



Welcome to the first edition of MAFRA Food Focus!

Welcome to the first edition of *Food Focus*, a quarterly review of trends, happenings and issues in food safety within New Zealand industries and our export markets. As the controlling authority for setting and monitoring of export food safety standards, MAF Regulatory Authority (MAFRA) works closely with New Zealand industry, the Government, consumer groups and similar agencies internationally. *Food Focus* seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the needs and roles of these groups in setting and achieving food standards. We hope you find the publication useful and welcome your questions and suggestions for future issues.



food focus

MAF Regulatory Authority Information for the Agriculture and Seafood industries.

EU Veterinary Agreement close

New Zealand and the European Union are close to a ground breaking agreement on sanitary standards for their joint trade in animals and animal products.

This follows a further week-long meeting of senior trade and agriculture officials in Wellington in early February.

Hoped to be finalised later this year, the Veterinary Agreement will mean New Zealand has "favoured nation" status and no longer has to replicate European sanitary systems.

Programmes can now be developed to suit local conditions provided that "equivalent" outcomes are achieved.

Use of "equivalent" measures could save producers up to \$20 million a year, says the principal New Zealand negotiator, Administrator Andrew McKenzie.



Georges Adelbrecht, leader of the European Commission delegation makes a point to Andrew McKenzie, MAFRA Administrator and Steve Hathaway, National Manager - Research and Development.

"It could also ease the way for contestability in meat inspection, HACCP, risk based inspection programmes and other New Zealand initiatives," he says.

The agreement has taken three years to achieve.

It received a major boost from the Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Agreements negotiated at the completion of the Gatt Uruguay round in March 1994.

Quality Quote

"A very good thing is veal pie, when you know the lady as made it, and is quite sure it ain't kittens."

Sam Weller a character in a Charles Dickens novel, and an early philosopher on food quality assurance.

INSIDE

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Access Snippets

New milk standards

New international standards for whey powder and edible caseins have been set by the Rome based, Codex Alimentaries Commission, a UN organisation that sets international food standards.

The next meeting of the New Zealand chaired Milk Products committee in May is expected to recommend new

standards for; butter, milk fat products, evaporated milk, sweetened condensed milks, milk and cream powders, cheese, whey cheese, cheeses in brine and unripened cheeses.

Agreements on the more contentious products of processed cheese, cream, fermented milk and individual varieties of cheese are also likely to be progressed, but not finalised at the May meeting.

The new standards will improve market access for dairy products internationally says Brian Burgess, Chief

Dairy Officer and technical secretariat for the committee. They are soundly based and avoid any unnecessary detail, so that they are suitable as reference standards under the GATT agreements.

The New Zealand delegation to the committee has closely consulted with the industry says, the delegation leader Phil Fawcett, MAFRA's National Manager for Standards. The simpler standards allow flexibility for the development of new technology and avoid barriers to trade caused by restrictive requirements.

Apple access proposed for Australia

AQIS, the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Services is considering a formal proposal from MAFRA for New Zealand apples to be accepted into the Australian market.

The agency, MAF's equivalent in Australia, is carrying out a technical assessment of the data prior to

consulting State Governments and industry on the proposal.

New Zealand apples are currently prohibited access into Australia, because they cannot be guaranteed free of the bacteria Erwinia amylovora which causes Fire Blight. But a four year research project by Hort Research

has now established that New Zealand apples are not a viable vector for introduction of the pathogen.

The MAFRA proposal contends that mature apples free from trash should be considered as equivalent to sourcing fruit from an area where Erwinia amylovora does not exist.



Policy Watch

Changing strategy for Meat Inspection

Background

The middle and late 1980's saw major changes to the way meat inspection services in New Zealand were provided and paid for.

As part of the change, there was a separation between those setting the standards (now carried out by MAFRA) and those applying the standards at the meat processing site (now carried out by MAF Quality Management).

Cost recovery from industry was another key move.

Further changes

The move to cost recovery has also lead to reassessment of the cost effectiveness of the current model for delivering meat inspection services.

The strict requirement for Government employees to carry out on-line inspection has been questioned and the lack of alternative inspection services for processors to choose from has been raised.

Overseas, some non-Government inspection services have been introduced, including domestic production in Canada, Australia and the U.K.

Internationally, there are now signs of a greater flexibility by controlling authorities. Scientific justification for standards is increasingly required and HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point) procedures are starting to replace rigid, prescriptive command and control models.

