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# MARKET NEWS



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## Focus on China

### African swine fever reports see huge drop in Q1

Reports on African swine fever on the Chinese mainland dropped significantly in the first quarter of the year compared to the same period in 2019, the agricultural authority revealed on Thursday.

As of March 19, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs has received four reports on African swine fever this year, said Wei Hongyang, deputy director of the ministry's animal husbandry and veterinary bureau.

One case related to a wild boar while the other three cases all happened to captive bred hogs, said Wei at a news conference held by the State Council's Joint Prevention and Control Mechanism.

To date, a total of 324 hogs were disposed of due to the infection, a dramatic decline compared to the same period in 2019, according to Wei.

In the first quarter of last year, he revealed that the country had 13 reports on African swine fever and lost more than 197,000 hogs.

Wei said investigations have been conducted on the reports within the year and the result showed that most of the cases resulted from illegal transportation.

"None of those vehicles transferring the infected hogs had their information recorded in local departments as required. And the hogs had not received quarantine inspection," he said.

Of those cases, some were traded online, which makes inspection work from the agricultural department even harder, according to Wei.

Last week, the ministry sent a notice to agricultural departments at all levels, urging them to strengthen inspection work and prevent the situation from happening again.

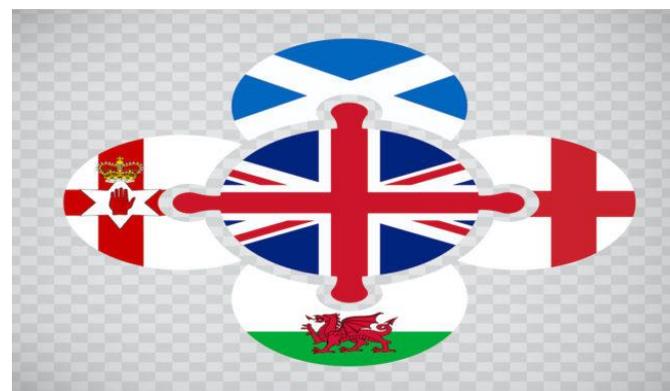
African swine fever is believed to infect only pigs, and no humans or other species have thus far been infected.

China reported its first case of the disease in August 2018 in Northeast China's Liaoning province. Later outbreaks were reported in other provincial regions.

At the news conference, Wei said that the ministry has received applications on the clinical testing of vaccines for preventing African swine fever. "We will speed up the approval and maintain a high level of the vaccine's quality," he said.

## International News

### New equivalency audit for UK meat was completed under EU regulations



Union.

Between USDA's on-site verification audit of the United Kingdom's meat inspection system July 15-Aug.2, 2019, and last Friday's public release of the report, Britain left the European

The report, which contains “no systemic findings,” does acknowledge the audit was conducted before Jan. 31, 2020, when the UK implemented Brexit by withdrawing from the EU.

“At the time of the audit, the United Kingdom was a member of the European Union (EU) and drawing its authority to enforce inspection laws from Regulation (EU) No. 178/2002, which establishes the general principals and requirements of food law, defines the European Food Safety Authority, and procedures in matters of food safety,” the report says.

“The United Kingdom implements the requirements of the EC Food Hygiene Regulations, which are the primary overreaching laws for regulating meat inspection and have been found to be the equivalent of that of the United States.”

Government oversight is one of the six “equivalence components” that are included in a foreign equivalency audit. The report says food safety and standards are “devolved matters” in that they are government authorities that are delegated to institutions like the Scottish Parliament and the Assemblies of Wales, Northern Ireland, and London or to even more local authorities.

Within this structure, the USDA report recognizes the UK’s Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) as the country’s central authority “for international trade negotiations on all sanitary and phytosanitary matters and international trade of food of animal origin.”

The purpose of the audit was to determine whether the UK’s food safety inspection system governing raw pork remains equivalent to that of the United States with the ability to export products that are safe and properly labeled.

As the audit got underway, England and Northern Ireland were eligible to export

raw pork products to the United States.

The audit was also to assess whether the UK’s regulatory oversight for beef and small ruminants is sufficient for export to the U.S. and if the system was adequate for all four UK countries: England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales.

“An analysis of the on-site audit observations within each component (there are six) did not identify any deficiencies that represented an immediate threat to public health,” the report says.

The auditors from USDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) “concluded that the United Kingdom’s meat inspection system government raw pork, raw beef, and small ruminants’ function in a manner equivalent to that of the United States.

They found the UK “implements a single food safety inspection system by applying the same set of laws, regulations, and policies to all establishments certified to export to the United States.”

The audit report, dated Feb. 26, 2020, was sent to Christine Middlemiss, the chief veterinary officer for the UK, on March 6, 2020, the same date it was made publicly available by the U.S. FSIS.

