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REGULATORY REFORMS**■ **FOODSAFE WEEK****WELCOME**

Another year is nearly over. Christmas is around the corner, bringing with it warmer weather (we hope!) and busy times in the food retail business. In this issue we cover shellfish safety – foods which are increasing in popularity with consumers and food proprietors alike and have special food safety considerations. We discuss NZFSA's major announcement that the food industry regulatory reforms got the Government's approval in October and what this will mean for you on page three. On page two we cover trans fatty acids – what they are, why they're important and why the regulators are looking into them.

Keep your feedback and comments coming in to:
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Protecting the safety of mussels and other shellfish

Shellfish are a popular summer food item and more and more cafés and small stores are keeping fresh shellfish tanks to provide their customers with the freshest produce possible. Unfortunately however, inspectors and Food Officers have recently reported that some food operators are not managing their fresh shellfish tanks in ways that maintain the safety and quality of their contents. Shellfish are a high risk product and need to be managed carefully. Failure to do so could result in a customer contracting a foodborne illness which can have a devastating effect on them. Selling unsafe food can also have a devastating effect on your business.

If you either display fresh shellfish for sale or store fresh shellfish for use in menu items, take note of these tips:

Shellfish deliveries:

- Shellfish should have been refrigerated within specified times after harvest – for mussels, this is no longer than 20 hours after harvest in warm months and 24 hours in cooler months. Use suppliers who can assure you this happens with their products.
- It's important to only sell good quality produce, so always inspect incoming deliveries. If the delivery vehicle is not clean, or is carrying other materials which might have contaminated the shellfish, then reject the delivery. Check that the shellfish arrive chilled, that they are alive and healthy (may be slightly open but close when tapped or jiggled), and that there are no broken shells.

Storing shellfish:

- Once delivered, refrigerate shellfish immediately in an area with low airflow (this prevents them from drying out). Keep them in their sack or a clean container for best results.
- Store shellfish between 4 and 10°C and keep them moist with water with a 3.3% salinity (7 teaspoons of salt into 10 litres of water). Fresh water will kill mussels.
- Carry out regular checks on storage conditions. Take and record the temperature of the storage water to identify when temperature controllers may need adjustment. Carry out a visual assessment of the quality of the shellfish (look for broken shells or dead fish).
- Shellfish should be consumed within five days of harvest, but under optimum handling and storage conditions, can be held for up to seven days from harvest.

Maintaining the storage unit:

- Ensure that you have a cleaning schedule in place for mussel display equipment. This should include: what is to be cleaned, how to do it, which chemicals to use, who is to do it, and how often it should be done. Refer to the manufacturer's instructions for maintaining and cleaning the equipment.
- Clean and sanitise your storage unit and change the storage water at least every second day.
- Keep a record of when cleaning and water changes have been carried out to ensure that these activities are being properly managed.

Staff training:

- Ensure that your staff are aware of your food safety requirements when handling shellfish.
- Train your staff in all aspects of shellfish care – from what to look for and assess when receiving fresh stock, to checking stored and displayed stock and cleaning tanks and equipment.

Having robust procedures in place to manage the food safety of shellfish will help ensure your business continues to be a preferred supplier of a favourite Kiwi menu item.



Trans fatty acids

There is growing consumer and media interest in the link between dietary intakes of trans fatty acids (TFA) and adverse health outcomes.

TFA are a type of unsaturated fatty acid that can impact on health by increasing cholesterol levels.

Low levels of TFA occur naturally in the fat of dairy products and in the meat of ruminant animals such as cows and sheep. They are also formed during the industrial processing or superheating of fats and oils – eg, in partial hydrogenation (the process of making semi-solid fat from liquid polyunsaturated oil). These partially hydrogenated oils are used as spreads or as shortenings for baking.

There is a significant and growing body of evidence linking TFA to an increased risk of coronary heart disease. Concerns exist in particular over TFA derived from partially hydrogenated vegetable oil.

Many countries (US, Canada and some European countries) have placed either limits on the amount of TFA allowed in foods, or made labelling of TFA content mandatory.

Previous research suggests that TFA occur in relatively small amounts in the New Zealand food supply compared with these countries. Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) is currently looking into New Zealanders' intake of TFA to determine whether they constitute a public health risk which should be managed. This assessment should be complete later this year.



Food Standards Code Corner

Did You Know?

The presence of brain, heart, kidney, liver, tongue or tripe in a food, must be declared either by the class name 'offal' or by the specific type of offal - eg, a 'steak and kidney pie' is not just a 'meat pie'.

Definitions

Food Safety – all aspects of food hygiene which relate to the production, processing, distribution, storage and sale of safe food.

Food suitability – covers product attributes that are not related to food safety, including composition and labelling as well as aesthetic defects and matters such as ensuring the product does not contain anything offensive, unexpected or unusual, but generally excludes quality issues (eg, floury apples).

Food industry regulatory reforms get the go-ahead

Following three years of review, the Government has agreed to NZFSA's proposals to redesign New Zealand's domestic food regulatory system. The changes will cover government involvement in all aspects of the safety and suitability of food produced, processed, manufactured, transported and traded in New Zealand. All food sold in New Zealand is included, whatever its source and however it reached the point of sale, and whether for profit or for charity.

In practical terms, this means NZFSA will: develop a new Food Bill; clarify the roles and responsibilities of the regulators; and introduce a range of risk-based tools designed to help food operators manage food safety and suitability.

What this means for food operators

All food businesses will be required to show how they manage food safety and suitability. Small, less complex food operations such as cafés will fill in an off-the-peg 'Food Control Plan' (FCP) to document their food safety and suitability management procedures. NZFSA will supply the templates free of charge. More complex food businesses will be able to modify a template FCP, or develop their own.

