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Focus on China



China halts shrimp imports from 3 Ecuadorian firms over coronavirus contamination



Shrimp imported from three Ecuadorian companies are being pulled off shelves across China following detection of the novel coronavirus on package samples.

China suspended imports from the three producers after six samples recently collected from the interior of the shipping containers and outer packages for frozen white shrimp tested positive for the coronavirus, although samples of the shrimp and their interior

packages tested negative, according to a notice released by the General Administration of Customs, National Health Commission and State Administration for Market Regulation on Friday.

Customs across China must supervise inspections to make sure all frozen shrimp produced after March 12 and imported from the three companies are returned or recalled from the domestic market to eliminate food safety risks and protect public health, the notice said.

In East China's Zhejiang province, 78 metric tons of related products had been taken off shelves as of Saturday noon, the provincial market regulator said. The products will be returned or destroyed.

In Shanghai, market regulators have intensified inspection into related products and venues, such as frozen storage rooms, wholesale food markets and restaurants. The municipal administration for market regulation has urged its branches across Shanghai to urge related distributors and sellers to immediately suspend the sale of frozen shrimp produced after March 12 and imported from the three companies, and cooperate in sample inspections.

Food markets to get greater scrutiny

Wholesale food markets across China will be put under stricter scrutiny to minimize risks to food safety and transmission of the novel coronavirus, officials with the country's top market regulator said on Friday.

The State Administration for Market Regulation will urge its branches across the country to intensify efforts in epidemic control and prevention, focusing on key venues such as wholesale markets selling agricultural products, Chen Xu, an official for market inspection with the administration, said at a news conference.

"The regulators will step up efforts to fight the illegal trade of wild animals, and ban eating such animals. Restrictions will be imposed on the trade and slaughter of live poultry, and the live poultry trade will be gradually banned in such markets," he said.

Market regulators will guide and supervise vendors to strictly follow regulations such as keeping purchase records to ensure all products are traceable, Chen said.

They will also intensify inspection over products sold in wholesale food markets, and ban the sale of suspicious products such as aquatic products from unknown sources, he said.

Wholesale markets that sell agricultural products are an important channel for the food supply in urban areas in China, contributing to more than 70 percent of the total supply of meat, poultry, aquatic products, vegetables and fruits. However, the latest COVID-19 epidemic in Beijing has raised an alarm on food safety and epidemic risks of such markets, Chen said.

The epidemic was first reported on June 11, and 331 cases had been confirmed as of Thursday by Beijing's health authority. The great majority of the confirmed infections were related to Xinfadi, the biggest wholesale food market in Beijing.

The novel coronavirus was found in many samples collected from the market in June, including cutting boards for salmon sold in the market.

Many scientists believe the novel coronavirus that caused the global pandemic originated from a wild animal. China's top legislature adopted a decision in February to comprehensively ban illegal consumption and trade of wild animals.

By mid-June, market regulators across China had handled 450 cases involving illegal trade of wild animals. They had inspected business venues of various types, including wholesale food markets, and suspended the business of more than 12,000 markets and

other business owners for violations in wild animal trade, according to Chen.

Zhang Zhiqiang, deputy chief for food safety monitoring and evaluation under the National Health Commission, said the commission will release a technical guide soon on protection against COVID-19 by employees engaged in the food business, such as those in wholesale food markets and restaurants, who are exposed to greater infection risks.

The guide will recommend detailed epidemic control and prevention measures for the group, including training, health management and handling of emergencies, he said.

Eight GM plant species pass safety tests for import



Eight genetically modified plant species have passed safety evaluations for import, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs said.

The five corn and three soybean species have characteristics such as resistance to pests

and weed killers. They will only be used as materials for processing and not for any other purpose, such as being planted in China. Their safety certificates took effect on June 11 and will expire after five years, according to a list released by the ministry on Tuesday.

Applicants for the certificates included both domestic and foreign agricultural companies.

Meanwhile, the ministry also awarded safety certificates allowing the use and production of 117 genetically modified organisms and products.

Most of the products approved are GM pest-resistant cotton species that can now be grown in specific areas of China. The others include vaccines and drugs for animal use that contain GM elements.

Academic opinion generally accepts the safety of approved GMOs, which offer superior yields and better pest resistance. However, their safety has sometimes been a source of public concern, both in China and abroad.

In addition to acquiring safety certificates, GMO researchers and developers have to complete some other procedures before the products can be made available on the domestic market.

China adopts very strict standards on the safety evaluation of GMO products, and all such products available on the domestic market have passed safety evaluations and are safe, the ministry said.

Although encouraging scientific research and development in GMO technology, the ministry has been cautious in its commercialization, with only a few GM agricultural plants, such as GM corn and cotton, having been approved for commercial planting in China. Some other GM plants, such as soybean, are only allowed to be imported as

material for food processing.

GM cotton has been extensively promoted across China due to its resistance to insect pests.

Large-scale food safety inspections secure safe environment for gaokao



The local market regulation authority in Beijing recently carried out a large-scale food safety and anti-epidemic inspection around school campuses to secure a safer environment for students during the national college entrance exam amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

On Tuesday morning, law enforcement officials from the Beijing Haidian District Market Regulation Bureau were scrutinizing food vendors, restaurants and supermarkets around Beijing Zhongguancun Middle School, the largest national entrance exam test

center in Beijing this year, for food safety inspections.

"All the food vendors within 200 meters around the school campus were included in the scope of food safety management," said Zhang Dan, director of the Food Circulation Department at Beijing Haidian Market Regulation Bureau, on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, law enforcement officials will scrutinize the facilities and operation of food vendors, the health status of employees and merchandise stocking to implement various epidemic prevention measures.

The district market regulation bureau had conducted rapid food safety tests for 62 batches of food at 35 food vendors, and all test results showed food was qualified. The bureau had registered 481 food business entities around the school campuses.

International News

Inspections of Small Businesses under the FSMA Intentional Adulteration Rule to Begin March 2021

Today, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration announced that routine inspections of small businesses to verify compliance with the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act's (FSMA) Intentional Adulteration (IA) rule will begin in March 2021.