The on-site audit included two laboratories, five beef facilities including slaughter and processing functions, one lamb and mutton slaughter and raw processing facility, one pork slaughter, and a processing plant, and a cold storage facility. Regulatory offices were also visited in the four countries.

For a three-year period, from 2016 to 2019, FSIS re-inspected 100 percent of the raw pork exported to the U.S. from England and Northern Ireland. More than

65.4 million pounds were re-inspected with almost 7 million pounds also tested for chemical residues and Salmonella. No public health rejections occurred.

The UK corrected findings the FSIS found in the last audit, which was conducted in 2017.

Some inspections in the UK are conducted by third-party contractors who are not government employees. Prior to the audit, FSIS “determined that the use in the United Kingdom of inspectors who are not under direct government supervision meets equivalence criteria.”

The UK “has formally delegated to contract employees the authority to conduct government inspection activities and to take enforcement measures when necessary to stop violations of food safety measures.”

Government supervisors audit the work of the contact employees at least four times a year.

USDA’s new equivalency audit for UK meat exports means that British beef will soon be headed for the U.S.

The next step is finishing up an export deal around valued at about £66 million over the first five years.

The UK’s Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) in partnership with DEFRA along with other organizations are negotiating with the U.S.

When those talks clear up remaining administrative details, look for UK’s beef export to America will begin.

### **Coronavirus stops FDA from conducting foreign food safety inspections**

The FDA isn’t conducting food safety inspections overseas through at least April

because of the coronavirus, but the move has more to do with the federal government’s travel restrictions than it does food.

Although the Food and Drug Administration is referring to the action as a postponement of inspections, it amounts to a suspension of inspection activity. Food inspections at land and sea ports of entry into the United States will continue as part of the government’s normal domestic operations.

“The FDA based this decision on a number of factors, including State Department Level 4 travel advisories in which travel is prohibited for U.S. government employees,” according to the FDA’s notice related to coronavirus, which is also referred to as COVID-19.

The agency continues to downplay the ability of the coronavirus to be spread via food saying there is “no evidence of food or food packaging being associated with transmission of COVID-19.”

However, public health officials say the virus can survive on hard surfaces such as plastic, stainless steel, and other metals that often come into contact with food. The FDA says its classic advice to clean, separate, cook, and chill is a frontline defense in containment of the spread of the virus.

Public concern about foodservice workers spreading the virus are not founded in facts as they are currently known, according to the FDA.

“... the virus that causes COVID-19 is spreading from person-to-person in some communities in the U.S.,” according to the FDA’s coronavirus web page. “The CDC recommends that if you are sick, stay home until you are better and no longer pose a risk of infecting others. Anyone handling, preparing and serving food should always follow safe food handling procedures, such as washing hands and surfaces often.”

The FDA announcement this week says officials believe the agency will be able to “maintain oversight over international manufacturers and imported products using alternative tools and methods.”

“These include denying entry of unsafe products into the U.S., physical examinations and/or product sampling at our borders, reviewing a firm’s previous compliance history, using information sharing from foreign governments as part of mutual recognition and confidentiality agreements. . .”

### UK MPs propose food standards amendment to Ag Bill



A parliamentary committee in the United Kingdom has put forward an amendment to the Agriculture Bill to protect food standards.

Members of the cross-party Environment Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Committee made the move after a hearing with representatives from the agriculture, animal welfare and trade sectors this week.

Members of Parliament (MPs) heard from Emily Rees from Trade Strategies, James West of Compassion in World Farming and Nick von Westenholz from the National Farmers’ Union on how the U.K. can ensure imports under new trade agreements are produced to the animal welfare and environmental standards expected by the public.

### Protecting standards in trade deals

The amendment will ensure food imported as part of future trade deals meets or exceeds British standards on production, animal welfare and the environment.

The government has previously said the U.K. will not compromise on its standards of food safety and animal welfare in future trade agreements.

Neil Parish, chair of the committee, said it is calling on government to uphold its commitments by amending the Agriculture Bill.

“The evidence the committee heard this week highlighted that the negotiation of new free trade deals present exciting opportunities to uphold and even boost our high production standards, but the government must ensure that consumer preferences for environmentally-friendly and humanely produced foods are respected,” he said.

“Lowering food production standards should not be a bargaining chip to be used in future trade deals – allowing imports to be produced in ways that are illegal here would severely undercut British farmers.”

As part of the law-making system in the U.K., the Agriculture Bill was introduced earlier this year and is currently at the House of Commons stage before moving onto the House of Lords.

Hormone-injected beef and chlorine washed chicken as well as other products

from around the world are examples of practices currently banned in the U.K but allowed elsewhere.

### Thousands sign petition

Meanwhile, more than 17,000 people have signed a petition from the National Farmers Union calling on the government to commit in law that British food standards will not be undermined in future trade deals.