Local councils will be the first point of contact for someone setting up a new food business. They will also be the main contact for small businesses and provide services such as advising on the appropriate tool for a specific food operation, registering FCPs and verifying them on an ongoing basis.

Some food operations which meet certain criteria such as low frequency of operation, small scale of impact (eg, cake stall) and fund raising activities will operate under non-regulatory Food Handler Guidance information, also provided by local councils.

NZFSA will also be working to standardise options for training and educating food workers from manufacture through transport, to serving food in a café or at a fundraiser. The intention is that everyone involved in all aspects of the food industry has the skills and competencies required to do their jobs effectively.

Drafting the changes to the law will now begin, and the transition to the new regime is expected to begin in July 2008 and take about five years. NZFSA has released a discussion paper which describes the next steps: proposals to implement the changes, including when each food sector is expected to be brought into the new system. NZFSA is asking for views on these transition proposals. We are particularly interested in suggestions which would better ensure that:

- the appropriate risk management tool has been applied to each food operation,
- the proposed sequence of moving food sectors to the new food regime is reasonable (based on risk and priority)
- there is sufficient capability and capacity for implementation (regulators, recognised persons and industry).

To get more information, download the paper from NZFSA's website at: www.nzfsa.govt.nz or call 0800 693 721 to be sent a copy. The closing date for submissions is 9 February 2007.

NZFSA Updates

Foodsafe Partnership Summer Campaign

The New Zealand Foodsafe Partnership launched a new theme with national foodsafe week in November – *Food Safety for Life*.

One of the important life skills needed to ensure continuing good health is the proper handling and storage of food. The *Food Safety for Life* campaign is aimed at providing those leaving home for the first time – young people off flatting, studying or travelling – with the knowledge they need to avoid contracting (or, just as importantly, giving others) foodborne illness.

Intended to run over several years, the *Food Safety for Life* campaign aims to broaden the focus of the partnership and provide scope for the development of a range of new resources targeted at various age groups.

For more information about the summer food safety campaign, visit the partnership's website, www.foodsafe.org.nz or contact your local public health unit.

Varying or surrendering your Food Safety Programme

A reminder for businesses operating under an approved Food Safety Programme (FSP) that you must apply to your local Public Health Unit for a variation to your FSP if you:

- change your trading name
- relocate your business
- introduce a new process or product
- change your critical control points
- make any other significant change to your procedures or premises.

You must surrender your exemption if you:

- no longer own the business
- change the legal name of your company.

To surrender your exemption, send your exemption certificates to your local Public Health Unit.

Doing the hard yards is worth it

First impressions last, so what will your customers think about your business if they see a dirty and smelly yard?

Yards and the smell caused by refuse stored in them are a frequent cause for public complaints to Councils and Public Health Units. The yard area is important because foods enter (and occasionally leave) via the yard and refuse is usually stored there. However, they are often forgotten when it comes to premises maintenance.

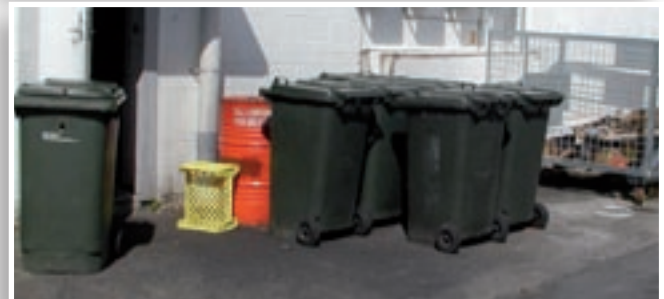
The Food Hygiene Regulations 1974 require that every yard or outside working area and every pathway is paved with a solid, washable surface with adequate drainage. If there is no yard a separate room or enclosure for the storage of refuse containers, and articles or materials not required for immediate use needs to be provided.

Yards can easily become a dumping ground for unwanted equipment and packaging. Rubbish gets dropped and left on the ground, and broken glass and spills are common. All this material provides food and shelter for rodents, birds and insects, which can carry foodborne illness-causing organisms and create a nuisance.

Ensure that keeping the yard clean and tidy is on your cleaning roster with details such as who is responsible, what cleaning products to use, the frequency and the cleaning method.

Here are some tips to remember for maintaining your yard:

- Clean your yards as often as necessary to keep them in good condition. For some this will be at least once a day, for others weekly.
- Sweep up all rubbish and put it in the bin before hosing the yard down. Don't forget to clean up the rubbish under the bins.
- Keep gutters clear. Rubbish can block gutters, creating a nuisance, and attracting vermin.
- Use hot water and a degreaser, such as a detergent to get rid of grease.
- Ensure only clean water goes down yard drains as they are connected to the storm water system. Spills and refuse must be cleaned up and placed in a refuse container or washed down a designated cleaner's sink or other suitable disposal point - not washed away to the sea through the storm water system.
- Shared yards can be a problem with everyone able to contribute to the mess but no one taking responsibility for it. The messier it is, the easier it is for rubbish to be added to the pile. Talk to your neighbours and work out a roster for areas of responsibility. This is particularly important for shared driveways and alleyways.
- Clean as you go. Pick up rubbish and clean up spills immediately before they spread. Get rid of unwanted articles rather than piling them up in the yard.
- Consider increasing the frequency of emptying your refuse or putting your organic waste into a separate designated refrigerator during summer as warmer temperatures will reduce the time it takes the refuse to start rotting and creating problems with smell.
- Ensure your bins are clean (including their base) if you move them in and out of your premises as this can transfer dirt and refuse inside from your yard.
- Do not use yards for food preparation as it can get contaminated by dust, dirt, animal droppings.



Sometimes it might feel like you're doing the hard yards to keep your premises clean and tidy but it's an effective way to show customers that you take pride in your surroundings and business.



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