



# foodfocus

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## NZFSA not so mysterious after all

The New Zealand Food Safety Authority should be less mysterious to people following the presence of our stand at Mystery Creek Fielddays this year.

The stand, set up to provide information about the New Zealand Food Safety Authority to the public, farmers and the industry proved quite a success with passersby who seemed to enjoy the opportunity to learn more about food issues.

Information on food labelling, food additives and giveaways such as balloons, magnets and other promotional material was readily accepted. Information on BSE, recreational hunting, Risk Management Programmes, Agricultural Compounds and Veterinary Medicines and legislation administered by the Authority was also given out. The stand was attended by experts from all groups within NZFSA.

"I think our stand was very successful. Our attractive signage drew people to the stand and people are always interested in food issues," NZFSA's Director of Communications and Business Services Sandra Daly said. "It was a great opportunity to let people know who we are and the more information we



can give to the public on food issues the better." Record numbers of people attended the fielddays this year, due in part organisers said, to the excellent weather.

For more information on food issues check out the New Zealand Food Safety Authority's website on [www.nzfsa.govt.nz](http://www.nzfsa.govt.nz)

### Quality Quote

"Food is an important part of a balanced diet."

Fran Lebowitz, 'Food for Thought and Vice Versa'

## Hard work reaps rewards

Recognition by the United States and Canada that New Zealand's level of protection against *T. saginata* tapeworm infection in cattle is equivalent to theirs will save our meat industry about \$4 million a year.

The United States and Canada have formally accepted a scientific submission from New Zealand that showed the measures we have in place to protect humans from *T. saginata* (a type of tapeworm) were equivalent to theirs.

"There has been concerted pressure over the past four years to

obtain US equivalency approval. Unfortunately until the last few weeks it had been unsuccessful. We are delighted that our efforts have now paid off," said Tony Zohrab, Director of Animal Products. *T. saginata* is rare in New Zealand but prevalent in other countries. The tapeworm uses cattle as its host. It is passed to humans who eat infected beef that is undercooked. In cattle the infection shows up as measles type cysts in beef muscle. The tapeworm can't be passed from person to person or spread between cattle.

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# One year on ...

The New Zealand Food Safety Authority celebrates its first anniversary on July 1. It has been a busy and challenging year, says NZFSA Executive Director Andrew McKenzie.

“One thing I have learnt during this year is that everything takes longer than you think, but with persistence and dedicated people you get there in the end.

There have been some major achievements. In February this year NZFSA hosted and chaired the Codex Committee on Meat and Poultry Hygiene in Wellington. It was a very successful meeting and a lot was achieved in moving towards a more cost effective and constructive approach to meat hygiene. The existing bilateral and multilateral arrangements for trade in meat are rarely risk-based and tailored to individual circumstances. This creates technical barriers to trade.

In December, after years of work, the joint Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code was given the power of law in New Zealand. That has brought about a lot of changes for the food industry with regard to food labelling but it has also simplified transTasman trade immensely. The regulatory standards team is currently working on an education programme to assist with implementation.

We held our first NZFSA conference in March. From feedback this was a great success. We welcomed the opportunity to get together with a wide range of our stakeholders to talk about your expectations for the future and our plans to create a regulatory environment that allowed expression of these. Indeed our efforts to communicate and consult as widely as possible have been fruitful in achieving two way dialogue and ensuring NZFSA is “hearing” stakeholders views clearly. The Consumer Forum has proved particularly useful in this regard.

The reconfirmation of New Zealand’s BSE free status by the EU Scientific Steering Committee last November was very important for New Zealand. Along with MAF’s Biosecurity Authority, we have been working hard for a long time to ensure

BSE doesn’t enter New Zealand. As the recent case in Canada shows where one cow tested positive for BSE, any such finding would have a major impact here both in terms of consumer confidence and international trade.

