

FOOD STANDARDS NEWS



The Newsletter of Food Standards Australia New Zealand

August 2002



FROM THE
MANAGING
DIRECTOR'S
DESK

New Board

On 1 July the former Australia New Zealand Food Authority ceased and was replaced by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ). The transition went very smoothly. On the day, the first meeting of the new Board was held and the Hon. Trish Worth, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and Ageing, held a public launch to mark the occasion. The new Board brings us an excellent mix of continuity and additional skills and perspectives.

Joint Food Standards Code

There are now fewer than 150 days before the end of the two-year transitional period which establishes the joint *Food Standards Code* as the sole source of food standards for Australia and New Zealand.

I am delighted that so many food businesses have acted quickly to review their products to ensure that they will be compliant with the new Code by 20 December 2002. This will ensure that these products can continue to be sold lawfully in Australia and New Zealand.

I am concerned, however, at continuing reports that some food businesses have still not reviewed their products, despite regular reminders from many sources. I am aware that many retailers have also been reminding their suppliers that they will not accept non-compliant products from them.

At the IBC Annual Food Composition and Labelling Standards Conference in Sydney recently, a recurring theme was that food businesses are now viewing the new Code positively. This was reflected in a poll taken at the conference taken by Mr Ron Cossen, Technical Manager - Food Standards Compliance, with Baldwins Lawyers, which showed that 72% of companies represented at the conference viewed the new Code as an improvement.

A number of senior company representatives speaking at the conference also indicated that, as they were soon to complete their product reviews, they were now looking to take advantage of the greater flexibility in the new Code to innovate in order to expand their existing markets and to move into new ones.



New shopper's guide to food additives and labels

Food labels are a wealth of information and we all use them at some time or other. Yet do we know exactly what they mean? There have been some changes to labels recently that mean that virtually all foods manufactured or packaged after December 2002 must have nutrition information panels, as well as the percentage of the main ingredient and lists of major allergens.

Shoppers consistently ask for more information about exactly what food labels mean. An easy-to-use shopper's guide has been designed to answer those questions and it also includes the official list of food additives by number, name and use.

The official Shopper's Guide to Food Additives and Labels will be published by Murdoch Books and available from early September. It will be sold at a recommended retail price of \$4.95 in Australia and \$5.95 in New Zealand through bookshops, supermarkets and newsagencies in both countries.

You can make an advance order:

- In Australia from Murdoch Books' customer service line at 02 4352 7000 or Fax: (02) 4352 7026 or by e-mail to vnewman@mm.com.au
- In New Zealand, from Celebrity Books Telephone (09) 414 2456 or fax 09 414 2457 or by email celebritybill@extra.co.nz.

Novel foods

The issue of innovation prompts me to again mention the Novel Foods standard. With novel foods – and indeed all foods – the first responsibility of FSANZ is the protection of public health and safety. However, we also take seriously our statutory obligation to support the maintenance and development of an internationally competitive food industry.

We believe that promoting innovation and protecting public health and safety are not incompatible – and indeed in many cases are

mutually supportive – where new foods or new technologies enhance the safety of the food supply. But this may not always be so, and often there will be uncertainty about the safety of the proposed use in our food supply.

I would stress that wherever a food is genuinely a novel one without an established history of safe use in Australia and New Zealand, it is imperative that companies proposing to manufacture or import it make an early approach to FSANZ for advice. For such

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Food safety body launched in NZ

On the same day that ANZFA became FSANZ – 1 July 2002 – New Zealand's food safety Minister, the Hon Annette King, launched the New Zealand Food Safety Authority.

'Food safety is very important for all of us and the New Zealand Food Safety Authority has been set up to protect consumers and enhance New Zealand's position as a trusted food supplier,' said Ms King.

'Food is a multi-billion dollar business in New Zealand. There are more than 30,000 businesses selling, manufacturing or processing food and more than 50 percent of New Zealand's export earnings come from food or food-related exports.'

Ms King said the new agency brings together the skills and expertise of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and the Ministry of Health.