The FSMA IA rule is designed to address hazards that may be intentionally introduced to foods, including by acts of terrorism, with the intent to cause wide scale public health harm. Food facilities covered by the rule are required to develop and implement a food defense plan that identifies vulnerabilities and puts in place mitigation strategies to address those vulnerabilities. The rule was finalized in 2016 and compliance dates are being phased in depending on

business size. The compliance date for small businesses (those with fewer than 500 employees) is July 27, 2020.

Last year we announced that inspections of large businesses under the IA rule would begin in March 2020 following a compliance date of July 2019 for those businesses. At that time we felt that it was important to provide additional time for industry to benefit from certain guidance, training and other tools that FDA issued last year. In the time since that announcement, COVID-19 has required the FDA to postpone most routine inspections, including those of large businesses under the IA rule, because travel restrictions, social distancing and other public health measures have made them temporarily impractical to conduct.

Recognizing the unique situation COVID-19 has created for both industry and regulators, the FDA intends to begin routine inspections of small businesses under the IA rule in March 2021. This approach, consistent with our approach regarding IA inspections of larger businesses, will help facilitate industry's continuing efforts to put in place measures that will protect public health while allowing the FDA additional time to conduct outreach to stakeholders.

When routine inspections begin for facilities covered by the IA rule they will consist of food defense plan "quick checks" during regularly scheduled food safety inspections. These "quick checks" allow FDA to verify that the facility has satisfied the basic requirements of the rule while also providing us with an opportunity to "educate while we regulate." During the "quick check" FDA investigators will ask the owner or operator of the facility a series of questions such as "do you have a food defense plan?" and may provide some educational materials.

Grade “A” Milk Search (GAMS) System



The U.S. Food and Drug Administration announces the launch of the Grade “A” Milk Search (GAMS) System, a new tool that allows stakeholders to easily search the FDA’s online Grade “A” Milk Memoranda database.

The new searchable inventory contains all active memoranda issued by the FDA related to oversight of the Grade “A” Program, including Memoranda of Conference Actions (IMS-a), Memoranda of Information (M-I), Memoranda of Interpretation (M-a) and Memoranda of Milk Ordinance Equipment Compliance (M-b). The search capabilities of the GAMS System include both basic and

advanced functions with options to allow for additional search fields, including document title/subject, type of memoranda and specific date ranges.

This new database serves as a resource to state and local milk regulatory and rating agencies, the dairy industry, and other interested parties in the safe production of milk and milk products through the application of science-based food safety principles on the farm and at all stages through the processing chain.

The GAMS System is maintained by the FDA’s Division of Dairy, Egg and Meat Products, Milk and Milk Products Branch in the FDA’s Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (CFSAN).

Irish survey finds good compliance for dried herbs and spices

A survey in Ireland has found the majority of dried herbs and spices are safe but a small percentage may be contaminated with pathogens.

Between August and the end of November 2017, the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI), Environmental Health Service and Official Food Microbiology Laboratory Group of the Health Service Executive (HSE) investigated the microbiological safety of dried herbs and spices. The report is now available.

In total, 855 samples were collected, mostly at retail, by environmental health officers (EHOs) who were asked to find out if dried herbs and spices had been irradiated. A total of 64 were non-compliant. The survey showed only five samples had been decontaminated using irradiation. It is an approved treatment in Europe to control pathogens such as Salmonella in these products.

FSAI said the lack of irradiation highlights the importance of good hygienic conditions.

“Particularly, given that pathogenic microorganisms such as Salmonella can

survive the drying process and survive on dehydrated foods for extended periods of time. If dried herbs and spices are not produced under hygienic conditions, they pose a risk of foodborne illness to the consumer as they frequently receive no further bactericidal treatment effective to eliminate pathogenic microorganisms of concern prior to consumption.”

Dried herbs and spices have low water activity that inhibit pathogens from growing but can allow some to survive. They are frequently eaten raw or used as ingredients in ready-to-eat foods (RTE) such as salads or as garnishes. Both items are not produced in large quantities in Ireland or other member states and are primarily imported into the EU from third countries.

Non-compliant findings

Samples were tested for *Listeria monocytogenes* and *Listeria* species, *Salmonella*, presumptive *Bacillus cereus*, and Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* (STEC).

All 768 single and 73 batch samples tested for *Listeria monocytogenes* were satisfactory, as were the 164 samples analyzed for STEC.

Four samples were unsatisfactory for *Salmonella* out of 790 single samples. *Salmonella* Infantis was detected in dill and *Salmonella* with unknown serotypes were found in basil, ginger and dhaniya (coriander) powder.

The contaminated dried basil sample originated in Egypt and was imported via the United Kingdom, ground ginger came from Poland with raw materials from the Netherlands, dill was from Egypt and imported via Germany and Lithuania while the coriander was packed and imported from the UK but country of origin is unknown.

For presumptive *Bacillus cereus*, out of 828 single samples tested, 22 were unsatisfactory while 79 were borderline. Black pepper, turmeric and basil were among the main items to be unsatisfactory or borderline for the limits.

This high level of non-compliance may be due to *Bacillus* spores being naturally present on fresh herbs and spices which are then concentrated by the drying process, according to FSAI.

For hygiene indicators, five samples were unsatisfactory for *E. coli* from 748 single samples tested while 33 were unsatisfactory for Enterobacteriaceae out of 755 single samples. In addition, five *E. coli* and 87 Enterobacteriaceae samples were borderline.



Recommendations based on results

Dried herbs and spices can become contaminated with pathogens during growth, harvesting or processing and at retail level, if sold loose.

A survey by FSAI and HSE in 2004 on bacteriological and toxicological safety of dried herbs and spices found six of 647 samples were contaminated with Salmonella, while two single samples and one of 25 batch samples were unsatisfactory for presumptive Bacillus cereus.

In 2016, the EU Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) portal listed 40 reports for 54 microorganisms in herbs and spices with Salmonella followed by E. coli being the most frequent. These pathogens were reported in herbs and spices such as fresh mint and parsley, dried parsley, mixed spices, ground cumin and coriander, peppermint, betel and curry leaves, chilli powder, fresh basil, perilla, and piper lolot. In this year, FSAI issued one food alert to recall spices due to Salmonella in coriander powder.