There have been many other successes during the past year including work done internationally to benefit food producers in New Zealand. But there is a lot more work to do as we move forward. You will have seen the brochure inserted with this edition of *Food Focus*. The NZFSA is embarking on a major review of the domestic food regulatory programme. It is likely

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that this project will take about five years to complete. We held our first meetings this month with the public health units and local authorities as a prelude to discussions with other stakeholders. I am confident we can move forward together in a positive way.

The purpose of the review is to develop a food regulatory programme that will ensure people involved in processing and selling food take responsibility for meeting safety and suitability

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requirements. We hope in doing this that New Zealand’s reputation for producing safe and suitable food will be enhanced and there will be benefits for both domestic and international consumers. It is a significant project and will require considerable commitment of resources within NZFSA. There is much consultation to be done with public health leaders, local authorities, the industry and consumers to this end.

It’s a challenge and we are looking forward to it. In the meantime it is business as usual. This is a long term project and it is important that developments and changes already underway continue.”

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## BSE ... a timely reminder

The detection of a single cow in Canada with bovine spongiform encephalopathies (BSE) in May is a timely reminder of just how vulnerable countries can be to this disease.

While New Zealand is BSE free it is important for us to remain this way.

New Zealand has an extensive surveillance programme in place to confirm our ongoing freedom from BSE and other related diseases. We don’t allow the importation of meat and bone meal from ruminants from all countries.

Under the Biosecurity (Ruminant Protein) Regulations 1999 the feeding of ruminant protein to ruminant animals is forbidden. Research indicates that BSE is spread when cattle are fed ruminant meat and bone meal contaminated with the BSE

agent. The regulations therefore ensure that in the unlikely event that any New Zealand cattle become infected with BSE, the disease would not be passed on to other stock.

Ruminant animals include sheep, cattle, dairy cows, calves, deer, goats, llamas and alpacas. The stringent measures required by New Zealand for imports of beef and beef products for human consumption were developed in conjunction with the Ministry of Health (the function has now come to NZFSA) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

Signs of BSE to look out for in cattle include the loss of control of limbs, trembling, wide-eyed staring, swaying of the head and erratic behaviour including charging. If an animal is showing any signs of BSE, a veterinarian should be contacted immediately.

# Focus on food labelling education

The New Zealand Food Safety Authority is to step up its food labelling education programme on allergens as part of the implementation of the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code.

The Food Standards Code, which came into full effect in December 2002, requires food manufacturers and importers to declare on food labels any common food product or substance that is capable of causing an allergic reaction in people. Commonly referred to as allergens, those specifically mentioned in the Code are:

Cereals containing gluten and their products (wheat, rye, barley, oats)

Crustacea (eg crayfish, crabs, prawns) and their products

Egg and egg products

Fish and fish products

Milk and milk products

Nuts, sesame seeds and their products

Peanuts, soybeans and their products

Royal Jelly

Sulphites

These allergens are said to cause about 90 percent of all food-related allergic reactions.

“Since the Code came into full effect several products have had to be recalled in New Zealand because they contained allergens that were not declared on the label. We are aware that Australia

has had a similar experience so it is timely to remind manufacturers and importers of their obligations in this regard,” NZFSA Director Tim Knox said.

“Allergy New Zealand says that over 30,000 New Zealanders have a food allergy. The World Allergy Awareness Day last month highlighted the importance of this issue. Although symptoms in allergy sufferers vary greatly, allergic reactions can be fatal so it is important that consumers have all the information they need to make informed choices about what’s in the food they eat,” Mr Knox said.

As part of our implementation programme we have written to food manufacturers and importers to reinforce the importance of this issue and remind them of their obligations under the Food Standards Code regarding the labelling of foods containing allergens.

This follows an advertisement in eight daily newspapers in May, advising food manufacturers, importers and consumers of the new labelling requirements under the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code.

A fact sheet about allergen labelling and advisory/warning statements is available on the NZFSA website [www.nzfsa.govt.nz](http://www.nzfsa.govt.nz). Hard copies can be obtained from local public health units.