As the U.K. starts trade negotiations with the EU and United States, people want the government to legislate so it will not import food that would be illegal for domestic farmers to produce.

Minette Batters, NFU president said: “This is yet another clear signal that the public do not want to see food on their plates that has been produced far below the high standards they expect of British farmers.

“In such a short amount of time, thousands of people have demonstrated their support for government legislating that our high standards of animal welfare, environmental protection and food safety will not be compromised by imports.”

### FDA reveals 2020 plan to increase food safety of leafy greens

Step by step, FDA officials are tackling the link between E. coli outbreaks and leafy greens. They released their new plan today with many steps repeating their walk thus far, but new footprints are planned to leave the mark of improved food safety.

Announced in a Voices Blog entry from the Food and Drug Administration, the commissioner and deputy commissioner of the agency joined forces to point at obvious environmental problems with leafy greens production. They had a laser focus on romaine lettuce, partly because of five E. coli O157: H7 traced to it from

2017 through 2019.



“The plan is a mix of all the work going on as well as new efforts,” FDA’s Deputy Commissioner for Food Policy and Response Frank Yiannas told Food Safety News this afternoon.

Yiannas said one area of increased focus is the review of the impact that animal agriculture has on the contamination of fresh produce growing fields. Regardless of whether major corporate feedlot operations are involved — such as the ones on Yuma, AZ, that have been associated with outbreaks — or small family operations with one irrigation pond, animal feces provide pathogen sources for water runoff and dust particles.

Hand in hand with concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) is the question of irrigation water, Yiannas said. Toward that FDA officials plan to publish a new federal rule for agriculture water standards by the end of this year.

The rulemaking process after publication in the Federal Register can take years, but not if an item is fast-tracked. The ag water rule is already overdue, with the new deadline 2022.

A third key element that is new to FDA’s leafy greens response, Yiannas said, is closer scrutiny of third-party audit companies that food producers use to gain food safety certification.

“We are already working with third-party auditing firms to let them know they are not doing a good job and we have already made progress,” Yiannas told Food Safety News.

The FDA’s 2020 plan does not include any specific enforcement measures against third-party auditors that are found to be failing to accurately review food safety practices at food businesses.

One roadblock that had to be overcome on FDA’s road to its new plan was the noise of information overload. Yiannas said sorting through the noise of duplicated data and missing pieces of key information was incredibly time-consuming. Information from states, academia, and other federal agencies flooded FDA sub-agencies and departments.

But, digging through the data has given the agency a clearer picture of the problems that need to be resolved. Romaine is one of those problems cited throughout the 2,400-word plan.

“This produce commodity has been too often implicated in outbreaks of foodborne illness. These include recurring outbreaks of E. coli O157: H7 infections tied to consumption of romaine lettuce, which is very popular in this country,” said FDA Commissioner of Food and Drugs Stephen Hahn today.

As far as recent romaine outbreaks, Yiannas said part of the 2020 plan is to release investigation information that has previously been withheld from the public. The reporting is listed under the response category in the plan.

“... we will soon be publishing an investigation report on three outbreaks of E. coli O157: H7 infections tied to romaine lettuce and leafy greens between November and December 2019. Each was tied to the Salinas Valley in California. We will also be conducting follow-up surveillance of fields in that region during this fall’s growing/harvest season,” Yiannas said.

“As public health officials, we are concerned by these recurring outbreaks and we believe all involved with the production and sale of fresh leafy greens can do better.”

## Survey shows slight rise in concern about food safety in UK



The concern of consumers about food safety in the United Kingdom has gone up based on results of a survey by the Food Standards Agency (FSA).

Findings from November this past year show 45 percent of respondents had concern about food

safety in U.K. restaurants, pubs, cafes and takeaways and 40 percent were concerned about it in shops and supermarkets.

This compares to results in May 2019 when 41 percent of people were concerned about food safety in U.K. restaurants, pubs, cafes and takeaways and 37 percent had concerns about this topic in shops and supermarkets.

The public attitudes tracker survey monitors changes in attitudes to food related issues and includes England, Wales and Northern Ireland. A representative sample of 2,101 adults in these countries were interviewed face-to-face in November. The methodology of the survey will be changing in the future with an increased sample in Wales and Northern Ireland.

Top food safety issues for those surveyed were chemicals from the environment, such as lead, in food, food hygiene when eating out, use of pesticides to grow food and food poisoning. Other topics of concern were hormones, steroids and antibiotics in food, Genetically Modified (GM) foods and food not being what the label says it is.

### **Public thoughts on food poisoning**

Awareness of Salmonella is at 92 percent and 86 percent for E. coli. Awareness of norovirus at 60 percent and Listeria at 61 percent have increased by 8 and 15 percentage points since November 2017.