Between June and July 2017 an outbreak due to a rare serovar, Salmonella Adjame, involved 14 confirmed cases in the UK. Seven people reported being vegetarian. An implicated food was not found but it was suspected to be a fresh product bought from a grocer. There were two non-travel related Irish cases of Salmonella Adjame in 2017 but source of infection was never identified.

Recommendations based on the FSAI survey include businesses should source dried herbs and spices from reputable suppliers who can provide evidence of adequate hygiene controls during production and processing, firms adding dried herbs and spices to foods to be cooked should ensure food is cooled to 5 degrees C (41 degrees F) within two hours or consumed within four hours and these products should be sampled during routine official controls.

FDA food safety inspections will resume next week after the pandemic pause

On-site inspections by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration will resume next

week, according to Commissioner Stephen Hahn. The announcement that the FDA will resume domestic inspection comes with an acknowledgment that the COVID-19 crisis remains FDA's top concern.

“However,” said Hahn, “resuming prioritized domestic inspections will depend on the data about the virus’ trajectory in a given state and locality and the rules and guidelines that are put in place by state and local governments. In order to move to the next phase, we must see downward trends in new cases of COVID-19 and hospitalizations in a given area. Our ability to resume is also affected by other services that have been curtailed by the pandemic, such as public transportation. The availability of these services will be an important factor in how we determine to resume domestic inspections.

Hahn said for the “foreseeable future,” domestic inspections will be pre-announced to FDA-regulated businesses as they are prioritized.

“This will help assure the safety of the investigator and the firm’s employees, providing the safest possible environment to accomplish our regulatory activities, while also ensuring the appropriate staff is on-site to assist FDA staff with inspection activities,” Hahn said.

One exception will be retail tobacco inspections, which are treated as undercover operations when they do occur.

“The health, safety, and well-being of our investigators, as well as the public, are of the utmost importance to us, ” Hahn added. “We will ensure our investigators are outfitted with personal protective equipment and are equipped with other necessary equipment to carry out their work while adhering to state and local guidance as well as applicable CDC guidance. We will continue to work to ensure our prioritized domestic inspections resume

appropriately and as safely as possible.”

The FDA’s domestic food facilities registrations totaled 94,423 going into 2020. The data reveals that as of Dec. 31, 2019, there were 221,843 FDA-registered food facilities, with 127,420 of them, or 57 percent, located outside of the United States. FDA is responsible for periodically inspecting facilities that are registered to produce food for U.S. consumption.

The only exceptions are that fresh meat, poultry, egg, and catfish facilities, which receive continuous inspections from USDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service. Those inspections continued during the pandemic.

The “White House Guidelines for Opening Up America Again,” call for the FDA to send out investigators for on-site inspections by the week of July 20, under a COVID-19 Advisory Rating system that uses state and national data about infection rates to determine in which regions enforcement can resume.

The rating system is also available to FDA’s state partners to help determine “mission-critical” inspections and if/when there can be a return to normal operations. State and local trends in COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations as well as the availability of other services like transportation are part of the system FDA will follow.

FDA suspended domestic and foreign inspections on March 10, including food safety inspections, because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has continued to issue advisories and warning letters during the pause. FDA did warn consumers later in March about hand sanitizers made in Mexico with methanol or wood alcohol that could be toxic if absorbed through the skin or ingested.

USDA won’t require meat and poultry testing for COVID-19



Plant-based diet advocates known as the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine failed to persuade USDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service that it should require all meat to be tested for the presence of SARS-CoV-2.

The Washington D.C.-based lobbying organization petitioned FSIS on May 20 to require all meat and poultry establishments to test and report on a weekly bases the number of workers and the number of their family members with presumptive or confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infections and those dying of COVID-19.

The petition also sought weekly posting of the number of FSIS inspectors with presumptive or confirmed SARS- CoV-2 infections and those dying of COVID- 19 on the USDA website. In addition, it wanted meat and poultry to carry a label stating: “Warning: Workers in the U.S. meat and poultry processing facilitates have been sickened or killed by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, and this product has not

been certified virus-free.” It also wanted retailers to post the warnings.

The FSIS, on July 1, sent the committee a letter denying the petition. The agency said public health and food safety experts have found no evidence to support the notion that COVID-19 is transmitted by meat or poultry products.

“We have conducted an expedited review and have decided to deny your petition,” FSIS said. “We have determined that neither the petition nor the addendum includes scientific studies or other information to demonstrate that COVID-19 can be transmitted to humans by meat or poultry products. In addition, some of the actions you are requesting are outside the scope of FSIS’s authority. The actions requested in your petition would not contribute to FSIS’s public health mission to ensure that meat, poultry, and processed egg products are safe, wholesome, unadulterated, and properly marked, labeled, and packaged.”

The FSIS said the petition did not include any reference studies or supporting information to demonstrate that COVID-19 can be transmitted by meat and poultry products or any other food.

“The transmission study referenced in the petition focuses on common foodborne viruses, such as norovirus and Hepatitis A, that can be transmitted by infected food handlers if they practice poor personal hygiene,” the letter continues. “The study does not suggest that airborne viruses, such as SARS-CoV-2 and other coronaviruses, can be transmitted by meat or poultry products.

“According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), SARS-CoV-2 and other coronaviruses are generally thought to be spread from person-to-person through respiratory droplets. Public health and food safety experts have found no evidence to support the transmission of COVID-19

associated with meat or poultry products or any other food. Although it may be possible that a person can contract 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, this is not thought to be the main way the virus is spread. Therefore, based on information about the SARS-CoV-2 thus far, it seems unlikely...”