More information on products available in New Zealand that are free of common food allergens can be found on the Manufactured Food Database funded by the Ministry of Health. The website address is [www.mfd.co.nz](http://www.mfd.co.nz)

## VICH programme working well

Two international animal health organisations have praised the work of the VICH (International Cooperation on Harmonisation of Technical Requirements for Registration of Veterinary Medicinal Products) in which NZFSA plays a significant role in.

The International Federation for Animal Health (IFAH) in Europe, which has as its members some major veterinary medicine manufacturers, and the Animal Health Institute (AHI) in the United States said the VICH was working well and had achieved excellent progress in several areas.

The VICH was officially launched in Paris in 1996. Its programme is aimed at harmonising technical requirements for veterinary product registration. New Zealand and Australia have observer status on the VICH Steering Committee. At present the ANZ regulatory representative on the Steering Committee is ACVM Group Director Debbie Morris and the industry representative is Peter Holdsworth from Avcare in Australia.

The two countries have set up an ANZ VICH Management Group to facilitate Australian and New Zealand input into VICH. It involves representatives from industry and the government. New Zealand is represented by the ACVM Group of NZFSA, ERMA New Zealand, Agcarm and the Animal Remedy and Plant Protectant Association (ARPPA). Australia is represented by the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA), the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), Environment Australia, Avcare and the Veterinary Manufacturers and Distributors Association (VMDA).

The harmonisation of technical data requirements is expected, over time, to greatly reduce costs and speed up the approval process through a reduction in workloads and the rationalisation of government resources. This means that new, often ‘softer’ products are available in the market earlier.

It will also facilitate the exchange of assessment reports and

## Leading vets make international waves

Four New Zealand veterinarians have been appointed to top level positions at the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE).

**Dr Andrew McKenzie**, New Zealand Food Safety Authority Executive Director has been appointed Chairperson of the Animal Production Food Safety Working Group. This role complements Dr McKenzie's position as chairman of the Codex Committee on Meat and Poultry Hygiene.

**Dr Stuart MacDiarmid**, NZFSA Principal Adviser Zoonoses Animal Health, has been appointed Secretary General of the Animal Health Standards Commission.

MAF's **Dr Barry O'Neil**, Director of Biosecurity, has been appointed Vice President of the International Committee and the Administration Commission, which is the governing body of the OIE.

**Dr David Bayvel**, MAF's Director, Animal Welfare has been appointed Chairperson of the Animal Welfare Working Group.

The OIE sets the international standards for trade in animal products and its decisions have considerable impact on New Zealand's farming and food sectors.

"The work of these four veterinarians has put New Zealand at the forefront of international developments in food safety, animal health and welfare and veterinary science.

"It recognises the expertise and standing of New Zealand in



*Dr Andrew McKenzie.*



*Dr Stuart MacDiarmid.*

these important areas," MAF's Director-General Murray Sherwin said.

"These appointments were made at the 71st annual General Session of the International Committee of the Office International des Epizooties (OIE), held in Paris recently. The main technical issues discussed were how countries could better protect themselves from the risks of BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy), foot and mouth disease and avian influenza. Conditions for safe trade in animals and animal products were also discussed.

"The OIE says the appointments of Dr Andrew McKenzie and Dr David Bayvel recognise the evolution of new fields of activity for their organisation – animal welfare and food safety," he said.

allow companies to rationalise development work on new chemicals.

The IFAH said the assessment of its members was that the VICH process was of value, especially to global companies developing products for registration in the EU, US, Japan, Australia and New Zealand, and to regional companies seeking geographical expansion.

"This conclusion is based on the fact that the VICH has achieved excellent progress in several areas. Early successes were achieved in areas based, in part, on guidelines developed within the ICH. For example, the focus of some of the earliest VICH guidelines was in the area of quality. Success was also achieved in technical specialties unique to animal health."

