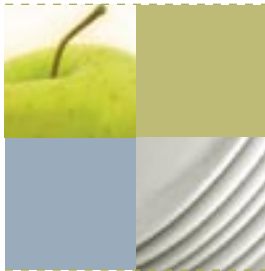




# FOOD SURVEILLANCE AUSTRALIA NEW ZEALAND

Food Standards Australia New Zealand

Summer/Autumn 2004



## Editorial

In addition to our regular items, this issue sees the reporting of different types of surveillance activities originating from different levels of government.

Firstly, this edition includes articles on two surveys that provide examples of the role played by the Food Surveillance Network in facilitating the coordination of surveillance activities across Australian jurisdictions and New Zealand. Both the pilot survey on the identity of fish species in Australia and the investigation of Sudan Dyes in chilli and paprika powders, have achieved outcomes that provide a meaningful national and bi-national perspective. The former survey in particular demonstrates effective collaboration between the States and Territories and FSANZ in investigating a complex issue from both the scientific and management perspective.

The Network also provides a valuable point of contact with jurisdictions on a range of survey planning issues, including eliciting comment on the general planning for the 22nd Australian Total Diet Survey. It is also developing into an effective forum for the consideration of enforcement, risk management and risk communication strategies before specific surveillance/monitoring activities commence.

Secondly, this edition includes articles on two surveys where baseline data has been collected that will be used for future evaluation of the impact on stakeholders of key changes to the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code. Please refer to the articles on artificially sweetened food as well as the consumer survey on allergen labelling.

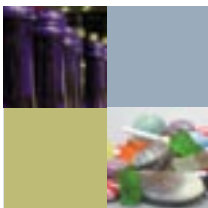
FSANZ is now working to finalise the evaluation activities for 2004 – 2008 that will underpin the Evaluation Strategy for this same

period. They will include activities associated with the proposed primary production and processing standards and regulatory measures for nutrition, health and related claims.

The Strategy will also provide options for evaluating other new regulatory measures implemented during this five-year period. The new Strategy will include follow-up activities from the previous 2001-2003 Strategy, designed to track changes after specific standards have been in place for at least two years.

## Acknowledgement

In the article on the survey of *Listeria monocytogenes* in cooked prawns, which appeared in the last edition of the newsletter-Spring 2003, we wish to acknowledge that Queensland Health and Scientific Services undertook microbiological analysis of the prawns.



## Food Recalls – Trends on the Web

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) has been collecting a variety of food recall data since 1990. This information has recently been collated and presented on the FSANZ Website to show:

- total annual food recalls since 1990;
- the percentage of food recalls initiated as a result of company testing, government testing or consumer complaints since 1998; and
- the cause of food recalls ranging from microbial contamination through to labelling errors since 1990.

Individual consumer-level recalls are posted on the FSANZ Web site within 48 hours of FSANZ being notified of the recall. This information is kept on the web for about 12 months.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) coordinates and monitors food recalls within Australia.<sup>1</sup> Food Recalls are conducted as a result of consultation between State and Territory Health Authorities and a sponsor - usually the product's manufacturer or importer.

### For more information

Use the link for extra food recall data

<http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/recallsurveillance/foodrecalls/foodrecallstatistics.cfm>

<sup>1</sup> In New Zealand, food recalls are co-ordinated by the New Zealand Food Safety Authority (NZFSA). Current New Zealand consumer recalls can be viewed using the following link - <http://www.consumer.org.nz/newssummary.asp?category=Recalls>

### What is a food recall?

A food recall is defined as "action taken to remove from sale, distribution and consumption foods which may pose an unacceptable safety risk to consumers".

A food recall may be initiated as a result of reports referred from a variety of sources - manufacturers, wholesalers, retailers, medical practitioners, government agencies (for example, the police or a health authority) and consumers. Recalls can be conducted at either the **trade** or **consumer** level.

# Are there any Sudan Dyes in Chilli and Paprika Powder?



A recent national survey of chilli and paprika powders found that there were no detections of Sudan I, II, III or IV in the products tested.