Other points FSIS makes in the decision letter include:

- Requiring that meat and poultry processing establishments test their products for SARS-CoV-2 would require that establishments use resources to conduct product testing that would serve no public health purpose. If the purpose is to prevent the spread of COVID-19, we believe that establishment resources would be better spent by implementing measures in the CDC/OSHA guidance to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among establishment workers. Therefore, we are denying this request.
- There is nothing in the Acts that give FSIS the authority to require regulated establishments to report information on the health status of establishment employees to public health authorities or that authorizes FSIS to make information related to the health status of Agency inspectors available to the public.
- Food facilities, including establishments under FSIS inspection, like other work establishments, need to follow protocols set by local and state health departments, which may vary... In the event of a diagnosed COVID-19 illness, FSIS follows and encourages establishments to follow, the recommendations of local public health authorities regarding notification of potential contacts.
- The warning statement requested in your petition is misleading because it

inaccurately implies that meat and poultry products that have not been “certified as virus-free” may transmit COVID-19 or are somehow unsafe. As discussed above, public health and food safety experts have found no evidence to support the transmission of COVID-19 associated with meat or poultry products. Thus, we are denying your request to amend the safe handling labeling regulations because we believe the requested warning statement would cause meat and poultry products to be misbranded.

Imported fruit and veg main problem in Singaporean sampling



Imported fruit and vegetables was the category with the highest percentage of non-compliances during testing in 2019, according to authorities in Singapore.

A total of 3,825 consignments of fruit and vegetables were sampled from April to December 2019 with 491 failing, meaning 87.2 percent passed the Singapore Food Agency’s (SFA) standards. Sample failures were because of exceeding

allowable limits, either microbiologically, chemically or for pesticide residues. Singapore imports more than 90 percent of its food.

Seafood products was the second least compliant category as 58 samples failed from 1,242 tests followed by processed food that had 67 non-compliances from 2,189 samples.

Meat and egg results

Overall, 114 meat and meat product samples failed from 7,010 consignments and 14 samples of processed eggs were in violation of the rules from 882 consignments sampled and tested. Chicken and quail eggs were sampled and tested from July to December 2019 with only three of 190 consignments failing the SFA’s standards.

For food products that fail tests, SFA rejects the consignments and requires importers to rectify the issue with their suppliers from overseas. Offenders who illegally import food are liable on conviction to a maximum fine of SGD \$50,000 (U.S. \$35,900) and/or imprisonment for up to two years.

SFA publishes food safety statistics in January and June to improve the public’s understanding of the agency’s methods to protect public health. It adopts a risk-based approach to food safety and is guided by science-based risk assessment and management. This means food of higher risks are subject to more stringent checks.

Local regulation

Non-retail type establishments were found to have the most non-compliances with 254 issues from 4,041 inspections. Almost 1,400 checks detected non-compliances from 52,000 retail sites and nine problems were found from

2,162 inspections at farms. Non-compliances included poor housekeeping and upkeep of the premises, poor maintenance of equipment and pest infestation.

From April to December 2019, 22 of 34 investigated gastroenteritis incidents were due to foodborne causes. Sixteen food recalls were issued; nine due to microbial contamination, five because of allergens and two owing to physical contaminants.

In June this year, Elite Fine Food LLP, an importer and supplier of foods, was fined SGD \$2,000 (U.S. \$1,400) for operating and storing meat and seafood products in an unlicensed cold store. In December 2019, officers from the SFA found the company had been storing meat and seafood products in this cold store with a chiller and freezer. More than 1,000 kilograms of frozen and chilled meat and seafood products, including processed pork, duck and beef, were seized.

Offenders who illegally store meat and fish products are liable on conviction to a maximum fine of SGD \$10,000 (U.S. \$7,200) and/or imprisonment for up to one year.

Survey finds food safety primary concern for consumers

Food safety is the main area of concern for consumers, according to a survey by DNV GL.

A total of 4,500 people were asked about food purchasing habits and results indicated the primary focus was on what impacts consumers directly as individuals.

Half of consumers were interested in more information on food safety and health. Broader sustainability issues, such as environment and social aspects are

lower on the list of priorities.

People would welcome more information and transparency on product content and on how food safety is secured from farm to fork. This is followed by hygiene practices adopted to prevent contamination and allergens or potentially dangerous ingredients. Sustainable packaging and food waste also ranked high in the survey that found geographical differences influenced by local legislation, context or recent scandals.

Room for improvement

Almost half said they took food safety for granted to a “large extent” for packaged food, while around a third did this for loose and unbranded packaged food.

DNV GL is a certification body that operates in more than 100 countries. The survey involved 4,500 consumers in March 2020 across 15 countries in Europe, North America, South America and Asia.

Respondents have full or somewhat trust in packaged products from brands at 85 percent, which is more than non-packaged (loose) items at 80 percent or packaged unbranded ones with 69 percent. However, less than half trust brands fully.

A total of 90 percent trust the information brands provide on packaged products, while only 64 percent trust data related to packaged unbranded products.

Joy Franks-Laing, global food and beverage manager at DNV GL-Business Assurance, said food safety is still top of the agenda for consumers.

“However, the survey results seem to indicate that while food and beverage

manufacturers and retailers may have invested considerably in protecting consumers, they are not 100 percent convinced that all products are safe to consume.”

Technology and brand story

Only a fifth of consumers surveyed regularly use QR-codes to access more information. However, in areas where distrust in food safety is higher and seen more as an individual rather than company responsibility, QR-codes are more widely used. If they gave access to detailed information on a product’s content and authenticity, two thirds of consumers would be more inclined to use them.

The survey found consumers are willing to pay more for products they trust. If information is verified or the product or manufacturer is certified to a food safety standard, 69 percent are willing to do this. Countries where food safety is of higher concern tend to be more willing to pay extra for verified information or product certification.

European respondents tend to trust food manufacturers and providers more than consumers in other geographies and are less active in seeking product information. In Asia, more would welcome information about food safety and on health issues. Southeast Asia and countries in South Europe pay higher attention to social issues such as healthy working conditions.

U.S. raises four issues at WTO SPS meeting

The United States raised four new issues at a meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO) committee on food safety and animal and plant health this past month.

The Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Measures also discussed 12

previously raised issues at the meeting on June 24 to 26.

Specific trade concerns (STCs) identified by the U.S. were Thailand’s draft list of hazardous substances regarding food containing pesticide residues, India’s new requirements for animal feed, China’s administrative measures for registration of overseas manufacturers of imported food and Vietnam’s regulations on animal feeds and husbandry — the latter was jointly raised with Argentina.