More than four in five people thought they were most likely to get food poisoning from raw chicken and turkey, followed by shellfish at 57 percent and reheated takeaway with 50 percent. Other suspected sources included eggs, unwashed vegetables or salad, cooked sliced meats and pre-prepared sandwiches. Almost one in five reported bread and frozen vegetables as a possible source.

Most people (93 percent) said no one in their household consumes raw milk. A total of 4 percent reported they consume it themselves and 1 percent said

children in their household drink it.

Almost four in five respondents indicated cooking food thoroughly would help them avoid food poisoning and two thirds said preparing different food types on different surfaces and chopping boards would help avoid illness. More than 60 percent also said washing fresh fruits and vegetables thoroughly, following storage instructions on labels, and eating food by the use-by date would protect against sickness.

Half of respondents reported not always following instructions on the packaging of frozen vegetables and more than a quarter rarely or never did this. When preparing frozen fruit, 38 percent of people did not always follow instructions and 22 percent said they rarely or never do.

### **Hygiene and allergens**

Half of respondents reported always being aware of the hygiene standards in places they eat out at or buy food from, and a third said they were sometimes aware. Of those that were aware of standards, 64 percent said this was because of stickers and certificates and 60 percent cited general appearance of the premises.

People were most concerned about food waste (57 percent), amount of sugar in food (53 percent), animal welfare (50 percent), and food prices (44 percent).

More than four in 10 were not aware of any rules, regulations or legislations around allergens and a third were not sure.

A total of 79 percent felt confident in asking for allergen information in restaurants. Concern about availability of food allergen information increased since the previous survey by 13 percentage points to 16 percent.

Two thirds took no action when they noticed a food recall alert, whilst 17 percent checked to see if they had the product, 13 percent passed information on to others and 8 percent avoided buying the product in the future.

Almost 80 percent of respondents were aware of the FSA. Of these, two thirds agreed the FSA is fighting food fraud and half said the agency is good at explaining food safety and the science behind it. A total of 69 percent of respondents agreed there is a high likelihood of the FSA taking action to protect the public if there was a food poisoning outbreak.

If new evidence about food safety came to light, 55 percent said there is a high likelihood that the FSA would tell the truth about it to the public and 58 percent said the agency would respond as soon as possible.

### **FDA officials repeat message to remain calm about food safety during outbreak**

Americans shouldn't worry about the safety of their food during the coronavirus outbreak. They should watch the FDA website's FAQ section for up-to-the-minute information, according to agency officials who spoke today.

Offering more generalities than specifics, three top administrators spoke to "stakeholders" during a half-hour session this afternoon "to discuss food safety and food supply questions related to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)." The moderator stressed that the conference call was not a media briefing and none of the questions from the audience were from news organizations.

Other topics discussed included postponing some food safety inspections and working with other departments on shortages of hand sanitizers and other supplies.

Two of the speakers specifically said there has been no evidence to date that the virus is foodborne or transmitted by food packaging. However, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has previously reported that COVID-19 can live on cardboard for hours and on hard surfaces such as stainless steel and plastic for up to three days.

"This is not a foodborne gastrointestinal virus," said Frank Yiannas, Deputy Commissioner, Office of Food Policy and Response.

The deputy commissioner stressed that person-to-person transmission is the main route for the virus. He also said people can contract coronavirus by touching frequently touched surfaces and then touching their faces.

The top food safety administrator at the FDA, Yiannas, also repeatedly said there is no shortage of food in the United States and that the farm-to-fork supply system is working around the clock to stock grocery stores. Yiannas said he is on the White House team that is watching for supply chain issues.

Yiannas did not say everything is completely under control in the food industry or in government.

"There is more we can do and more we will do together," Yiannas said.

### **New Zealand targets 20 percent decline in foodborne Campylobacter by 2025**

New Zealand has set a goal to reduce foodborne Campylobacter infections by 20 percent by 2025.

The goal to cut foodborne campylobacteriosis was informed by a study commissioned by New Zealand Food Safety that found more than 80 percent of

cases are likely due to consumption of poultry, and this proportion is even greater in urban populations.

The Campylobacter Action Plan for 2020 to 2021 focuses on improving biosecurity controls at farm level; boosting hygiene during primary processing; re-evaluating the regulatory target for Campylobacter that determines the allowable limit of contamination on chilled chicken carcasses; and consumer education.



### Past progress

Bryan Wilson, deputy director-general for New Zealand Food Safety, said Campylobacter is the most common cause of reportable foodborne illness in the country.

“Contributing factors are Kiwis’ ever-increasing level of consumption of fresh chicken meat and the way we handle, prepare and cook poultry meat in New

Zealand. Working with the poultry industry, New Zealand Food Safety’s risk management strategy has achieved more than a 50 percent reduction in foodborne cases since 2006,” he said.