Recent international surveys, particularly in the United Kingdom, have found a number of chilli, paprika, relish and chutney products containing chilli powders, being contaminated with Sudan I and Sudan IV. The implicated products were primarily sourced from India.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ), in collaboration with all Australian States and Territories through the Food Surveillance Network, conducted a survey in March 2004 to determine if the red dyes-Sudan I, II, III or IV-were present in chilli and paprika powders available for sale in Australia. The Australian survey focussed on chilli and paprika powders from India and other Asian countries as these were considered to be the likely source of Sudan dyes based on the results of overseas surveys.

56 samples were collected throughout Australia and were analysed by AgriQuality Australia Pty Ltd. There were no detections of Sudan I, II, III or IV in any of the 56 samples tested and the following limits of detection applied:

Sudan I = 0.5 mg/kg;  
Sudan II and III = 1.0 mg/kg; and  
Sudan IV = 2.0 mg/kg.

Although a relatively small number of samples were tested, the results of this survey provides information to the Food Authorities that indicate that chilli and paprika powders available to the Australian public are not contaminated with Sudan dyes.

FSANZ and Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) will continue to liaise with the States, Territories and New Zealand on the appropriate level of testing of imported foods for these contaminants.

In addition a number of other outcomes were observed as part of this survey. In particular, the survey provided:

- a catalyst for a laboratory to develop the analytical capability to test for Sudan dyes in foods, thus enhancing domestic testing capabilities;



- insight into the great diversity of these products in the Australian market; and
- information on compliance with labelling requirements of the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code. The relevant enforcement agencies were informed of these samples that did not comply for them to follow up.

## What are Sudan dyes?

Sudan dyes are red colours that are not approved for use in food. There is limited evidence that Sudan dyes are carcinogenic in animals but no data are available in humans. Based on the available toxicological evidence and limited exposure to the products concerned, there is no immediate public health risk from exposure to products containing chilli contaminated with Sudan dyes.

## For further information

Contact: Jonathon Kite,  
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Follow the link below to read about the testing done by the New Zealand Food Safety Authority on imported chilli powders from India for Sudan I.

<http://www.nzfsa.govt.nz/consumers/food-safety/sudan-1/index.htm>

# Pilot survey on the identity of fish species sold throughout Australia

A collaborative pilot survey was recently conducted on the identity of fish species sold throughout Australia. Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) in the Australian Capital Territory and Health Departments in New South Wales, Northern Territory, South Australia, Queensland and Western Australia conducted the survey in September 2003.

Sampling was limited primarily to fish supplied as Barramundi and Red Emperor. These fish are nationally available, of a high market value and there is no ambiguity concerning the recognised marketing name of the fish. The Environmental Health Service of the Health Department of Western Australia coordinated the survey planning and sampling. The Western Australia Chemistry Centre performed the analysis using a DNA fingerprinting technique to discriminate between the acquired sample and a verified reference sample of both raw and cooked fish samples. Parallel testing of a number of the samples was also undertaken by Queensland Health Scientific Services using both protein based electrophoresis and a DNA based method. There was high concordance in results obtained from the different test methods and testing centres.



## Advice for buyers of fish

Consumers should:

- ask and confirm the name of the fish supplied before ordering - if the seller is not certain ask them to check with someone who is certain.
- remember that Australian Dietary Guidelines advise eating one or two fish meals per week for good health.

Retail/food service operators should:

- Clarify with the supplier whether they are using the accepted marketing name and use the scientific name to confirm if there is doubt. Ensure that your food safety plan includes a 'fish name protocol' for your business.
- Ask for and keep written evidence of the description of the fish that was supplied or have the type of fish sold documented on the invoice.

- Buy the book *Australian Seafood Handbook (Domestic and Imported Species)* and learn the distinguishing visual characteristics of the fish and the flesh (there are some characteristics). Gain experience preparing fish from known whole samples.
- Learn about The Australian Fish Names List so that you can talk about the issue with your customers. There is plenty of information on this at: [www.seafoodservices.com.au/fishnames](http://www.seafoodservices.com.au/fishnames).
- Ensure that your staff are conversant with this issue and understand the importance of consumers being able to make informed choices when purchasing. If in any doubt discuss this issue with your training provider and include in your training plan.