Thirteen other new STCs included Saudi Arabia’s temporary suspension of Brazilian poultry exporting plants raised by Brazil, Costa Rica’s import restriction on dairy products raised by Mexico, general restrictions on imports of chocolate and cocoa products due to maximum levels of cadmium raised by Peru, and Nepal’s import ban on energy drinks raised by Thailand.



Call for delay to EU rules

Some exporting countries expressed concerns at import requirements that were

more stringent than necessary.

Many countries called on the European Union to suspend for 12 months and review processes for determining maximum residue levels (MRLs) for plant protection products because of potential negative impact on imports of fruits and vegetables from third countries. They also called for a delay to MRL reductions planned for 2020 in response to the trade and economic downturn caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

A group of 33 members said in the current circumstances, implementation of SPS measures that create additional restrictions or burdens on international trade is a challenge that hampers worldwide economic recovery efforts, especially in developing countries.

The EU, which is the largest common market in the world and biggest importer of fruits and vegetables, said the standards applied are based on studies addressing potential risk to consumer health. An EU official reiterated that all MRL-related processes are notified to WTO members with time for food businesses to prepare for the modified requirements from existing standards.

During the meeting, WTO members stressed the importance of ensuring that trade in agricultural and food products is not overly restricted in global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Of 175 notifications related to COVID-19, a quarter were under the SPS agreement.

Initially, measures were mainly trade restrictions and increased certification requirements. They were notified as emergency measures and temporarily restricted imports and/or transit of terrestrial or aquatic animals from affected areas to limit spread of the virus.

Examples of emergency notifications are by the Philippines on meat

commodities, from Switzerland covering all foodstuffs on the Swiss market and by Korea on wild animals considered possible intermediate hosts for COVID-19 transmission.

Other notices were about temporary relaxation of labelling requirements for food products and measures to be implemented in organic certification processes. They also covered guidelines on the approval of SPS import clearance for meat commodities. Since April, most notifications from members have related to measures to facilitate trade, now representing almost half of the total.

Coronavirus product testing

The U.S. and EU also hit out at measures such as declarations that products are coronavirus free and additional testing put in place by China.

A U.S. statement said it was receiving increasing reports of COVID-19 product testing for food and agricultural commodities, including meat, seafood, fresh fruit, and bulk grains. Some U.S. exporters reported some importing countries are testing 100 percent of shipments.

The U.S. delegation said the country is “deeply concerned” about actions to restrict imports of food and agricultural products, a move causing escalating confusion and consternation across supply chains.

Several foreign embassies received a letter requesting that authorities suspend exports from facilities that “identify COVID-19 cases or suspected cases” and notify the importing government of infections in factory workers.

Importers were advised to request that foreign suppliers of agricultural products sign “Letters of Commitment” showing the importer of the products will ensure that food items are “not contaminated by COVID-19 and to ensure food safety”

among other things.

“We are also unaware of any notification to the public, to the trading community or to other governments of measures to implement COVID-19 testing requirements for imported foods. Nor are we aware of any public notification of similar testing requirements applied for domestically produced foods,” said the U.S. delegation.

A statement from the European Union said it regretted the outbreak has led to a few countries adopting trade restrictions for agri-food products that are not science based, targeted or proportionate to risk. These additional requirements include tests, inspections or certificates.

“In particular, we would like to share our deepest concern about one very recent development and the request by one WTO member, which is also one of the largest global trading countries for agri-food products, of stringent additional verification measures on all imported food products,” it read.

“If individual members insist on additional, unnecessary verification measures, the situation could easily lead to a global spiral toward imposing unjustified import controls in the agri-food chain. This would do nothing to control the current pandemic but will be very harmful to food security, food prices and global trade relations and it will also undermine the trust of the public.”

The SPS Committee is scheduled to hold its next meeting on Nov. 5 and 6.

FAO and WHO publish draft on microbiological risk assessment

The FAO and the WHO have put out draft guidance on microbiological risk assessment for food for public comment.

It is intended to provide guidance and a framework for carrying out each of the



four components of a microbiological risk assessment, whether as part of a full risk assessment, as part of other evaluations, or as a stand-alone process, according to officials.

The four areas are hazard identification, hazard characterization, exposure assessment and risk characterization.

The primary audience is the global community of scientists and risk assessors, and risk managers or others responsible for decision making and/or communication.

The United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) established the Joint Expert Meetings on Microbiological Risk Assessment (JEMRA) to provide advice on risk assessment of microbiological hazards in foods.

Hazard identification and characterization

The document covers undertaking risk assessment of all microbial hazards which may adversely affect human health in foods along the supply chain.

Risk analysis, consisting of risk assessment, management, and communication, is used to develop an estimate of the risks to human health, identify and implement measures to control them, and communicate about the risks and measures applied.

Hazard identification is usually the first step in risk assessment. It is an examination of the foodborne hazard and associated potential adverse health outcomes due to specific foodborne exposure, which is supported by a review of knowledge about the hazards and/or food in question.

Hazard characterization provides a description of the adverse effects that may result from ingestion of a hazard, whether that is a microorganism or its toxin. For emerging hazards it may be less certain than for well-established ones, such as *Campylobacter*, because of the lack of data and information, and may require more frequent updates to reflect increasing knowledge.

Exposure assessment and risk characterization

The goal of exposure assessment is to deduce, from available information, the probability and magnitude of exposure to the hazard. This may be in a given population or be limited to evaluation of one or a few processing steps. The risk manager may also wish to limit the scope to specific regions, populations, or periods of time.

It considers the factors that have a direct effect on consumer exposure to the hazard. These include frequency of consumption of the product; pathway, frequency and levels of contamination with the hazard; the range of doses; and factors that affect it such as potential for microbial growth, inactivation during

cooking, and seasonal and regional influences.

Risk characterization integrates the findings from the other three parts to estimate levels of risk, which can be used to make risk management decisions. It can include one or more estimates of risk, risk descriptions, and evaluations of risk management options.