New Zealand Food Safety is part of the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI). MPI’s 2017 to 2020 strategy aimed to reduce human foodborne campylobacteriosis in New Zealand from 88.4 cases per 100,000 people in 2014 to 79.6 cases per 100,000 by the end of 2020.

During 2018, 6,957 cases of campylobacteriosis were reported and 3,826 of these were estimated to be foodborne.

In 2006, New Zealand had one of the highest reported rates of campylobacteriosis from all sources worldwide with 379 cases per 100,000 people. Figures from 2019 show rates of 126.1 cases per 100,000 people.

### Burden of disease from poultry meat

The year-long Source Assigned Campylobacteriosis in New Zealand Study (SACNZS) estimated relative contributions of different reservoirs and exposure pathways to the burden of human illness.

The study found 84 percent of cases could be attributed to a poultry source, 14 percent to a cattle source and 2 percent were unassigned. Raw milk consumption was only reported in 4.1 percent of cases.

About 90 percent of urban campylobacteriosis cases were assigned to poultry sources, while less than 75 percent of rural cases were linked to this source.

Specific risk factors associated with eating poultry resulted in statistically significantly elevated odds ratios such as consumption of undercooked chicken and eating it outside the home. More than 80 percent of people in the study as

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cases or controls had poultry within the previous seven days.

Wilson said the 12-month study included interviews with 666 people who'd been infected with the bug.

“As well as identifying the sources of Campylobacter illnesses in humans, the study identified several factors that may increase the likelihood of an individual contracting the disease. We’ll continue our work with industry to drive down the level of Campylobacter in poultry by understanding where the bacteria enter the food chain and where cross-contamination is likely happening.”

## Safety Alerts

Date	Brand Name(s)	Product Description	Product Type	Recall Reason Description	Company Name
03/23/2020	Icelandic+	Whole Capelin Fish Pet Treats	Animal & Veterinary, Food & Beverages, Pet Food, Foodborne Illness	Potential for Clostridium botulinum	IcelandicPlus LLC
03/20/2020	Lindt	85% Cocoa chocolate bars	Food & Beverages, Allergens	Undeclared milk and soy	Lindt & Sprüngli
03/18/2020	Mountain Rose Herbs	Organic Kudzu Root Herbal Supplement	Dietary Supplements, Food & Beverages, Herbal, Foodborne Illness	Potential to be contaminated with Salmonella	Mountain Rose Herbs

03/16/2020	AFC Distribution Corp.	Cooked Butterfly Tail-On Whiteleg Shrimp (Sushi Ebi)	Food & Beverages, Foodborne Illness	Potential to be contaminated with Vibrio parahaemolyticus	AFC Distribution Corp.
03/16/2020	Wegmans	Ginger Salmon Oven Safe Meal and Salmon Teriyaki Oven Safe Meal	Food & Beverages, Allergens	Undeclared wheat	Raw Seafoods, Inc
03/16/2020	Chicago Indoor Garden	Red Clover Sprouts, Sprout Salad, Mixed Greens, Spring Salad	Food & Beverages, Foodborne Illness	Presence of E. coli 0103	Chicago Indoor Garden
03/13/2020	WinCo	Frozen Blackberries and Frozen Berry Medley	Food & Beverages,	Norovirus	WinCo Foods, LLC
03/11/2020	Pero Family Farms	Zucchini Spiral Pesto Side Dish Kit	Food & Beverages,	Undeclared egg and milk	Pero Family Farms Food Company, LLC
03/10/	Meijer	Mixed Nuts	Food & Beverages,	Undeclared	Meijer

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2020				Brazil nuts	r
03/06/2020	HEB	Salad Kit, Tuscan Herb	Food & Beverages,	Undeclared peanut, wheat, soy & tree nuts	Dole Fresh Vegetables, Inc.
03/05/2020	Vita	Wild Herring In Wine Sauce	Food & Beverages,	Undeclared Milk	Vita Food Products, Inc.
03/05/2020	Stonewall Kitchen	Ghost Pepper Salsa	Food & Beverages,	Undeclared Milk and Soy	Stonewall Kitchen, LLC
03/03/2020	Whole Foods Market	Green Chile Chicken Tamales	Food & Beverages,	Undeclared Milk	Whole Foods Market
03/03/2020	ReStructure	Vanilla Protein Powder	Food & Beverages,	Undeclared Milk	New Capstone, Inc.
02/27/2020	Premier Choice	3 lb. tub Peanut Butter Cookie Dough	Food & Beverages,	Undeclared milk	Choice Products USA, LLC

02/24/2020	Sierra Soups	Pasta e Fagioli	Food & Beverages, Allergens, Soup	Product contains undeclared gluten	Sierra Soups
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## Enterprise News

### FSA outlines controls for producers in raw milk guidance



The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has developed a guidance document for producers of raw drinking milk in England and Wales.

