



Welcome

Recent events have lent a lot to the case for constant care and vigilance in setting and maintaining food standards. In this issue (our second Food Focus) we look at the lessons in the "Mad Cow" situation in Great Britain, and review positive progress in a raft of access areas from seafood to seeds, as well as the technologies helping New Zealand to set and maintain the standards. Thank you for reading Food Focus. We look forward to your comments and suggestions for future issues.

RA

food focus

MAF Regulatory Authority Information for the Agriculture and Seafood industries.

Lessons from the News

Food standards and border controls have been in the news more than usual lately.

Media interest in "Mad Cow" disease, fruit fly invasions and rabbit viruses has been intense and frequently sensationalised.

But behind these important, high-interest stories is a reality that is often complex, ambiguous and unglamorous.

Mad Cow disease is a good example. MAFRA has been well aware of the concerns about Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) for a number of years and has had systems in place to protect New Zealand's herds from the possibility of importing BSE since it was first identified as a risk in 1988. Since that time, MAFRA has been in regular communication with veterinarians throughout the country, monitoring for any evidence of it here.

When the human infection scare erupted in March this year, MAFRA was already familiar with the issues and able to provide sound rational scientific input into the debate which raged as fears grew. As a result, New Zealand was able to move quickly to address these concerns while still



Pictured: An unwanted member of the Oriental Fruit Fly species.

honouring our international obligations and commitments.

Similarly, the well-oiled systems that detected fruit fly in Auckland at a very early stage of the infestation and which swung into action to eradicate it, highlighted the work of MAFRA over many years. The positive response of our trading partners and the minimal restrictions they placed on our horticultural exports demonstrated the international confidence in

those New Zealand systems.

Quietly, behind the scenes, MAFRA is monitoring for numerous other diseases and organisms which are potentially harmful to our primary industries.

Perfect safety can never be attained, but the combination of the external linkages maintained to gather and share information; the standards set for agricultural security and food safety and the monitoring and audit to ensure those standards are met, assure New Zealand primary producers and consumers world wide that their industries and products are as safe as practically possible.

And hopefully off the front pages!

Quality Quote

"It must have been about one in the afternoon when I woke. I was feeling more or less like something the Pure Food Committee had rejected."

The Inimitable Jeeves (in PG Woodhouse's book of the same name) wakes up feeling like a condemned carcass.

INSIDE

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Access Snippets

NZ benefits from new milk standards

New Zealand achieved all its objectives at the May meeting of the Codex Committee on Milk and Milk Products in Rome, reports Phil Fawcett, MAFRA's National Manager for Standards.

The Committee is a subsidiary of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, a UN organisation that sets international food standards.

It finalised seven revised standards and one new standard for milk products while working through a challenging agenda set by the New Zealand secretariat to the Commission.

The record 203 delegates from 60 countries finalised standards for butter, milkfat products, evaporated milk, sweetened condensed milks, milk and cream powders, cheese, whey cheese and cheeses in brine.

The standards have been simplified and drafted in a way that makes them suitable for use by the World Trade Organisation, as well as acting as models for national standards. In particular they do not restrict

manufacturers to traditional methods of processing (favoured by the Europeans), as long as the product has the required characteristics.

Good progress was also made on a key document for New Zealand's interests; the Code of Principles concerning Milk and Milk Products.

The code will make it harder for non-dairy products to be mislabelled as milk products.

A positive and constructive atmosphere was maintained with strong chairmanship from Peter O'Hara Acting Director General of MAF.

The New Zealand secretariat to the meeting was complimented on its preparation for the meeting, enabling it to deal with numerous and complex comments, and to progress the standards.

Hope for Japan

Japan is reviewing its quarantine regulations with some possibility for better access for New Zealand fruit.

Korean moves

Republic of Korea is also reviewing its plant protection laws. MAFRA's National Advisor - Export Phytosanitary Standards, Stephen Ogden takes a technical case to the

Koreans next month to show that pest control measures for New Zealand apples and stone fruit, and survey procedures for potatoes, provide adequate phyto-sanitary assurances to enable Korea to lift the prohibition on these commodities.

Still waiting on Australia

AQIS, the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service is yet to release its recommendation whether MAFRA's technical data supporting access for New Zealand apples into the Australian market should be accepted. Their report was due late May/early June.

Meat gains

- Croatia has now agreed to accept US or EC standards for New Zealand meat rather than the complex veterinary agreement and EC-plus standards they originally sought.

- France is now accepting New Zealand game meat processed to less than 100 gram portions.

This change means more value-added processing can now be done in New Zealand for the French market.

- Switzerland has removed a long-standing prohibition which prevented the export of New Zealand bobby veal.

Seafood Arrangement in the Can

New Zealand's seafood trade with Canada will become more efficient thanks to a new access arrangement between the two countries.

Previously Canadian border checks could cause delays to seafood being released into the Canadian market, resulting in reduced shelf life.

But the new arrangement means New Zealand seafood products will receive preferential inspection treatment and Kiwi exporters should incur less costs and waste.