The guidance gave examples of risk assessments including one in 2004 on Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) and Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy (TSE) in goat milk and milk-derived products by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). Another was seafood safety using RiskRanger, a decision support software tool, in Australia. In 2014, the FAO and the WHO looked at 24 parasites in food and their public health and trade impact with work, including development of a quantitative ranking tool using expert opinion.

The USDA-FSIS estimated whether blade-tenderized steak posed a greater risk from *E. coli* O157:H7 than its equivalent non-tenderized steak in 2002. A 2001 study simulated the exposure of the Dutch population to Shiga-toxin producing *E. coli* O157 in steak tartare and EFSA studied the public health risk posed by *Salmonella* in table eggs in 2014. The FAO and the WHO work on *Listeria monocytogenes* in ready-to-eat foods and *Vibrio vulnificus* in raw oysters was also mentioned.

Comments on the guidance should be sent to both jemra@fao.org and jemra@who.int no later than July 15, 2020.

MARKET NEWS

Safety Alerts

Date	Brand Name(s)	Product Description	Product Type	Recall Reason Description	Company Name	
07/21/2020	Hostess	Raspberry Zingers	Food & Beverages,	Potential to contain mold	Hostess Brands LLC	
07/18/2020	Giant Eagle	Dried Fruit Mix	Food & Beverages, Snack Food Item	Dried Fruit Mix	Giant Eagle, Inc.	
07/17/2020	Whole Foods	Spinach Artichoke Dip	Food & Beverages, Allergens	Undeclared Egg	Winter Gardens Quality Foods, Inc.	
07/16/2020	Happy Colon	Shortbread Cookie & Chocolate Chip Cookie	Food & Beverages, Snack Food Item	Undeclared Milk	Happy Colon Foods, LLC	
07/13/2020	Wegmans	Pecan Blend Trail Mix	Food & Beverages, Allergens, Snack Food Item	Undeclared Almonds and Walnuts	Flagstone Foods, LLC	
07/09/2020	Sundial	Herbal Products/Dietary Supplements	Food & Beverages, Spices, Flavors & Salts	Misbranding & Unapproved New Drugs	Sundial Herbal Products	
07/08/2020	KIND	Oats & Honey Granola with Toasted Coconut pouches	Food & Beverages, Allergens, Nuts & Nut Products		Undeclared sesame seeds	KIND Healthy Snacks
07/02/2020	Signature Farms	Garden Salad	Food & Beverages, Foodborne Illness		Possible Cyclospora Contamination	Jewel-Osco
06/30/2020	Garland Ventures Ltd.	Five Cheese Stuffed Shells	Food & Beverages,		Potential to be contaminated with Listeria monocytogenes	Garland Ventures Ltd.
06/29/2020	Hy-Vee	Chopped Salad Kit, Shredded Iceberg and more	Food & Beverages, Produce		Possible Cyclospora Contamination	Hy-Vee Inc.
06/29/2020	Fresh Express, Giant Eagle and more	Old fashioned coleslaw, 3 color deli coleslaw and more	Food & Beverages,		Possible Cyclospora Contamination	Fresh Express
06/29/2020	Garlic Shrimp Poke	Garlic Shrimp Poke	Food & Beverages, Shellfish		Potential to be contaminated with	Norpac Fisheries Export

MARKET NEWS

				Listeria monocytogenes	
06/29/2020	Whole Foods Market	Red Velvet Cheesecake slices	Food & Beverages, Bakery Product/Mix	Undeclared walnuts	Whole Foods Market
06/26/2020	Marketside	Classic Iceberg Salad	Food & Beverages,	Possible Cyclospora Contamination	Fresh Express
06/25/2020	Enlightened	Chocolate Peanut Butter Ice Cream	Food & Beverages, Allergens, Ice Cream/Frozen Dairy	May contain undeclared milk ingredients	Beyond Better Foods, LLC

Enterprise News

African Swine Fever kept out of U.S. but pork remains threatened around the world

What if the coronavirus never made the leap from Asia to North America? COVID-19 would still be infecting millions in Europe, Africa, and Asia, but not in the United States or Canada. North Americans would be watching COVID-19 fatalities only from afar.

That’s what we are doing, only its with African Swine Fever, not COVID-19.

North America isn’t being spared from coronavirus spread, but so far it has escaped ASF entirely. It is wiping out populations of pigs around the world, just not here.

African swine fever (AFS) is a highly contagious and deadly viral disease affecting both domestic and wild pigs of all ages. ASF is not a threat to human health and isn’t transmitted from pigs to humans and does not threaten food safety. ASF is found throughout the world, especially in Asia and Africa, but it not yet made it to North America.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) are working to prevent swine fever from spreading. African, Asian, and European swine populations have been involved in 14,327 AFS outbreaks since 2016 and those events have brought the loss of more than 8.2 million pigs.

FAO and OIE say the escalation of the spread of African swine fever (ASF) has placed most of the world’s domestic and wild pig populations under direct threat. To support countries’ efforts to protect economies and food security, the two world bodies have launched a joint initiative for the global control of ASF

Pork, they say, is the most consumed meat in the world, representing 35.6 percent of global meat consumption.

In recent years, ASF — which may cause up to 100 percent mortality in pigs — has become a major crisis for the pork industry, causing massive losses in pig populations and generating drastic economic consequences.

Currently affecting several countries of Africa, Asia, and the Pacific, and Europe, and with no effective vaccine, the disease is not only impeding animal health and welfare but has detrimental impacts on the livelihoods of farmers.

“Today, 51 countries are affected by African swine fever. Amid the difficult situation posed by COVID-19, ASF continues to spread, intensifying the current health and socioeconomic crises,” said Matthew Stone, OIE Deputy Director-General for International Standards and Science.

Many countries that are affected by ASF lack sufficient human, financial, or technical resources to rapidly detect, respond, and contain animal diseases.

Salmonella outbreak linked to British eggs



Almost 40 people are part of a Salmonella outbreak traced to eggs from the United Kingdom.

A spokesman for Public Health England told Food Safety News that it does not hold information on the date of onset of illness for all the patients.