'The food industry and consumers will benefit from a single agency dealing with food safety. It will provide a strong co-ordinated approach to reducing the incidence of food borne illness and managing food related risks.'

Executive Director Dr Andrew McKenzie said the new Authority will combine the functions of MAF Food and the Ministry of Health in one agency to provide a more integrated approach to food safety.

At present the Ministry of Health administers the Food Act, which covers food sold domestically, while MAF administers legislation surrounding primary production, processing and exports. The New Zealand Food Safety Authority will be a semi-autonomous body attached to MAF.

'Bringing these functions together under one agency will enable New Zealand to provide consistency in the management of food safety from the beginning of the food chain to the end,' Dr McKenzie said.

FSANZ will work closely with NZFSA in developing food standards for Australia and New Zealand – in relation to standards for food composition and labelling, contaminants and microbiological controls for which FSANZ is responsible.

« From the Managing Director cont.

foods, where there is an inadequate history of safe use, the food cannot lawfully be sold until a scientific risk assessment has been undertaken to confirm its safety and it has then been approved.

An early approach to FSANZ staff can help to avoid the problem of novel foods being found to be unlawful after they have come onto the market, with the associated costs and embarrassment of their enforced withdrawal.

Ian Lindenmayer
Managing Director

Guides for Food Safety Standards now available

A series of new guides will be available to assist food businesses to meet their legal obligations under Food Safety Standards 3.1.1 (Interpretation and Application), 3.2.2 (Food Safety Practices and General Requirements) and 3.2.3 (Food Premises and Equipment), which are currently being implemented by the States and Territories. The guides take the following forms:

Food Safety: Temperature control of potentially hazardous food

This provides guidance on the temperature control requirements of Standard 3.2.2. It explains what types of foods need to be kept under temperature control and advice on ways to meet the legal requirements. It is aimed at enforcement officers and those businesses wanting more detailed information on the temperature requirements.

Food Safety: Skills and knowledge for food businesses

This provides guidance on the new skills and knowledge requirement in Standard 3.2.2 for small food businesses. It explains how the proprietors of these businesses can meet their legal obligation to ensure that food handlers working for the businesses have the skills and knowledge they need to handle food safely.

Fact sheets for charities and community organisations on the Food Safety Standards

A series of fact sheets have been developed for charities and community organisations to assist them comply with the Food Safety Standards. There are ten fact sheets to cover the range of food handling activities normally undertaken by these businesses. The fact sheets are:

- An introduction to the new Food Safety Standards
- Notification
- Skills and knowledge
- Labelling
- Temperature control
- Sausage sizzles and barbecues
- Preparing and cooking food
- Transporting food
- Camping
- Health and hygiene for food handlers

Food businesses and enforcement officers are encouraged to obtain copies of these materials. Copies can be downloaded from the FSANZ website

www.foodstandards.gov.au or hard copies can be requested by contacting FSANZ on 02 6271 2241 or your State or Territory health authority. There is no charge for these materials.

Have you checked out the new-look FSANZ website?

The new FSANZ website has been running from 1 July at www.foodstandards.gov.au. As we had to update the website for the new name, we have also taken the opportunity to make a few improvements to the website based on your suggestions.

These include moving the buttons that link to the second-level pages from along the top to down the left-hand side. This has enabled us to split some of the lengthier pages. The quick links, previously on the left hand side, are now in a 'drop down' menu on the right hand side.

The demands on our website have grown over time – something we welcome. However, this has also been placing pressures on our IT resources.

We are aware that many users find accessing information on our website very slow at times. We are moving to a new internet provider and will be connecting to Canberra's

Transact service in mid-August, as soon as the cabling is available to our premises. This will provide a very substantial increase in our bandwidth, which we expect to alleviate these problems.

In the meantime, as an interim measure, we have made some changes that are helping to reduce delays.



New food poisoning stats highlight need for vigilance

Last month, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Commonwealth Minister for Health and Ageing, the Hon Trish Worth, announced that a major research project funded by the Department of Health and Ageing indicated that there were more than 7 million cases of food poisoning every year in Australia or, on average, over 19,000 per day.

