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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.

Tips for Christmas food safety

People often celebrate Christmas and the summer holiday season by dining out more than usual. This means commercial food premises have to cope with larger amounts of food than normal and take on temporary or occasional staff. These practices can increase the risk of foodborne illness so it's important to recognise these risks and take precautions

Here are a few points to remember:

- Ensure that you have enough staff to complete all tasks, especially those relating to premises hygiene.
- Make sure that all temporary staff are trained, not just on their job tasks, but also on your business's food safety and hygiene practices.
- Staff replacing supervisors over the holiday period must also have adequate training and be able to manage the critical control points of the preparation processes.
- Remind staff that food safety and hygiene procedures are a priority and must be followed.
- Staff who are ill with symptoms of diarrhoea or vomiting must not work, and must remain off work for at least 24 hours after the symptoms have stopped, to prevent the contamination of food.
- Consider extra storage facilities. If freezers and chillers are over stocked they will not function properly as cold air must be able to circulate around the food to keep it safe. Remember it is essential to maintain the correct/recommended product temperatures.
- Use a suitable system of stock rotation to ensure older foods are used first, and food spoilage is minimised.
- Are the services you require available over the summer period, especially around Christmas? Check that your pest control, refuse, electrical and equipment maintenance services are available during your operating periods. If not, make other arrangements.
- Check use-by dates on incoming stock and pay particular attention to perishable goods such as dairy products.
- Ensure reheated food reaches 72°C, and is held there for at least three minutes. The food should be steaming hot, as lukewarm food is an ideal environment for bacteria to grow. Reheat food only once.
- Use separate cutting boards and utensils for raw meats and ready-to-eat foods to avoid cross-contamination.
- Wash your hands with soap and warm water and then dry them thoroughly before preparing foods and between handling raw meat/poultry and ready-to-eat foods such as salads and cooked meats. Use the 20+20 rule – wash for 20 seconds and then dry for 20 seconds.



On behalf of Regional Public Health we wish all proprietors, their families and staff our greetings for the festive season and best wishes for the New Year.

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