“There have been 38 reported cases linked to this incident through analysis of

whole genome sequencing data. Cases range in age from 6 months to 85 years; 19 are female and 19 are male. We are aware of two cases having been hospitalized,” the spokesman said.

A notification on the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) portal from early July shows that eggs contaminated with Salmonella Enteritidis were subjected to physical or chemical treatment in the Netherlands, which was a commercial decision by the producer.

Lion Code flocks involved again

The Food Standards Agency (FSA), Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) and PHE were involved in the outbreak investigation, which began in May. Analysis of whole genome sequencing data identified the same strain of Salmonella from farm samples and in infected people.

British Lion Brand eggs account for about 90 percent of UK egg production. The British Lion mark on eggs means that they have been laid by hens vaccinated against Salmonella. All eggs with this mark have been produced under requirements of the British Lion Code of Practice.

Vaccination to prevent Salmonella in healthy animals is only partially protective. Control of infection also depends on careful administration of the vaccine via drinking water and good farm management to minimize risk of contamination.

Eggs from infected farms are restricted until they are sent for processing or disposed of as animal by-products. They cannot be sold as fresh table eggs. Farmers voluntarily culled the birds on site or sent them for slaughter following testing as arranged with the FSA.

“On May, 20, 2020, eggs from Lion Code flocks which had been identified as

possibly containing Salmonella were exported to the Netherlands for pasteurization. This process destroys the Salmonella and avoids destruction of all eggs,” said a Food Standards Agency spokesperson.

“Control measures have been taken at the farm affected to ensure that Salmonella is no longer present. We informed both the European Commission and Dutch authorities about this situation.”

Farms are fully cleansed and disinfected by the owner before they are allowed to re-stock. Environmental samples are taken after these measures to check for Salmonella. The re-stocked poultry flocks are then sampled by APHA in line with National Control Plan requirements.

The FSA spokesman said an outbreak of Salmonella was identified in the East of England as a result of reports of illness following retail sales.

“Once the link was made to particular flocks, restrictions were put in place but eggs at retail had already been sold. Those still at the packing center and farm were quarantined and then sent to the Netherlands for pasteurization. We issued a RASFF at this time to make the European Commission and relevant Netherlands authorities aware about the distribution of potentially contaminated eggs for processing – as is normal practice,” he said.

“Following consultation with local authority, PHE and APHA colleagues, we took the decision not to issue a recall due to the small number of eggs estimated to be potentially contaminated, the low level of risk to healthy consumers and the very much larger number of unaffected eggs likely to be implicated, a recall was considered to be disproportionate.”

Other egg outbreaks

The outbreak is not related to reports of Salmonella poisoning linked to British eggs revealed last year by The Bureau of Investigative Journalism and The Guardian.

Their investigation found there were at least 100 cases recorded in the past three years, and 45 since January 2019 traced to contaminated poultry farms.

Following this incident, the British Egg Industry Council said it had introduced additional, enhanced testing and auditing to minimize the risk of it happening again.

The U.K. also has the most confirmed and probable cases as part of a Salmonella outbreak linked to Polish eggs that has been ongoing since 2012 with 688, according to figures from January this year as reported by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and European Food Safety Authority (EFSA).

Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Sweden and the U.K. have recorded 1,656 infections since 2012.

The public are advised to follow good hygiene and egg handling practices such as storing eggs in the fridge until use, using them by the best before date, cleaning surfaces and kitchen equipment effectively after use, and washing hands thoroughly before and after handling them.

About Salmonella infections

Food contaminated with Salmonella bacteria does not usually look, smell, or taste spoiled. Anyone can become sick with a Salmonella infection. Infants, children, seniors, and people with weakened immune systems are at higher risk

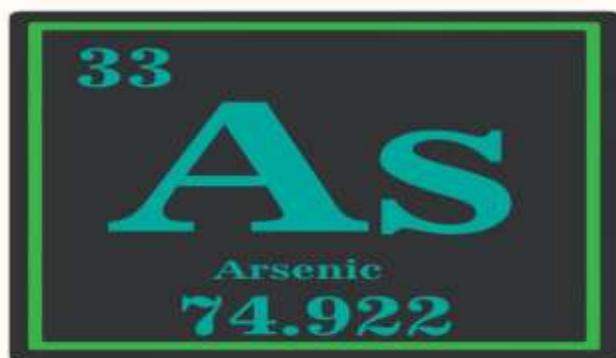
of serious illness because their immune systems are fragile, according to the CDC.

Anyone who has eaten eggs and developed symptoms of Salmonella infection should seek medical attention. Sick people should tell their doctors about the possible exposure to Salmonella bacteria because special tests are necessary to diagnose salmonellosis. Salmonella infection symptoms can mimic other illnesses, frequently leading to misdiagnosis.

Symptoms of Salmonella infection can include diarrhea, abdominal cramps, and fever within 12 to 72 hours after eating contaminated food. Otherwise, healthy adults are usually sick for four to seven days. In some cases, however, diarrhea may be so severe that patients require hospitalization.

Older adults, children, pregnant women, and people with weakened immune systems, such as cancer patients, are more likely to develop a severe illness and serious, sometimes life-threatening conditions.

Bottled water's arsenic king remains legal but still loaded with heavy metal



Consumer Reports still has a knack for finding something hiding in plain sight that many people will find outrageous. The find this time is bottled Starkey Spring Water manufactured by Whole

Foods and also sold by Amazon. It's the arsenic king of bottled water.

The problem with Starkey bottled water is that it contains harmful levels of arsenic.

Recent testing by CR found Starkey with “concerning levels” of arsenic, ranging from 9.49 to 9.56 parts per billion (ppb) or at least three times the level of every other brand tested.

Starkey is barely legal, coming in at just under the government's maximum for arsenic, which is 10 ppb. CR sees the maximum as too high to protect public health and it seems most water bottlers would agree.

James Dickerson, CR's chief scientific officer, says that regular consumption of even small amounts of heavy metal over time can contribute to risks for cardiovascular disease, certain cancers, lower IQ scores in children, and other health issues.

