

Information for Australia & New Zealand Laboratories regarding Folic Acid Proficiency Testing Program

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) in collaboration with the National Measurement Institute (NMI), is undertaking a folic acid proficiency testing program for laboratories that will carry out analysis of folic acid in fortified foods and food products e.g wheat flour for making bread and fortified bread.

The Mandatory Folic Acid Fortification Standard becomes enforceable on 13 September 2009 (Australia) and on 27 September 2009 (New Zealand). The Standard requires folic acid to be added to wheat flour for baking bread at the level of between 2 and 3 milligrams per kilogram of wheat flour (Australia) and to bread at no less than 0.8 mg/kg and no more than 1.8 mg/kg (New Zealand).

State and Territory agencies in Australia will be enforcing and monitoring the flour milling industry's compliance with the fortification standard, particularly in determining that the level of fortification is within the range specified in the Standard. Laboratory analysis of fortified wheat flour and food products may be required to verify the amount of folic acid present. To ensure national consistency of the analytical methods used, and the comparability of results from the laboratories whether independent, industry-based or State/Territory Government Department affiliated, the program of proficiency testing has been established.

It is noted that each laboratory in Australia that currently undertakes analysis of folic acid in foods uses a method of its own choosing. In addition, not all laboratories undertaking these analyses have NATA accreditation. The absence of an internationally recommended methodology for folic acid analysis and the difficulties associated with the analytical processes, make it necessary for laboratories in Australia and New Zealand to use methodologies that produce reliable results, and make results comparable across the different laboratories.

The folic acid proficiency testing program plans to:

- assess the capabilities of laboratories that will undertake folic acid analysis in fortified food products;
- determine the effectiveness of the current folic acid analytical methods used by the laboratories;
- assess the variability in results;
- assess the performance of each laboratory relative to the others in the program;
- help improve folic acid testing capabilities to ensure reliable results; and
- enable laboratories to meet the requirements of ISO 17025 for participation in a suitable proficiency test.

The NMI has commenced work on the preliminary round of the folic acid PT program. This will involve collecting baseline information from the laboratories, resolving possible problems regarding the preparation of test samples and introducing participating laboratories to the requirements of the program.

There will be an initial testing of samples, with samples sent out during February 2009. The formal round of sample testings is expected to start in April or May 2009 with time for a second round of formal testings if required. The program plan is to ensure that laboratories are ready for the analysis of folic acid in fortified foods by the September 2009 implementation date for the Mandatory Folic Acid Fortification Standard.

Follow-on proficiency testing activities can be decided by participating laboratories or could be based on the outcomes of the formal sample testings.

If you are an Australian and/ or New Zealand institution with an analytical laboratory that undertakes folic acid testing of foods and would like to participate in the folic acid proficiency testing program, please contact the National Measurement Institute. The contact details are:

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