The VICH was also providing intangible benefits, it said. "VICH provides a unique environment in which regulatory and industry experts in a given field work closely together and develop a rapport and trust."

AHI agrees. "Industry has the opportunity to impact the content

of guidelines and, through them, the type of regulatory requirements to which we are subject. Therefore, even where the commercial impact is not great, the regulatory impact can be large."

NZFSA ACVM Director Debbie Morris said she was pleased at the positive feedback from the industry.

"From a regulatory point of view in a country as small as New Zealand, it is important to work from a consistent base of data requirements. This system works for all parties and it is great to get positive feedback from industry on the harmonisation process.

"There have been major contributions from New Zealand NZFSA representatives Brian Pidford (quality) and John Reeve (food safety) on the working groups as we are well used to working with the EU and the USA and finding a pragmatic 'middle ground'."

For further information on VICH go to [www.nzfsa.govt.nz/policy-law/vich/index.htm](http://www.nzfsa.govt.nz/policy-law/vich/index.htm)

# Survey

The New Zealand Food Safety Authority is reviewing its publications and we want to know what you think about *Food Focus*. We would appreciate it if you could take a few minutes to answer these questions on a separate sheet and send it by fax to Sharon Williams, Editor, *Food Focus* on 04 463 2583 or by post at PO Box 2835, Wellington.

- How useful and informative do you find *Food Focus*?
- Are you happy with the content of *Food Focus*?
- What do you think of the layout and style?
- Would you prefer a publication that was more indepth than *Food Focus*?
- Are there any issues that you would like to see covered more regularly in *Food Focus*?
- Are there issues you would like to see covered that are not currently covered in *Food Focus*?

Thanks for your time in filling out this survey. We will let you know of any changes planned.



## Full circle for retiree

When Derek Buckland started working in the health protection area 42 years ago his first job as a new kid on the block was to seize and destroy thalidomide.

Last month as he was packing up his desk at the New Zealand Food Safety Authority, he was knee deep in the recall of dietary supplements manufactured by the disgraced Australian company Pan Pharmaceuticals – one of the biggest recalls ever in New Zealand or Australia.

“What goes around comes around,” says the now retired senior advisor in risk management and programme manager of wine.

“When I first joined the Department of Health as a trainee in Dunedin one of the first jobs I did was the seizure and destruction of thalidomide. It was extremely important, because of the deformities and the child birth defects that thalidomide was found to have caused, to get it out of the market pronto.”

Derek looks back on his career with a lot of pride and gratification that he has done his bit to protect public health.

Derek joined the Department of Health on February 4, 1961 as what is now called a health protection officer. He spent the first few years working in the environmental health/public health field and in those days spent a lot of time on basic sanitation issues. He made a decision to specialise in food in 1971.

He has been involved in a number of major public health food issues and has overseen many food recalls. Derek believes that the food industry has come a long way in managing risks and issues that once would have been “swept under the carpet” are now being dealt with responsibly by food businesses.

“Things on occasion will go wrong and it’s the putting right that counts. We have a lot more recalls occurring today than we did not too many years ago and it’s about food business recognising their responsibilities, recognising their risks and moving appropriately to remove that risk from the consumer. Removing



product that is not fit for purpose from the market is an essential component of risk management.”

And, says Derek, consumers have a high expectation that the food they eat is safe. “They don’t want to take any risk at all and I can understand where they come from but I have great difficulty in identifying in my life anything that does not have some level of risk associated with it. There is a risk with everything. Consumers have this expectation that the food they eat is safe and believe in this quite seriously. They will react violently to any situation where they perceive there is a risk to their health and wellbeing but if one looked at a zero risk situation for food, I think we would all starve.”

Derek and his wife have “two and a half lifetimes” of plans for retirement. They plan to retire to the Wairarapa and build a house on a block of land they own. “I was originally a farmer and I am going back to my farming roots. I need the open space,” he says.

In the meantime Derek can still be found in the NZFSA’s head office two days a week doing some contract work.