The guidance has been produced in response to increasing sales and outbreaks related to unpasteurized milk. Between 2015 and 2017 there were five outbreaks linked to raw milk. These included 103 reported cases, 40 of which were

laboratory confirmed. Children were unwell in all outbreaks and some were hospitalized.

It will apply beginning April 1, but does not cover dairy products made using raw drinking milk. Sales of raw milk and cream are banned in Scotland.

### **FSMS and pathogen testing**

Raw drinking milk producers are legally required to create and implement a system which assesses what could go wrong to affect safety of their product and identify controls to stop that from happening.

There are no legislative changes but the FSA is more explicit in the controls that should be implemented by producers so they can demonstrate compliance with legislation and try and ensure products are as safe as possible.

Main controls emphasized in the guidance are to have an effective and verified Food Safety Management System (FSMS) which is a legal requirement and to commit to testing for pathogens which can be found in raw milk. Failure to have an adequate FSMS could result in enforcement action against a producer.

FSA dairy hygiene inspectors visit farms producing raw drinking milk twice per year to check adequate procedures are in place.

### **Consultation key points**

The FSA held a public comment period from February to April 2019 on proposed enhanced controls in the production of raw milk. Since action was proposed in June 2018, there were another two outbreaks linked to raw milk until October 2019.

Responses to this consultation saw the FSA acknowledge if milking was

between once and twice a day, annual costs to industry for recordkeeping would, on average, increase from £41,000 (\$53,400) to £71,000 (\$92,500). The estimated one-off cost to industry for implementing a FSMS could increase from £10,000 (\$13,000) to £72,000 (\$93,800) or £445 (\$580) per producer.

Concerns were also raised about the price and lack of labs that test for Shiga toxin-producing E. coli.

FSA said testing for E. coli O157 rather than all STEC reduces protection for public health. The agency acknowledged the burden on businesses and said it was trying to balance the need to protect public health and the sampling and testing burden.

Michael Wight, head of food safety policy at the FSA, said it was important to strike a balance between protecting public health, preserving consumer choice and supporting business.

“Food businesses must follow the measures set out in this guidance in order to reduce the health risk to consumers from this product. The FSA will continue to monitor any health incidents associated with raw drinking milk to see if these measures are sufficient.”

### **Producer responsibility**

Raw drinking milk is considered a risky food by the FSA so enhanced measures are in place to protect public health. If they are not effective, then the agency will consider if further regulatory or legislative measures may be required. The guidance will be reviewed in February 2021.

FSA advises that pregnant women, infants and small children, elderly people, and those with weaker immune systems caused by health problems should not

have raw milk. However, the agency said the risk is not so unacceptable as to justify removing the right of adults to choose to drink it.

Sellers are required to ensure that raw drinking milk meets microbiological standards of a coliform count of less than 100 colony-forming units per milliliter (cfu/ml) and an aerobic colony count at 30 degrees C (86 degrees F) of less than 20,000 cfu/ml. There are no legislative requirements for pathogen testing but it is encouraged by the FSA. EU regulation has limits for *Listeria monocytogenes* in ready-to-eat food such as raw milk.

Tali Eichner, membership secretary of the Raw Milk Producers Association, said the new controls are practical for producers and focused on improving food safety.

“The approach proposed by the FSA meets this need by enabling the producer to assess the risks in their own system and setting controls appropriate to their individual situation.”

Raw milk produced from all species, except buffalo, must carry this warning: “This milk has not been heat-treated and may therefore contain organisms harmful to health.” In Wales and Northern Ireland, in addition to this wording, a statement must be on the container or at point of sale saying: “The Food Standards Agency strongly advises that it should not be consumed by children, pregnant women, older people or those who are unwell or have chronic illness.”

A date is not yet set for a label alteration in England but any changes to requirements will allow a three year transitional period.

### Experts say coronavirus likely not spread by foodborne routes

Public health officials and academics agree that the coronavirus poses little

danger from a foodborne illness perspective, right now, but some are maintaining a slight level of vagueness about the situation.

“While it is theoretically possible the virus could be transmitted via food, based on everything we know, the risk of foodborne transmission is dramatically smaller — perhaps by millions of times — than the risk by airborne droplets,” Donald W. Schaffner, extension specialist in food science and Distinguished Professor at Rutgers University, told Food Safety News.

Schaffner has done extensive research in quantitative microbial risk assessment, predictive food microbiology, handwashing and cross-contamination. He frequently works with Ben Chapman, professor and food safety specialist with the Department of Agricultural and Human Sciences at North Carolina State University.

Chapman agrees that the risk of foodborne transmission of the coronavirus — now sometimes being called COVID-19 — is low. It hasn’t been documented at all yet. But there are cross-contamination concerns.