As recently as 2019, CR tests of Starkey's arsenic content was over or close to over the limit. A 10.1 ppb level was recorded at that time, along with three other samples that ranged from 9.48 to 9.86 ppb.

Two consumer lawsuits cited CR's test results from 2019.

CR announced the latest findings on Starkey's arsenic content as part of a project on the need for safe, clean, and affordable water. “I think the average consumer would be stunned to learn that they're paying a lot of extra for bottled water, thinking that it's significantly safer than tap, and unknowingly getting potentially dangerous levels of arsenic,” said Natural Resources Defense Council's Erick Olson.

The NRDF studies water quality and Olson is the organization's health and food

director.

Two states, New Jersey and New Hampshire have lowered their maximums for arsenic to 5 ppb, but it only applies to tap water. CR findings point to health risks that can emerge below the 10 ppb limit.

Tap water in the United States is regulated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). It permits the states to impose stricter limits. Bottled water, however, is regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and FDA is not open to any state imposing more stringent arsenic levels.

As long as Whole Foods keeps Starkey's arsenic level under 10 ppb, it is meeting the FDA's heaving metal standard. An FDA spokesman told CR "it is not possible to remove arsenic entirely from the environment or food supply."

FDA last updated its maximum arsenic level 15 years ago.

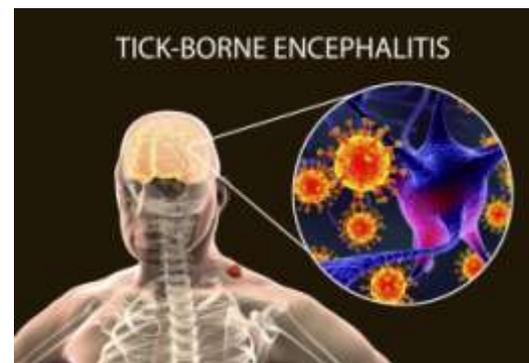
CR's new round of tests found many of 45 brands with undetectable amounts of arsenic. Starkey Spring Water was the only brand that exceeded 3 ppb. CR's Brian Ronholm said that shows lower levels can be achieved.

Ronholm is a former USDA deputy undersecretary for food safety and is currently CR's director of food policy. He says FDA's standard needs to be updated "to be more consistent with public health goals."

Shortly after Starkey Spring Water was introduced by Whole Foods in 2015, Florida notified FDA that it tested out for arsenic at 11.7 ppb. Others reported Starkey arsenic content at 12 ppb. Two thousand cases were recalled in 2016-17 for high arsenic.

Local water utilities at least annually test their own tap water and make the report available to anyone who requests a copy.

Tick-borne encephalitis outbreak linked to raw milk cheese in France



France has identified its first outbreak of tick-borne encephalitis from consumption of raw milk products, with more than 40 people affected.

The infections are linked to eating a brand of raw milk goat cheese in Ain, in the Rhone-Alpes region,

between April and May this year, according to Santé publique France.

The cheese producer is GAEC des Chevrettes du Vieux Valey, based at Condamine in Haut-Bugey, Ain. It is thought ticks carrying the virus contaminated a goat, then its milk, then the cheeses, and finally consumers.

A total of 42 cases of lymphocytic meningitis, encephalitis and infectious syndromes have been identified in people living in the commune of Oyonnax, within a radius of 30 kilometres. Two additional people live in Loire-Atlantique and Jura but consumed the implicated raw milk goat's cheese. Cases occurred between the week of April 13 to 19 and May 18 to 24 with a peak from April 20 to 26.

Virus found in cheese

At the end of May, the diagnosis of tick-borne Encephalitis (TBE) virus, the agent responsible for tick-borne encephalitis, was confirmed for 33 of the 44 cases. The other 11 are under investigation and biological tests are being done to confirm or rule out the diagnosis of tick-borne encephalitis.

Among confirmed cases, the median age is 49 with the youngest patient aged 11 months and the oldest 86 years old. Thirty people were hospitalized or went to hospital and two have been admitted to intensive care.

Forty-one of 43 cases reported having raw milk cheese from the same producer in Ain from mid-April. Presence of the TBE virus has been identified in a goat cheese from the company. A recall of dairy products from the firm was carried out before this result was known.

The producer has started pasteurizing goat milk before processing. A withdrawal and recall of products on sale at the time of the alert was conducted in late May.

A statement from GAEC des Chevrettes du Vieux Valey said the TBE virus carried by ticks was found on a single batch of cheeses produced on April 20 with checks on more recent products negative but it continues to discard product from milking until authorities say it can restart sales.

“We are awaiting the results of the blood tests on our goats to ensure that our animals are no longer carriers of this virus. We also wish a speedy recovery to the victims of this virus and we will inform you of the progress of the investigation concerning us,” according to a statement from the farm owners.

Rare infections from food source

Occurrence of sporadic cases of tick-borne encephalitis is not new in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region with a few identified each year. One case was identified at the end of May 2020 in Ain in a person bitten several times by ticks but who did not consume the cheese.

Most infections with the virus result from infected ticks, which often remain

attached to the skin for days. On rare occasions, infection can result from consumption of unpasteurized milk from infected goats, sheep or cows, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

The incubation period of TBE is usually between 7 and 14 days. In an early phase, symptoms may include fever, malaise, anorexia, muscle aches, headache, nausea, and/or vomiting. After an asymptomatic interval, a second phase of disease occurs in some patients who could experience symptoms of meningitis such as fever, headache, and a stiff neck and encephalitis (e.g., drowsiness, confusion, sensory disturbances, and/or motor abnormalities such as paralysis). Encephalitis developing during this second phase may result in paralysis, permanent health issues or death.

Severity of illness increases with age of the patient and there is no specific treatment for tick-borne encephalitis, according to the WHO.

The French Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health and Safety (ANSES) is doing additional environmental studies on ticks and the TBE virus in the geographic area concerned. Investigations are also being carried out, particularly among dairy farmers, because ticks carrying this virus may be present in other municipalities.

MARKET NEWS - REPLY

If you have any views or comments on the articles in the marketing news please feel free to contact us on the following email address: sales.china@mxns.com