She said that these were 'the latest preliminary data from OzFoodNet, a food-borne illness surveillance network established by the Department'.

These figures compare with a conservative estimate made in 1999 by the former ANZFA of 4.2 million cases of food poisoning a year – 11,500 a day – which, since its publication, has been criticised as being an over-estimate by some organisations and research teams.

OzFoodNet's final report is not expected to be available until later this year. However, Ms Worth has used the new findings to highlight the dangers of poor food hygiene, especially among children.

'Food poisoning can be a serious issue for children. Young children, in particular, are

much more susceptible to the adverse effects of food poisoning.

'Overall, Australia has a very safe food supply, but every day there are still lapses where food is not handled properly and people get sick. Simple precautions or actions taken by food handlers can prevent these illnesses occurring.'

FSANZ continues to work with jurisdictions in Australia and New Zealand to coordinate and encourage the use of food safety plans by food businesses.

FSANZ starts intense sweetener survey

FSANZ, with the assistance of Roy Morgan Research Pty Ltd, is undertaking a comparative study to assess the current dietary exposure to intense (artificial) sweeteners in the Australian and New Zealand populations. The study will focus on foods and drinks containing intense sweeteners.

The intense sweeteners being examined in this survey are saccharin, cyclamate, aspartame, sucralose, acesulphame potassium, alitame, neotame and thaumatin.

The study aims to provide information on the levels of consumption of intense sweeteners as a case study to assess if the move from a 'recipe-based' food standard for food additives in the old Food Standards Code to a less prescriptive one in the new Code has changed the level of consumption of food additives.

Roy Morgan Research will be involved in the screening of a representative sample of people in Australia and New Zealand, aged 12 years and above. This screening will identify apparent 'high' consumers of intense sweeteners. Individuals who are identified as 'high' consumers will be requested to complete a 7-day diary of their consumption of intense-sweetened foods and beverages.

A supplementary component of the survey will address the consumption of intense sweeteners by people living with diabetes and by those following diets for impaired glucose tolerance.

For the Australian population, the results from the survey will be compared to the findings of a similar survey conducted by the then National Food Authority (NFA) in 1994. The 1994 NFA survey was not conducted in New

Zealand. The results from the Intense Sweetener Survey will provide important information to the Authority when reviewing the standards in the future and when considering current applications for intense sweeteners.

The number of intense sweeteners approved for use in Australia and New Zealand food products has increased over the past ten years. Additionally, the range of foods that they are permitted to be added to has increased.

The survey will canvas people from all walks of life and from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The information provided by participants will be held in the strictest confidence.

FSANZ takes this opportunity of thanking those companies that have assisted the Authority in the preliminary stages of this project by providing information on the intense sweeteners present in their products. This information is being treated as commercial-in-confidence by FSANZ.

FSANZ has initiated six evaluation activities during the transition period from December 2000 to December 2002. These activities will provide benchmark data to address critical data gaps and enable a full evaluation of the impact of changing key food regulatory measures.

Some of these evaluation activities have been reported in previous editions of *Food Standards News*. More information about FSANZ's surveys can be found on our website at www.foodstandards.gov.au under Recalls & Surveillance/Monitoring and evaluation.

How do you want your nutrient information?

Over the last two decades, the FSANZ Food Composition Program has commissioned a series of analytical programs to determine the nutrient composition of a wide range of Australian foods.

The results of these programs have been published in a number of formats, including the electronic databases *NUTTAB95*, *Supplement to NUTTAB95* and *AUSNUT 1999*, and the hard-copy publications *Composition of Foods, Australia (COFA)*, *Nutritional Values of Australian Foods* and *Food for Health: A Guide to Good Nutrition*.

Our existing publications are becoming somewhat out-of-date and, with the establishment of the new food regulatory agency, now is a particularly good time for us to look at options for publishing a new product, whether it be in an electronic or paper format.