The supply of fish under the incorrect name may breach both food and trade practices legislation. If you have information or evidence of fish mislabelling, contact the Office of Fair Trading, local councils or Health Department in your State or Territory.

Both cooked and raw samples of fish were collected from the food service sector while raw fish samples were collected from wholesale and retail outlets. Officers from State and Territory governments purchased the samples of fish from various service establishments as purchased by consumers.

This pilot survey found that food service establishments had the lowest level of compliance with 43 out of 67 samples correctly identifying the fish, retailers showed 39 out of 44 samples were compliant and wholesalers showed 24 of 27 samples were compliant. While there were a relatively small

number of samples involved the pilot survey does indicate that a proportion of fish supplied are not correctly identified. The study also demonstrates excellent collaboration between the States and Territories and FSANZ in investigating a complex issue from both the scientific and management perspective.

This survey is timely, as FSANZ has been working closely with the seafood industry to develop purchasing advice to ensure that wholesalers, retailers and consumers are buying the correct fish.

### For more information

Read the full report *A Pilot Survey on the Identity of Fish Species as Sold through Food Outlets in Australia*, on the FSANZ website:

[www.foodstandards.gov.au](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au)

Also contact the Australian Fish Names List at

[www.seafoodservices.com.au/fishnames](http://www.seafoodservices.com.au/fishnames)

# How much artificially sweetened food do we eat?

## Survey on the consumption of intense sweeteners by Australians and New Zealanders

How much intensely (artificially) sweetened foods do Australians and New Zealanders consume? Has the amount consumed changed in recent years? Do the amounts of these sweeteners consumed exceed international health standards? Has the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code, where permissions are given for food additive use, been effective at controlling dietary exposure to intense sweeteners?

To answer these questions and more, Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) surveyed representative samples of Australians and New Zealanders aged 12 years and above, over a 6 month period in 2002-03. Telephone and diary techniques were used.



The survey has demonstrated that, almost without exception, Australians and New Zealanders consume intense sweeteners at levels that pose no appreciable risk to their health and safety. On average, those who participated in the survey had dietary exposures to the sweeteners studied (acesulphame-K, alitame, aspartame, cyclamates, saccharin, and sucralose) of less than 20% of the Acceptable Daily Intake (ADI), the reference health standard for food additives.

There have been increases since 1994 in the number of intensely sweetened foods available for sale, in the proportion of Australians consuming these products and in the daily consumption amount of intensely sweetened soft drinks and yoghurts. However overall dietary exposure to intense sweeteners, as a proportion of the ADI, has not increased significantly. This suggests that the Code is largely effective at controlling exposure to these food additives.

The only exception to this was in the case of cyclamates. Although average intakes were well below the ADI, the top 5% of cyclamate consumers in the 12 – 39 years age range had exposures that were at, or slightly above, the ADI for cyclamates. To reach this level of exposure, a 70 kg adult would need to drink more than 1.2 litres per day of cordial or soft drink containing cyclamates, per day, or a 50 kg adolescent would need to drink more than about 900 mL per day.

Overall, 58% of those studied consumed a food containing an intense sweetener in the week of the survey. Women, diabetics and those on weight control diets were more likely to use these foods. Diabetics and those with impaired glucose tolerance who consume foods containing intense sweeteners were not exposed to higher amounts of intense sweeteners than consumers of these types of foods who have neither of these medical conditions.

In 2000, as part of the review of the food additive standard, many specific permissions for food additives were changed to generic ones, applying across broad food categories. At this time, the maximum permitted level of cyclamates in some foods was reduced. FSANZ will carefully consider the survey findings relating to cyclamates in more detail before recommending any further change to the Food Standards Code.

## Background information

FSANZ surveyed representative samples of Australians and New Zealanders aged 12 years and above, over a 6 month period in 2002-03. Participants were asked, by telephone, to estimate amounts of these foods consumed over the previous seven days. A subset of these participants who consumed more than approximately 250 ml of diet soft drink or cordial or 3 to 4 serves of tabletop sweetener per day, or who had diabetes or impaired glucose tolerance, were then eligible to complete a seven day diary survey. The diary survey recorded consumption of individual brands of around 300 foods and drinks containing intense sweeteners. This information was combined with information on levels of intense sweeteners in these foods, to estimate their dietary exposure to each of the six sweeteners studied.

