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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](http://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](http://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.**



# Fly on the wall

In this issue, we discuss food safety issues facing operators at this time of year and things you can do to avoid stress and disaster during the silly season...

**Equipment** - don't wait until the day of a function to find all is not as it was when you last packed it up:

- check all function crockery and utensils that have been stored over winter and discard and replace any chipped platters, rusty tongs or broken thermometers
- check all bulk catering equipment and make sure it's operating correctly; clean it out if it hasn't been used for a while
- get key equipment such as dishwashers, chillers and thermometers serviced

## Staff:

- make sure all part-time function staff are trained in food safety practices
- ensure the necessary equipment is available to maintain good staff hand hygiene when you are working in awkward venues ie, a hand wash area with running water, flowing soap, paper towels and hand sanitiser

**Pests** - develop a plan to be ready for summer pests such as cockroaches, ants and flies:

- replace or repair any damaged fly screens
- clean and service any electronic 'fly zappers'
- get your premises insect-treated
- ensure all bins (inside and outside) have lids
- restock pest control products you might need

## Taking care with hot foods

The pathogen that most commonly causes foodborne illness outbreaks at large functions is *Clostridium perfringens* and it loves the temperature danger zone (between 4 and 60°C). Cool foods quickly to below 4°C by splitting into smaller dishes if necessary and reheat them to piping hot when required. Also remember:

- heat hot foods in the oven or on the stove to piping hot (above 60°C) before loading into pie warmers or hot holding units
- keep pie warmers hot - above 60°C
- keep food in bain maries hot - above 60°C
- ensure the temperature of reheated foods is maintained above 60°C during hot holding

**Taking care with cold foods** - ensure chillers, fridges, chill cabinets, and freezers maintain correct temperatures to keep food safe:

- cool pre-prepared bulk food quickly – it should reach less than 4°C within one hour
- ensure you have thermometers in cold storage units and check them regularly
- record temperatures of all cold storage units at least daily
- make sure that your chillers and fridges are running between 2 and 4°C
- ensure freezers are at -18°C
- do not over-stock cold storage units as this reduces air flow
- store cooked foods and salad items above raw meats
- place raw meat at the bottom of the chiller so it can't contaminate other foods

## Some recent food complaints received and investigated at the Public Health Unit:

- alleged foodborne illness complaints relating to food premises (20)
- mouldy sandwich and lamington
- 'off' cream in apple pie
- poor labelling on a previously frozen product and shaved ham
- foreign matter in a pie, staple in yoghurt, glass in muesli bar, stone in potato product
- luke-warm meat pies
- cold pies going straight in to pie warmers without preheating
- cough lollies sold with mixed lollies
- hair in meal.

**All Health Protection and Environmental Health Officers wish you a happy, safe Christmas and a very profitable new year!**

For more information please contact:

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