The arrangement was signed at a Quadrilateral Meeting held in Rotorua on April 29.

Judy Barker, MAFRA Meat and Seafood National Manager - Fish, says the arrangement follows two years of work by MAFRA and the Ministry of Health with Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

The signing sees Canada accept that New Zealand's food safety standards,



Signing the seafood agreement at Rotorua. Left to right: Peter O'Hara, N.Z. Ministry of Agriculture, John Emberley, Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Jim Wilson, NZ Ministry of Health.

procedures and systems provide equivalent outcomes to their national requirements.

It also sets out ways for resolving any seafood trade problems that may occur and will lead to an ongoing exchange of standards and legislation between the two countries.

New Zealand exported 1,300,000 kilograms of seafood products to Canada last year, which included among other products, 426,205 kg of frozen and chilled fish fillets, 853,720kg of mussels and 376,320kg of squid.

Enforcement Notes

- The National Fauna and Flora Investigation Unit, responsible for investigating illegal introductions of fauna and flora has become part of MAFRA. The unit is expected to continue its successful record against illegal activities in its new guise as the "MAFRA Enforcement Unit".

- Stiff fines have been meted out to a number of international visitors choosing to flaunt New Zealand's border protocols for personal fruit imports. Two recent prosecutions were for \$10,000 and \$15,000.

- Five dairy farmers are currently being prosecuted for allegedly presenting bobby calves for slaughter with antibacterial residues above prescribed tolerances. The charges carry maximum fines of \$20,000 for an individual or \$100,000 if the farm is run as a company.



Technology Update

Making the most of "The Net"

Thinking of bringing papaya in from Papua New Guinea or sending punga to Pennsylvania? You might soon be able to get help on "the Web."

The Web is the user-friendly graphics-based part of the global Internet.

It's accessible to any person or organisation connected with a modem, personal computer and internet account.

"People can be sure they have the latest set of standards, and they can get them anytime of the day or night without needing to have the relevant MAFRA person right there," says MAFRA's Information Manager, Brent Fry.

The medium is ideal for conveying the complex often-changing detail of import and export standards for plants, animals, dairy, meat and seafood, he says.

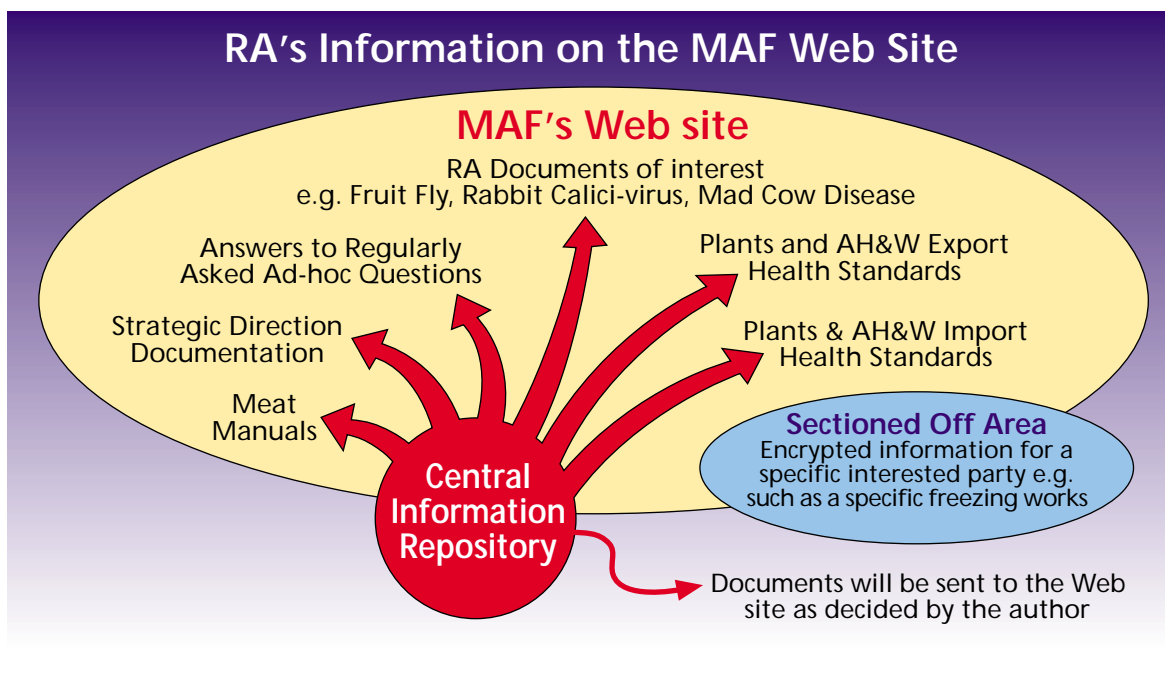
A host of industry relevant and public-interest material will also be available at the site. Expected to be on line by late July, the quantity and diversity of information available will expand over time. A section of the site is to be

"Hot Issues", says Brent.