In assessing the public health and safety risk of intense sweeteners, dietary exposure is compared to internationally accepted health standards for each of these sweeteners. These standards are known as the Acceptable Daily Intake (ADI) and those for sweeteners have been adopted by the World Health Organisation and the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations. Food regulators aim to set food standards to ensure a population's exposure to food additives such as sweeteners does not exceed the ADI. However short term exposure above the ADI does not necessarily indicate a health risk as ADIs incorporate substantial safety margins and are based on lifetime exposure.

FSANZ's forerunner in Australia, the National Food Authority, conducted a similar survey of Australians aged 12-39 years, using the same survey technique, in 1994.

### For more information

Read the report on the *Survey on the consumption of intense sweeteners by Australians and New Zealanders* on the Food Standards Australia New Zealand website using the following link:

<http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/mediareleasespublications/publications/intensesweetenersurvey march2004/index.cfm>

# Have mineral levels in Australian fruits and vegetables changed since 1981-85?

A FSANZ study comparing the levels of six minerals in some 40 types of common fruits and vegetables has found no significant changes in values obtained between 1981-85 and those obtained in 2000-01.

The study was undertaken in 2002 by nutritionists in the Modelling, Evaluation and Surveillance Section of FSANZ, following several Australian media reports suggesting that nutrient levels in Australian horticultural produce are declining due to soil conditions and horticultural practices.

We Commissioned the Australian Government Analytical Laboratory (AGAL) to analyse the levels of six minerals - potassium, sodium, calcium, magnesium, iron and zinc - in 44 types of common Australian fruits and vegetables sampled in Melbourne in 2000-01. Levels were compared with some older values obtained by analyses conducted between 1981-85 for the same produce items purchased in Sydney. The earlier analyses were conducted by a University of New South Wales (UNSW) research team headed by Drs Heather Greenfield and Ron Wills.

In both cases the samples analysed were composite samples prepared from a number of separate purchases sourced from multiple retail outlets, different growing regions and/or from a range of producers. For some items such as apples, composite samples represented a single popular variety (e.g. 'Granny Smith' apples). For other items, composite samples represented whatever was available for retail sale under a common name (e.g. 'cauliflower'). For the latter samples, it is not known whether the varieties sampled in 2000-01 were the same as those sampled in 1981-85. The produce items are listed in Table 1.

**Table 2: Average mineral contents for 44 types of fruits and vegetables purchased in 1981-85 and 2000-01**

Mineral	1981-85 (mg per 100g)	2000-01 (mg per 100g)
Potassium	220	230
Sodium	8	9
Magnesium	11	15
Calcium	16	18
Iron	0.5	0.3
Zinc	0.3	0.2

**Table 1: Fruits And Vegetables Analysed**

Fruit	Vegetables
Apple - Red Delicious, Granny Smith and Golden Delicious	Bean
Avocado	Broccoli
Banana	Cabbage
Grape - Red Globe and Green Seedless	Capsicum - green and red
Kiwifruit	Carrot
Mandarin - Murcott, Ellendale and Imperial	Cauliflower
Mango	Celery
Nectarine	Cucumber
Orange - Navel and Valencia	Lettuce
Pear - Packham and Bartlett	Mushroom
Peach	Onion - white and brown
Pineapple	Pea
Plum - red and yellow	Potato - Coliban and Desiree
Rockmelon	Pumpkin - Jarrahdale and Butternut
Strawberry	Sweet corn
Tomato	Zucchini
Watermelon	

For all of the fruits and vegetables we calculated the average mineral contents for samples purchased in 1981-85 and again in 2000-01. These are listed in Table 2.

A comparison of the old and new values does not suggest any significant or consistent changes in mineral content over this time. While average potassium, sodium, magnesium and calcium levels are actually slightly higher in 2000-01, average iron and zinc levels are slightly lower in 2000-01.

Comparisons of the mineral levels measured at these two times should be made with caution for a number of reasons. Foods are biological materials and therefore innately variable. The samples were collected in different locations,

sometimes at different times of the year, possibly at different stages of ripeness and probably came from different growing regions. These factors could easily impact on mineral levels. Factors like storage and marketing conditions could also have an impact. In addition, in many cases the samples were different varieties. The 1981-85 analyses were conducted using a less sensitive analytical technique than the method used in 2000-01.