“Since coronavirus is a respiratory virus we believe that it is contracted only by inhalation or similar mechanism (such as) sticking your finger in your nose, when your finger has a virus on it. If it was in food it would be destroyed by proper cooking,” Chapman told Food Safety News.

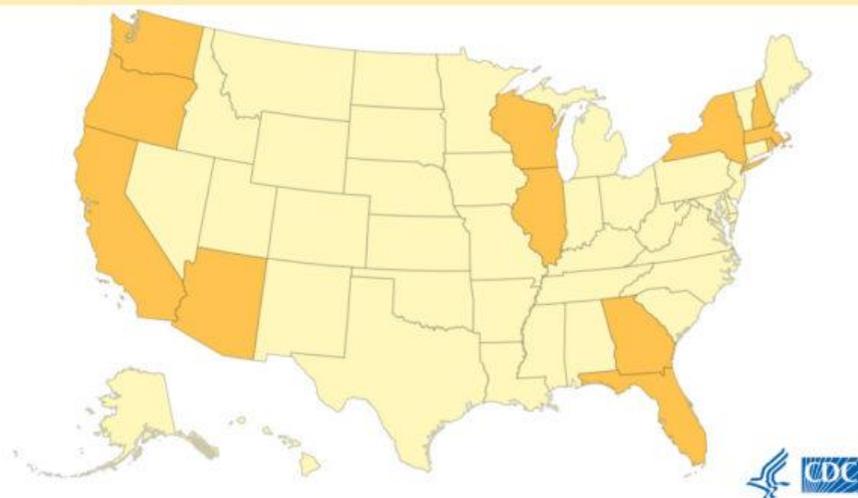
The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports the virus is generally spread person-to-person through respiratory droplets from sneezing, coughing and talking.

“Currently there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 associated with food,” according to the CDC. “It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then

touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.”

There is a chance of cross contamination from hard surfaces such as door handles, cooking utensils, countertops and other items, but that danger is low, according to the CDC.

### States Reporting Cases of COVID-19 to CDC



“... because of poor survivability of these coronaviruses on surfaces, there is likely very low risk of spread from food products or packaging that are shipped over a period of days or weeks at ambient, refrigerated, or frozen temperatures,” the CDC reports.

International health officials, who have declared the coronavirus outbreak a global threat, also say the chance of foodborne transmission is of small concern.

The virus has similar characteristics of SARS and MERS viruses, which are not spread through food. The World Health Organization reports there is not yet any

evidence to support the theory that the virus is spread through food. Some concerns about food had been voiced when initial reports of the virus started coming out of China because the first patients had visited the same food market.

Unlike some other viruses, such as norovirus and hepatitis A virus that survive in food, the coronaviruses cannot grow in food, according to international public health officials. The coronavirus needs an animal host, which includes humans, to grow.

Recommendations for the single most effective weapon against the virus are a unanimous call for increased diligence in hand washing.

“The respiratory virus risk in restaurants is really more about being in the same location as a lot of people, some of who can be depositing the virus on surfaces like tables, doors, menus and managing that with a hand washing and alcohol-based sanitizer regime is an effective step to reduce risks of both COVID-19 and influenza,” said Chapman.

“What I am doing personally is trying to be diligent about washing my hands and using hand sanitizer — sanitizer is in fact very effective against the coronavirus. I’m also trying to be alert about what I’m touching, before touching my nose or mouth. I’m not avoiding any specific foods.”

### Foreign supplier verification most common violation in FDA food facility inspections

According to recently released Inspection Observation Data for the Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 from the Food and Drug Administration, most food importers are required to develop and maintain FSVPs for their foreign suppliers.

And the most commonly cited violation during FDA food facility inspections last

year was failing to develop a Foreign Supplier Verification Program (FSVP), with 340 violations.

Foreign supplier verification is one of the mandates of the 2011 Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA). This requires importers to perform certain activities to ensure their suppliers are FDA compliant and producing goods in a safe and acceptable manner.

According to Hampton, VA-based Registrar Corp., the vast majority of FSVP compliance deadlines have passed. FDA expects applicable importers to present their FSVPs upon inspection.

Register Corp. offers food sector companies assistance in passing FDA inspections and tracks FDA data.

In 2017, the first year after the initial deadlines, Register Corp. said FDA cited 108 importers for failing to develop an FSVP. In 2018, FDA cited 289 importers for this violation. This past year that number jumped to 340, a 17 percent increase.

Additionally, the FDA cited numerous facilities for other FSVP-related violations that include:

- Failing to follow or maintain the FSVP
- Failing to translate the FSVP into English when applicable
- Failing to sign and date the FSVP upon modification
- Failing to make adequate assurances of a supplier's food safety
- In total, Register Corp. reports FDA issued 354 citations for FSVP related violations.