Media and the public will be able to dial in for the latest news and views on subjects like Mad Cow Disease, fruit flies and rabbit calici-virus.

The networking technology will also improve information flows within MAFRA. Running "invisibly" behind the public internet connection will be a private "intranet" for MAF staff information. Appropriate file saving protocols are to be introduced which will increase the speed, accuracy and availability of the file sharing process within MAF.

The new web address will be: www.maf.govt.nz



Case Study

MAF will publish Import Health Standards that have been issued in accordance with the Biosecurity Act 1993 on MAF's web site.

An Import Health Standard is the document that defines the conditions that must, if an import is to be made, be met in the country of origin, during transit, during importation and quarantine and following entry into New Zealand.

Examples of Import Health

Standards include:

- Sheep and Goat Embryos from the Republic of South Africa,
- Untanned Lamb Slink Skins from Australia,
- Pears, *Pyrus communis* (Peras europeas) (Fresh Fruit) from Chile,
- European Grape, *Vitis vinifera* (Fresh Fruit) from the USA.

New Zealand has international obligations as a signatory to the World Trade Organisation Sanitary/Phytosanitary agreement as well as under the Biosecurity Act 1993, to make its import requirements readily available and transparent to trading partners and to the New Zealand public.

Import Health Standards issued under the Biosecurity Act 1993 are currently available to interested parties in hard copy form. Soon Import Health Standards will also be accessible through MAF's Web site. Due to the vast number of standards involved, placing those currently issued on the Web site is a huge task which will be managed in stages. It will be a few years yet before all Import Health Standards are available via the Internet. However, enabling people to come to the standards rather than vice versa, will ensure that the public always has access to the latest information.



Research Review

Reducing contamination of lamb carcasses during dressing.

What are the factors which significantly affect carcass contamination?

This is the subject of an important MAFRA applied research project nearing completion. Principal researcher is Research and Development scientist Monique Biss MVSc, based at Affco's Rangiora plant near Te Puke.



Monique says being based in the plant keeps her in touch with industry issues and the working realities for the people in the front line. It also ensures the research takes into account practicalities of the workplace.

While some studies have previously focused on post-slaughter factors affecting carcass contamination, Monique's is one of the first to also systematically study pre-slaughter presentation, and how this affects carcass cleanliness.

Her case-control method compares contamination levels of carcasses produced under similar circumstances, but with a single pre-slaughter factor changed so as to test the effect of that factor.

Key factors tested for in the research included:

- fleece length
- fleece dirtiness
- pre-slaughter washing

The inter-relationship of these factors with varying dressing interventions was also considered;

- conventional versus inverted systems
- controlling "roll back" - (when the fleece touches the carcass)
- controlling direct handling of the carcass by workers
- some dressing techniques, including the perineal trim
- hygiene associated with recovery of brains and tongues.

Key findings:

What you see is not always what you get!

One key finding is that while pre-slaughter washing reduces visible contamination it actually increases unseen or micro-biological contamination.

While the cleanliness of pelts is an important factor in reducing carcass contamination, washing stock immediately prior to slaughter is not the optimal way to achieve this. The single biggest hygiene gains occur when farmers send well presented stock for slaughter - clean shorn lambs make a big difference.

Another significant finding was that resources going in to the "control" of pelting sheep's heads may be misplaced. Monique's research found that contamination levels of sheep's tongues and brains are not affected by additional on-line dressing resources added to improve the appearance of the process.

However, control of hygienic practices during the recovery of brains in the offal room did improve contamination levels of this tissue.

The findings of the research are now being used to underpin a generic HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point) Plan under development by the MAFRA R and D Group under the leadership of Judith Lee. This will also involve a spreadsheet model for the hygienic dressing of lambs and is expected to be distributed widely in the industry by the end of this year.

Meet our People



Judy Barker
National Manager -
Fish. MAF - RA,
Meat and Seafood

An enthusiastic consumer of seafood herself, Judy's job is to develop standards in association with the Fishing Industry Inspection and Certification Council which

keep all aspects of our export seafood safe, and meet our trading partners' food safety and hygiene requirements. Judy's particular area of work relates to all seafood other than bivalve molluscan shellfish. A Massey University qualified Food Technologist, Judy is also at the forefront of resolving market access issues for the seafood industry.

Bright Note

Achieving agreement on something as complex, important and sensitive as contestability of meat inspection services was never going to be an easy task. But 12 months from its formation by the Meat Industry Hygiene Council the Technical Working Group on Contestability has presented its proposed model for the changes back to industry and the policy writers within MAF. Convener of the working group Dennis Butler says the process was boosted by the extremely constructive approach of the main groups involved; MAFRA, MAF Quality Management and representatives of the meat industry.

Editorial Box

RA Food Focus is the quarterly newsletter of MAF Regulatory Authority. It is provided for general information only and people requiring specific information should contact the Authority. Food Focus welcomes feedback and suggestions for future editions.

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