All of these factors mean that we are not really able to make direct comparisons between the old and new levels.

Based on the results of this small study, there does not seem to be any evidence that mineral levels in Australian horticultural produce are changing.

## For further information contact

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Section, FSANZ

phone: 02 6271 2213 or  
email: judy.cunningham@foodstandards.gov.au.

## In the pipeline...

Work on the 22nd Australian Total Diet Survey is progressing. Food Standards Australia New Zealand has sought requests for tender for the provision of analytical services (closed 30 April). Sampling and analysis will begin in July 2004.

The Food Safety Unit of the Victorian Department of Human Services has completed a study of Asian meats in relation to temperature control. This study included challenge testing of Chinese duck, chicken and

pork under various time/temperature profiles. Look for the results and outcomes in a future edition of the newsletter.

# GM Food Passes Labelling Tests

Studies in both New Zealand and Australia show that GM food complies with labelling requirements of *Food Standard 1.5.2 – Food Produced using Gene Technology*.

## Why do a survey?

The labelling standard for genetically modified (GM) food came into force in December 2001. New Zealand and Australian State and Territory enforcement agencies decided to investigate how well food businesses were complying with GM food labelling provisions of the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code (Standard 1.5.2). The standard requires any food, or food ingredient, or processing aid produced using gene technology and containing novel DNA, and/or novel protein to be labelled as 'genetically modified'. This food standard also allows up to 1% unintentional presence of GM food or ingredient in a final food.

## Who conducted the survey and how?

In **New Zealand**, the Ministry of Health began a compliance project in April 2002 following recommendations from the New Zealand Royal Commission on Genetic Modification. It was taken over by the New Zealand Food Safety Authority (NZFSA) on its establishment on 1 July 2002.

The **Australian** pilot study was a preliminary examination co-ordinated by the South Australian Department of Human Services and was carried out in collaboration with other States and Territories.

Although there were variations, both projects consisted of the auditing of food businesses, as well as testing of foods such as soy milk products and corn chips that could have contained genetically modified ingredients.

**Table 1. Food samples tested.**

New Zealand	
soy milks	13
tofu, vegetarian smallgoods	17
breads	14
baking mixes, flours	16
corn chips, tortillas, tacos	31
infant formulae, baby foods	7
meat smallgoods	13
soy bean, soy sprout	3
gluten free cakes	1
un-popped corn	1
mince pie	1
Australia	
soymilk	12
cornflakes	7
tacos	4
corn chips	13
bread	15

## What were they testing for?

### New Zealand

The New Zealand project included a large auditing component to examine the extent of documentation to support the source of ingredients/food being used in relation to non-GM status. Audits of 231 manufacturers and 38 importers were undertaken across New Zealand. 97 (45%) manufacturers audited used raw material/ingredients of soy and corn that are minimally processed. Manufacturers audited had chosen to source ingredients/foods that had not been genetically modified.

The Institute of Environmental Science & Research Ltd (ESR) in conjunction with the NZFSA undertook a Surveillance Testing Program of 103 food products that had the potential to be non-compliant. An additional 14 samples were collected from companies being audited and were tested. Table 1 describes the types of food collected and tested.

### Australia

For the Australian pilot study, the 36 manufacturers, importers or retailers that supplied the samples were asked to present evidence demonstrating the GM status of potential ingredients used in their products. This was undertaken to ascertain whether they had implemented management systems (i.e. documentation or testing) to determine the GM status of ingredients. 51 samples were also tested and are shown in Table 1.

## What did the survey find?

### In New Zealand

All of the 103 food products tested in the surveillance component of the survey complied with the Standard. However of the 14 additional samples collected in the course of auditing businesses, one imported product was found to be non-compliant with the Standard and was followed up with the importer concerned and the labelling was rectified.

The audits showed that most manufacturers had taken at least some steps to check the GM status of their products. 71% of manufacturers and 63% of importers had enough documentation to demonstrate they had made an adequate assessment of the status of their foods. The remainder had either incomplete or no documentation to determine the GM Status of their ingredients or foods.