“This significant increase in FSVP violations paired with the FSMA-related warning letters issued throughout the year points to a steady increase in FSMA enforcement from FDA. Being prepared is key to avoiding a citation,” it said.

### Food Safety Violations

In addition to FSVP violations, FDA cited food facilities for other violations relating to food safety and good manufacturing practices. Here are the five most common from FY 2019:

1. Personnel (21 CFR 117.10)- This violation is for failing to take reasonable measures and precautions related to personnel practices. This can include failing to address hygiene issues or other good manufacturing practices in relation to employees handling food products. FDA issued 226 citations for this violation, a marked increase from 161 the year before.
2. Pest Control (21 CFR 117.35(c))- FDA cited 222 facilities for not excluding pests from their facility or for utilizing pesticides in unlawful manners. This is an increase from 183 citations from the year before.
3. Sanitation Monitoring (21 CFR 120.6))- This citation is for a failure to monitor sanitation conditions and implement good manufacturing practices. These can range from failure to use clean water for food production, unclean food contact surfaces, cross-contamination risks, and other poor sanitation practices. 195 facilities received this citation, an increase from 188 the year before.
4. Sanitary Operations and Plant Maintenance (21 CFR 117.35(a))- 193 facilities were cited for failing to maintain their plant in a clean and sanitary condition or keeping the plant in good repair. This also marks an increase from the year before at 167.

5. HACCP Plan Implementation (21 CFR 123.6(c))- FDA cited 182 facilities for failing to implement either the monitoring, recordkeeping, or verification procedures listed on their HACCP Plans. HACCP Plans are required for most juice and seafood facilities.

When the FDA inspects a food facility, the agency will check for compliance with current good manufacturing practices and any other applicable food safety regulations. Failure to comply can result in FDA issuing warning letters, citations, or detentions.

### U.S. market is again open to raw intact beef from Brazil



Raw intact beef from Brazil is again eligible for export to the United States beginning with cattle slaughtered on or after Feb. 21, 2020.

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue had suspended all imports of fresh beef from Brazil because of “recurring concerns about the safety of the

products intended for the American market.”

That USDA ban on Brazilian raw intact beef was imposed on June 22, 2017, and was ultimately USDA’s answer to the widespread bribery of Brazilian meat inspectors. That scandal put Brazilian food safety checks in doubt.

The USDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) sent its auditors to Brazil June 10-28, 2019, and again just last month, Jan. 13-24, 2020.

The most recent visit was to verify that Brazil’s “central competent authority” took corrective actions regarding the 2019 audit findings. It was also to determine whether Brazil’s food safety inspection system is governing raw and processed meat equivalent to that of the United States, with the ability to export products that are safe, wholesome, unadulterated, and correctly labeled and packaged.”

The FSIS audit confirmed that Brazil had fully implemented the corrective actions from the prior audit findings. The FSIS audit team inspected eight of the 28 plants that may now export fresh, intact beef to the U.S.

The inspections confirmed the application of written guidelines that prescribe the body temperature at which livestock are to be condemned during antemortem inspection; and the implementation of post-mortem inspection procedures, which ensure that only wholesome carcasses, free of contamination and defects, receive the mark of inspection signifying approval.

Also, the FSIS auditors confirmed Brazil’s control of specified risk materials (SRM) and the verification of proper operation and maintenance of retorts.

During the raw intact beef ban, Brazil was able to export processed beef and pork and raw intact pork to the United States. With \$7.3 billion in fresh and

processed beef exports last year, Brazil is happy to see the end of the ban.

Brazilian Agriculture Minister Tereza Cristina Dias announced the U.S. market was opening on Friday in Brasilia. The USDA confirmed it on Monday in a short FSIS Notice.

In the weeks prior to the beginning of the USDA ban, Brazilian Police charged 63 people in a corruption scheme that involved the country's Ministry of Agriculture. Federal auditors at meat processing facilities were accused of having taken bribes for years in exchange for fraudulent sanitary permits.

The scheme reportedly also included selling spoiled meat and injecting water into poultry in order to sell it at high prices. Police also found chemical ingredients being used to make rotting meat smell better.

At the time, the U.S. had only been accepting fresh beef from Brazil since 2016 and the volume was small. None of the plants targeted by Brazilian police had shipped meat to the U.S.

Last October, Brazil's BRF SA admitted to bribing food inspectors with cash and health benefits. This included payments of nearly \$5 million through 2017. BRF SA reached a "leniency agreement" with the government. The European Union banned 12 BRF SA plants from selling in its member countries.

Police also said 39 of the 60 bribed inspectors remained on the job. About 2,500 food inspectors are employed by the Agriculture Ministry.

Before the USDA ban on Brazilian beef, FSIS was reinspecting all Brazilian meat entering the U.S.

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