As part of our planning process, we wish to conduct a survey to obtain people's opinions about what they would like to see in this new publication. Our aim is to produce a set of food composition tables that is as useful, practical and as easy to read as possible, regardless of people's area of interest or field of expertise.

A survey form is available on the FSANZ website. All interested readers are invited to complete the survey form and return it to FSANZ within the stated timeframe. Please let us know your views. This will help us provide you with better service.

More information from the Food Composition Program on (02) 6271 2277 or via email at luisa.trevisan@foodstandards.gov.au.

Chief Scientist Dr Marion Healy examines advances in GM safety assessment

A risk and evidence based approach underpins assessments of potential food borne hazards. Safety assessments for genetically modified (GM) foods aim to determine if a hazard, nutritional or other safety concern is associated with the food.

Principles underpinning safety assessments of GM foods have been adopted in a fairly consistent manner around the world. These include a pre-market assessment that is risk and evidence based; case-by-case assessments that take into account both the changes intended by the genetic modification as well as any unintended changes; and use of conventionally produced counterpart foods as a benchmark of safety.

The safety of whole foods, including GM foods, can only be determined by considering all available information about each aspect of the food. Assessments consider the history of use of both the donor and recipient organisms in conventional food, a complete molecular characterisation of the genetic modification, the nature of the new protein and its potential health impact (eg toxicity and allergenicity potential) and nutritional and compositional impacts of the genetic modification.

FSANZ has assessed foods from 21 GM organisms. These foods are all plant products from a small number of crops (six) with a limited range of modified phenotypic traits; namely herbicide tolerance, protection against insect pests (primarily lepidoptera), or plant viruses and, in one case, alteration of the fatty acid profile. A very conservative approach has been used in selecting protein coding regions and regulatory sequences for insertion into these food crops with most sequences being derived from plant genes or plant associated bacteria and viruses.

Evolving techniques to develop and characterise GM organisms impact on the safety assessment process. Of particular note is the advent of plant transformations using particle bombardment, which enables a

greater range of plant crops to be transformed.

Similarly, DNA sequencing technology enables detailed and precise characterisation of the inserted DNA, including its identity, organisation and copy number as well as definition of the junction of the inserted DNA with the surrounding plant DNA. The use of PCR and the reverse transcriptase PCR has also added to information about the organisation and expression of the inserted DNA.

Recent reviews of the assessment approach by several countries and international organisations have concluded that it provides a high level of assurance about the safety of GM foods in both the short and long term.

However, each of the reviews also highlighted developing techniques that may lead to more detailed analysis of the expression pattern and impact of the inserted DNA. These include profiling techniques such as micro array technologies to analyse mRNA expression, differential protein expression and fine-scale analysis of changes in metabolites.

These techniques will not be useful in the safety assessment process until there is a good understanding of the natural variation in the expression of genes and their products in conventionally produced organisms. Such information will provide the basis for interpreting the significance of any differences that might be detected between GM and conventionally produced organisms and their food products.

The development of GM organisms with a broader range of modified characteristics may require additional scientific evidence to assess potential health impact. Importantly, in assessing GM foods in which the nutritional profile has been altered for human health purposes, analysis of the dietary intake patterns of individuals and the nutritional status of the whole population may assume greater importance.

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

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Important notice for NZ readers



FOOD STANDARDS NOTICE

Food Standards Australia New Zealand – formerly Australia New Zealand
Food Authority – advise that from 17 July, all information regarding
Food Standards Notices will be available on our website
www.foodstandards.govt.nz

To be alerted of these notices by email, please contact nzreception@foodstandards.govt.nz. We are able to forward a copy of the circular by mail if an email address is unavailable. We will continue to advertise in the Wednesday edition of the NZ Herald.

For further details, please contact nzreception@foodstandards.govt.nz or at Food Standards Australia New Zealand on 0-4-473 9942 or write to PO Box 10-559, The Terrace, Wellington.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand's role is, in association with others, to protect the health and safety of people in Australia and New Zealand through the maintenance of a safe food supply.

FOOD STANDARDS
Australia New Zealand
Te Mana Kounga Kai – Ahitereiria me Aotearoa