### In Australia

The Australian Pilot Study found that all the samples tested complied with the Standard. The unapproved Starlink corn was **not** detected in any of the corn products tested.

Small traces of GM material were found in 10 of the 51 samples (5 soymilk, 3 taco and 2 corn chip samples). The GM material found was well below the 1% unintentional presence of GM food ingredients permitted before labelling is required. The four soymilks that were found to have small traces of GM material were labelled as being sourced from non-GM ingredients. The companies involved were informed that traces of GM material had been detected in their products.

Documentation examined as part of the Australian survey shows that the companies including non-GM claims on soymilk intended to source from non-GM ingredients and relied on identity preservation systems to substantiate these claims.

The survey also found that, in general, large food businesses had documentation or testing in place to ensure the GM or non-GM source of ingredients. In contrast, smaller food businesses were less likely to have such systems in place. However, suppliers servicing large companies demanding non-GM ingredients would most likely be providing the same stock to small and medium enterprises.

### Approval of GM foods

Food Standards Australia New Zealand is continuing to carry out safety assessments on genetically modified food to ensure that approved GM foods are as safe and nutritious as their conventional counterparts. Should a food not pass this safety assessment it will not be permitted for sale. To date 22 GM foods have been approved in Australia and New Zealand. Follow the link to Food Standard 1.5.2 and read the list of GM foods approved for sale in Australia and New Zealand:

[http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/\\_srcfiles/Standard\\_1\\_5\\_2\\_GM\\_v69.pdf](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/_srcfiles/Standard_1_5_2_GM_v69.pdf)

### For more information

Read the New Zealand report *Assessment of Compliance with Standard 1.5.2, Food produced using Gene Technology* on the New Zealand Food Safety Authority website using the following link:

<http://www.nzfsa.govt.nz/labelling-composition/publications/reports/assessment-of-compliance-1-5-2/index.htm>

Read the *Australian Pilot Survey of GM Food Labelling of Corn and Soy Products* on the Food Standards Australia New Zealand website using the following link:

[http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/\\_srcfiles/GM\\_Survey\\_Report\\_Final\\_for\\_website.pdf](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/_srcfiles/GM_Survey_Report_Final_for_website.pdf)

# AQIS Imported Food Inspection Scheme – 2nd quarter 2003 results

The Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) produces a summary report every three months on the results of inspection and testing of imported foods under the *Imported Food Control Act 1992*. The reports are compiled some time after the quarter is finished to allow time for all results and confirmatory testing to be completed. Outlined below are the outcomes of AQIS testing from 1 April 2003 to 30 June 2003.

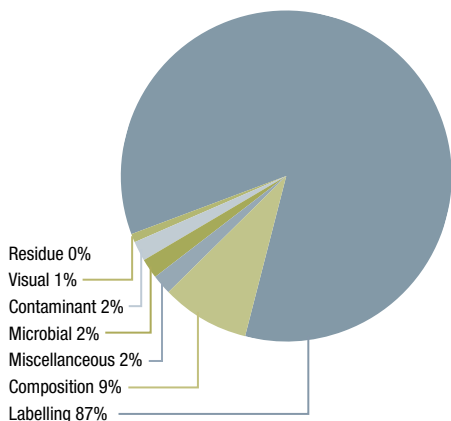
In the April - June quarter, 20 120 tests, which included labelling and visual inspection, were conducted on selected imported foods. Of these tests only 749 failed tests (3.7%) were recorded. Putting it another way, 96.3% of the tests conducted on inspected foods complied with the testing criteria.

