a relatively high risk to human health.

Food-grade gelatine produced from animal hides poses a negligible risk to human health, although gelatine produced from bones using conventional processes is a higher risk food. The production of food grade tallow should result in very low levels of protein impurities, and its use as an ingredient in baked products such as cakes, biscuits and pastries poses a negligible risk to human health.

Finally, edible collagen, produced from bovine hides, and milk and milk products, do not appear to contain the BSE agent and therefore pose a negligible risk also.

FSANZ will be reviewing its regulatory requirements to take account of the outcomes of this risk assessment, which is available from the FSANZ website at [www.foodstandards.gov.au](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au) or [www.foodstandards.govt.nz](http://www.foodstandards.govt.nz).

## Have you got your copy of the Code?

There is less than 3 months to go until the new *Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code* comes into effect.

Are you aware that the new labelling changes must appear on packaged foods made on or after 20 December 2002? Do you know what these changes are?

The new labels must include, where appropriate, nutrition information and the percentage of the characterising

ingredient (such as the percentage of strawberries in strawberry yoghurt), new date markings and full disclosure of major allergens.

Act now! Take this opportunity to order your copy of the *Food Standards Code* and companion user guides. Details on how to order are on the FSANZ website, [www.foodstandards.gov.au](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au) or you may contact ANSTAT, phone 03 9278 1144 or order online <http://anzfa.anstat.com.au>