More attention is being given to microbiological threats and less to visual pathologies which might be unsightly, but are not necessarily a threat to food safety.

Possible new structure

In 1993 Price Waterhouse was employed by MAF to report on the possibilities for further change within the New Zealand meat inspection programme.

Their report recommended retaining a single Governmental regulatory authority (as currently exists) to set standards and provide assurance to overseas markets that their standards are met.

A separate standards implementation body (such as MAF Quality Management) would also be established as a "Recognised Body" to verify food

safety standards are being met. The new structure would permit alternative suppliers to offer verification services in the medium term.

More rapid change was recommended for inspection tasks. With appropriate verification procedures, it was recommended that industry rather than Government employees could provide inspection.

The proposed changes will require amendments to the Meat Act, clear communication with overseas markets and with domestic consumers. They also have considerable industrial relations implications. The New Zealand Meat Industry Association is supportive of the changes. MAFRA and the Meat Industry Hygiene Council Technical Working Party are now developing the necessary specifications.

Summary

The proposed meat inspection strategy will:

- enable more cost effective post mortem inspection procedures
- enable non Government agencies to provide inspection and certification services.
- devolve some ante and post mortem tasks to processors

It is possible the new system will be trialled within the next year.



Technology Update

Risk Analysis

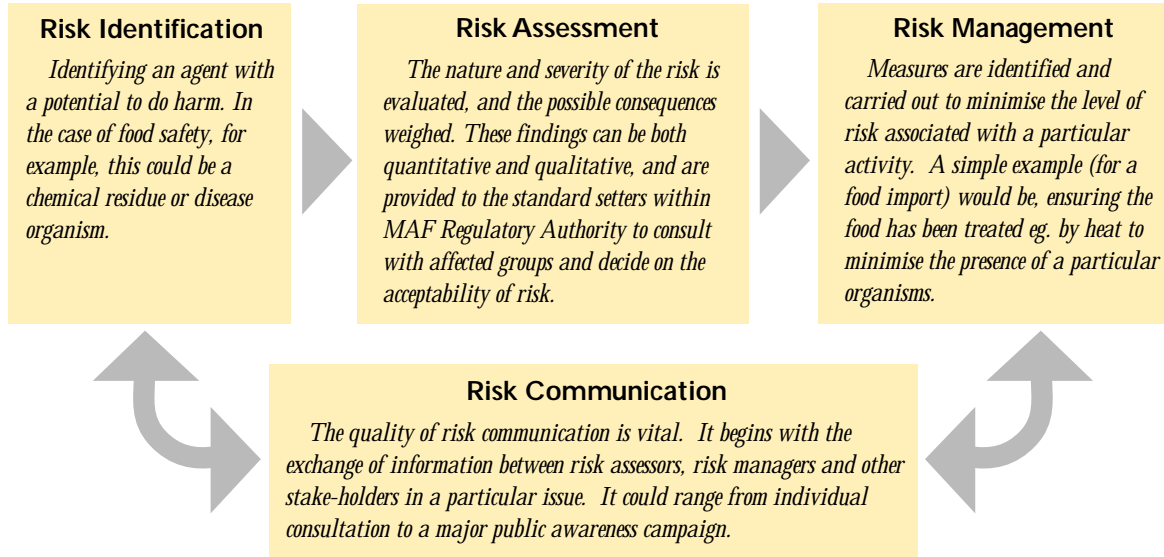
New Zealand is exposed to risks as a busy trading nation. These risks occur both in exporting (when our trading reputation is constantly at risk of flawed or dangerous exports

leaving our shores), and in importing where our people and environment are exposed to contaminated food, undesirable animals or diseases.

Obviously, as our nation cannot live without trade - pursuing a zero-risk option through isolation is not viable. Instead, through the merging of scientific disciplines, and through borrowing from the

disciplines of financial management and engineering a new practical framework has been created for decision making: Risk Analysis.

Risk analysis is a tool that ensures regulators make well-informed, an unprejudiced decisions. The tool identifies a level of risk, but doesn't make value judgments on the acceptability of that level. As a formal tool it has four clear stages:



Why is risk analysis important?

- It helps protect and enhance our access to overseas markets.
- It helps protect New Zealand's unique animal and plant health status.
- Consumers are demanding new products from overseas, but also require protection from risk.

- Animal welfare and environmental concerns are growing.
- Risk analysis is needed to ensure new genetic material (needed to maintain our competitive position), can be imported safely.
- Industry efficiency can be improved by using risk analysis to show where wastage is occurring.