## How Much Imported Food is tested?

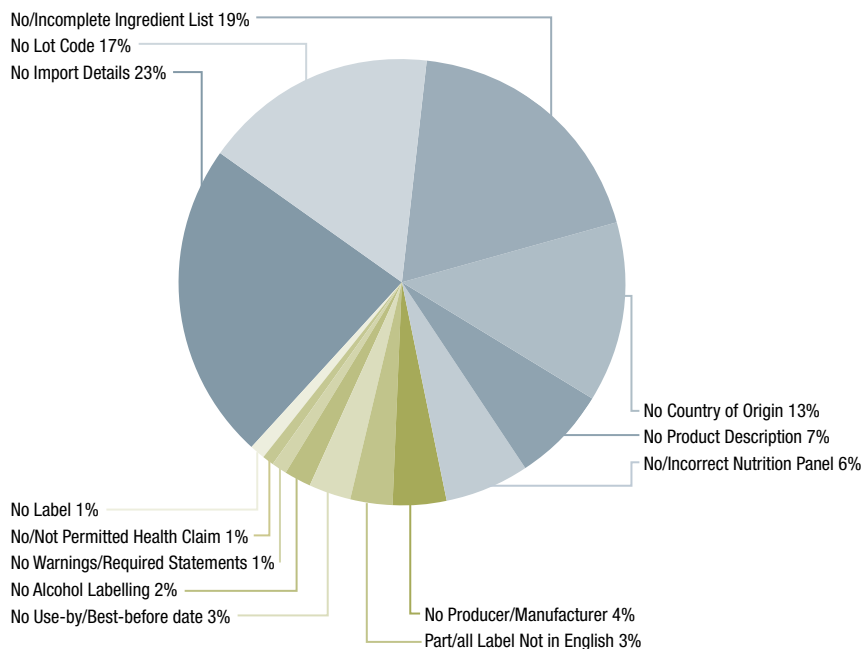
AQIS inspects approximately 5% - 10% of all foods coming into the country, although some foods are inspected at a higher rate. The percentage varies as the frequency of inspection is determined by the risk rating assigned to the food and the compliance history of that type of food from that source.

The breakdown of test failures for the quarter is illustrated in Figure 1. In the small number of situations where inspected foods were found not to comply, it was found that the majority of non-compliance was for labelling failures (86.5%). This is not unusual as the labelling requirements in the *Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code* (the Code) are relatively new and other countries do not have the same labelling requirements as Australia and New Zealand. Labelling non-compliance is still an issue despite importers having the option to relabel imported food to bring labels into line with the Code before an AQIS inspection is carried out. AQIS is developing brochures that will raise awareness amongst the importing industry that they need to ensure that the food they import meets Australian requirements.

**Figure 1: Summary of Failed Foods (failure by element type)**



**Figure 2: Summary of Failed Foods for Labelling (by labelling element)**



The specific labelling requirements that have not been met for the April - June quarter are shown in Figure 2. It can be seen that labelling failures would decrease by 72% if a valid ingredient list, lot code, importer details and country of origin were correctly declared.

After labelling, the next area of non-compliance was 'composition' failure. Of the many compositional tests applied, there were only 42 failed tests across a wide range of products. These test failures included non-permitted vitamins in products such as formulated meal replacements and colours in products such as sweet and salty plums. In addition, some chewing tobacco contained prohibited plant species betel nut and some Body Balance Liquid Whole Food containing stevia which is currently not permitted in food.

In the tests for 'contaminants' there were only 9 failed tests. The main failures were: aflatoxin, in peanuts and satay sauce (4 failed tests); 3-MCPD in soy sauce (2 failed tests); and mercury in shark (2 failed tests).

In the microbiological testing, there were only 8 failures for exceeding microbiological limits, six of these were seafood. Five failures related to excessive Standard Plate Counts and the remaining three related to failures for *Listeria monocytogenes*, *Salmonella* species, and *Escherichia coli*.

AQIS advises States and Territory authorities as well as the New Zealand Food Safety Authority on a weekly basis, as to what foods were failed under the imported food inspection scheme. This is done to provide enforcement agencies with up to date information on potential problem areas in their

jurisdictions and to facilitate consistent testing of domestically produced foods. The three-month summaries are produced and analysed by AQIS so that long-term trends can be monitored. They can also help gauge the effectiveness of any new measures introduced to improve imported food compliance.

## Types of testing

Where an imported food is selected for inspection, it is subjected to a visual/label inspection and where relevant analytical tests may also be applied. More than one test may be assigned to a particular food within a consignment, and several lots may also be tested. The number of tests does not therefore reflect the number of foods tested.