## Meet our People: Tony Rumney, Programme Manager, Primary Production and Residues, Dairy and Plant Products Group

For most people, working remotely has its downsides but the biggest problem Tony Rumney faces at his home-based New Plymouth office is knowing when to stop work.

Tony usually spends two days in New Plymouth, and an average of three days in Wellington and admits working on your own can be challenging. Being away from home so often also has its problems but Tony says he's lucky in that he has such a patient and understanding wife.

"The biggest problem is putting it (work) to bed and putting it away. There is a tendency to stop at five o'clock. Then at 7 o'clock because there is nothing on telly I'll wander back and tutu on some bits and pieces," he says.

Tony has been working for the New Zealand Food Safety Authority for just over a year after leaving his last job at Fonterra and he's loving it.

"One of the attractions of coming into work at the Food Safety Authority is the people you work with. The number of knowledgeable and helpful people that are accessible is great. I am constantly coming into contact with people that you can really learn from. It's a little bit more challenging and for that reason you can't just cruise. If you do, you feel guilty because if you are not making the effort it is going to be quite noticeable."

He also enjoys working with the Dairy and Plant Products group.

"We do have a very good small team that is working well together and it is one of the big surprises coming in. You have this perception it's a government department and that its going to be a bit stodgy in the way it operates but there is a lot of support and there is more walk the talk than you get in most organisations. It is very rare to see it happen," he says.

The primary production side of Tony's job is based around



setting standards for farms. He deals a lot with PSP operators, assessors and validators.

Tony also manages the National Chemical Contaminants Programme – the residues side of his work.

"The legwork is done by AgriQuality. What we are doing is checking that the industry is doing everything we are telling

them to and to demonstrate that things are working. When we put statements on official assurances we need to know that they are valid statements we are putting on."

He started his career with Kiwi Co-operative Dairies Ltd working in the laboratory. He moved to Northland in 1985 and established an independent milk testing lab for three dairy companies in Northland. He moved back to New Plymouth in 1992 and started his own lab doing water testing, soil testing and plant residue testing. It was his first excursion out of the dairy industry but it kept drawing him back and he rejoined Kiwi Co-operative in 1997.

"It (the dairy industry) pulls you back. Going out on my own in the lab, I didn't have much to do with dairy but by the time I finished most of the work was being done for dairy farmers."

Tony is married with two teenage children, whom he says he spends most of his time chauffeuring around. He also dabbles with golf.

"I really enjoyed golf but it was quite time consuming and with a garden that resembles Jurassic Park it's more of an interest for me than active participation at the moment."

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Cattle become infected by eating grass or drinking water that is contaminated with eggs from human faeces. The symptoms of infection in humans are generally mild and readily treatable.

"Historical data has shown that there is an extremely low level of *T saginata* infection in cattle in New Zealand. However a more quantitative risk assessment was needed to obtain more detailed information on the true extent and intensity of infection of cattle carcasses.

"The NZFSA surveyed 60,000 animals over two years. During

that time a total of 41 animals were found with one or more suspect cysts in the head or heart muscles. In 32 cases only one cyst was found. Our assessment shows there is an extremely low level of risk to humans in New Zealand and overseas from New Zealand beef," Dr Zohrab said.



Food Focus is issued by the New Zealand Food Safety Authority. It provides an overview of issues impacting on the regulatory environment for the food industries. People requiring specific information are invited to contact the Authority. New Zealand Food Safety Authority, 86 Jervois Quay, PO Box 2835 Wellington. Phone 04-463-2500, Fax 04-463-2501. Food Safety Concerns 0800 NZFSA1 (0800 693 721). Website: [www.nzfsa.govt.nz](http://www.nzfsa.govt.nz). Food Focus welcomes feedback and suggestions for future editions. Please contact: Sharon Williams, Senior Communications Advisor, Email: [sharon.williams@nzfsa.govt.nz](mailto:sharon.williams@nzfsa.govt.nz)