New booklet published.
A useful guide to Risk Analysis will be published by MAFRA on March 13. It explains the background, practice and provides examples of risk analysis.



Case Study

Improving Consumer Choice Through Risk Analysis

New Zealand has an important salmon farming industry and significant recreational fishery. Fears of importing diseases that could threaten our country's fish stocks had lead to a total ban on uncooked salmon imports, but this had never been scientifically justified.

MAF Regulatory Authority carried out a risk analysis for ocean-caught Canadian salmon imported as four



types of product (headed and gutted, and fillets - frozen and chilled). A total risk of 23 diseases were identified in the first (qualitative) phase of risk assessment and particularly careful attention was given to the one considered to be most likely to be transmitted in

product easily transmitted of these; furunculosis.

Factors taken into account included:

- how often the disease occurs in caught wild salmon.
- how the the disease organism (*Aeromonas salmonicida*) is distributed in the flesh of infected fish.
- how effective inspection and grading systems are in detecting the disease.
- the effects of processing (e.g freezing) on numbers of bacteria.
- how well *A. salmonicida* survives in the environment.
- how much is needed to infect a healthy fish.
- what New Zealand waste management practices are.

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In the quantitative analysis that followed, it was found that the chances of New Zealand salmon, trout or native fish stocks being infected with *A. salmonicida* were extremely remote - less than one disease introduction for every 10 million tonnes imported. The entire production from this fishery is less than 100,000 tonnes per year, and New Zealand consumption would account for only a small percentage

of this output. The probability that any other type of disease could be imported was considered even smaller than for *A. salmonicida*.

On the basis of this risk analysis, imports of Canadian salmon into New Zealand - with certain risk management measures in place - were permitted from April 1995. The result is that the consumer has more choice on the supermarket shelf.



Research Review

Baseline survey will inform Policies

This edition of *Food Focus* has identified a raft of market access and systems issues MAFRA is currently working on to improve safety standards and decrease compliance costs to industry.

carcasses from differing classes of stock and processing sites during the course of the year.

The carcasses will be subject to a range of tests for indicator organisms which show contamination from the environment, hides, dirt and contact from hands.

Aerobic plate counts will betray the presence of *Escherichia coli* - a specific indicator of faecal contamination.

Specific checks will be carried out

for two pathogens associated with outbreaks of food poisoning - *Salmonella* and *E.coli* 0157:H7. This latter pathogen has been found to cause significant outbreaks of food poisoning and haemolytic



A broad body of reliable scientific data about current practices and outcomes is needed to develop these policies.

For the first time in New Zealand a nationwide "Baseline" Survey is being carried out.

Steve Hathaway, National Manager of Research and Development for Ministry of Agriculture says the first year of the study will quantify the level of contamination of slaughtered beef carcasses.

The Meat Research Institute in Hamilton has been contracted by MAFRA to test around 3,000

uraemia syndrome (HUS) in children.

The data will be invaluable in negotiating claims of "equivalence" of our food sanitary measures with trading partners, under the rules of the recently ratified World Trade Organisation Agreement.

The study will also enable comparison with similar data from US, UK and Australia and monitoring of the success of new practices and programmes.

The final report from the study is expected to be lodged with the Meat Industry Hygiene Council in March 1997.

Meet our People



Stephen Ogden
National Advisor -
Export Phytosanitary
Standards

Stephen's role is to analyse the changing plant hygiene requirements of our trading partners. He identifies which plant diseases are restricted by each country

and what certification is required for each species or plant product we export. This information is conveyed to other staff in MAFRA and MAF Quality Management who communicate the standards to exporters and implement them. Accuracy is essential as failing to reach the standards or unnecessarily exceeding them is expensive for exporters and for New Zealand.

Bright Note

MQM's National Chemical Residue Laboratory at Wallaceville has received its ISO9002 Quality certification from international accreditation agency Bureau Veritas.

The December presentation to Dr John Turner's twenty five strong team capped a four year overhaul of quality systems and a "final intensive quality push" at the lab. The Lab's clients now have the extra certainty of external quality certification for its vital services of residue testing of meat, fish and plants.

Editorial Box

RA Food Focus is the quarterly newsletter of MAF Regulatory Authority. It is provided for general information only. For more specific information please contact the Authority. Food Focus welcomes your feedback and suggestions for future editions.

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