## For more information

Browse the AQIS webpage:  
<http://www.aqis.gov.au>

or ask about imported food matters  
phone: 02 6272 5515

# Consumer Survey on Allergen Labelling

In 2002, Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) commissioned the 'Quantitative Consumer Survey on Allergen Labelling' as part of its Evaluation Strategy. The survey provides FSANZ, for the first time, with quantitative Australian and New Zealand data from 510 main grocery buyers from households where a member was 'at risk' of adverse reactions to food or certain ingredients in foods, i.e. allergens.

This survey assessed the main grocery buyers levels of awareness and knowledge of information provided on manufactured food labels about allergens. This included assessing their ability to successfully identify foods containing pertinent allergens, their behaviours towards food selection for 'at risk' consumers, and whether (mis)understanding of allergen labelling contributes to the occurrence of adverse reactions in 'at risk' sub-populations. The data were obtained from a targeted sample using self-administered questionnaires with open ended and closed questions. Allergy specialists based in public hospitals and private clinics, and major allergy support groups assisted with the distribution of questionnaires in both countries. The key survey findings are as follows:

## 1. Ability to successfully identify manufactured foods that contain allergens

The main grocery buyers' ability to identify food products that contained the allergen of concern varied considerably. It depended on the food allergy within their households, and the terms used on the labels to declare the allergen. The survey demonstrated that many buyers did not recognise all substances that could trigger an adverse reaction within their households. Those households with tree nut, milk, or egg allergies were more accurate in their assessment of ingredients and/or labels, while those with peanut or wheat allergies were least accurate. Some products posed particular issues of recognition/knowledge for both groups, for example 'vegetable oils' that may be contaminated with or contain allergens; 'praline' that could contain peanut and 'textured vegetable protein' could be wheat derived instead of soy.

Additionally, the data indicated that the main grocery buyers who were members of an allergy support group were more proficient at identifying many of the substances of concern compared to non-members.

## 2. Existing behaviours of main grocery buyers in regard to food selection

The main grocery buyers reported on strategies to manage their food selection when buying for 'at risk' consumers. For example, 41% reported checking all product categories to avoid substances of concern. Other strategies adopted included *always* reading food labels carefully (90%), *always* buying the same brand that past experience has shown to be allergen free (62%), *never* buying loose or bulk foods (43%), *often* buying food in sealed packages (44%), and *often* checking food lists provided by an allergy group (24%).

## 3. Reasons for adverse reactions to foods following diagnosis

Forty-two percent of the main grocery buyers reported that the person with the most serious food allergy within their household had had a reaction after diagnosis had first been made. The causes reported for this repeat reaction had been accidental consumption (36%), contact with substance of concern (21%), unlabelled/incorrectly labelled food (14%) and traces of substances in unexpected foods (6%). Members of allergy support groups were significantly more likely (10%) than non-members (1%) to report that the reaction was caused by unexpected traces of substance in the product.

## 4. Trustworthy, clarity and understanding of food label information

Food labels were perceived to be trustworthy by 57% of the main grocery buyers. However, 66% were *sometimes* unsure about food items or particular ingredients in manufactured foods. Those who were not members of an allergy support group were significantly more likely (63%) to trust labelling information compared to members (51%).

The main grocery buyers were asked which of the three statements about the possibility of a product being contaminated with allergens was most informative and useful. The statement 'made on the same equipment as products containing (allergen name)' was preferred by 46% of the main grocery buyers, but 37% indicated that this statement was not very useful. Members of allergy support groups were significantly more likely than non members to report that statements such as 'made on the same equipment as products containing (allergen name)', 'may contain traces of (allergen name)', and 'made on the same premises as products contains (allergen name)' were useful.

Overall, the survey indicated that main grocery buyers used food labels extensively in managing the allergies in their households. They also reported noticing changes in the way allergens were listed on food labels. Ninety percent of the main grocery buyers always read food labels carefully. Significantly more Australians had noticed specific changes, such as statements about nuts, products made on the same production equipment as nuts, and blanket statements of 'contains dairy/nuts/eggs' etc. Significantly more New Zealanders had noticed the use of bold print for allergens listed in ingredient lists. The full survey report is available in hardcopy and on the FSANZ website:

<http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/mediareleasespublications/publications> or  
<http://www.foodstandards.govt.nz/mediareleasespublications/publications>.

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