NEWSMONTH

May 2021

MARKET NEWS

CONTENTS

International News

New law puts sesame on fast track for allergen labeling requirements

Coming in at No. 9 and trailing the first eight contenders by 17 years may not sound like a victory, but sesame's ninth place finish on the official list of "major allergens" is a big win for supporters of the FASTER Act.

Consumers, advocacy groups and dozens of legislators have been working for years to have sesame added to the list, which since 2004 has consisted of milk, eggs, fish, shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat and soy. With President Biden's signature in recent days, the Food Allergy Safety, Treatment, Education and Research Act became law and among other things put sesame on the list.

By becoming the ninth food to be listed as a major food allergen, sesame comes under the labeling regulations already imposed on the eight other major allergens. The new labeling must be in place by Jan. 1, 2023.

Some companies such as Hershey's and General Mills already include sesame among the allergens they specifically identify on their labels. Identification requirements for sesame will now be subject to allergen labeling requirements from the Food and Drug Administration.

More than 1.1 million people in America are allergic to sesame, according to a 2019 study published in the journal JAMA (the Journal of American Medical Association) Network Open. The published study reports that children who have food allergies usually do not out grow them and adults can develop allergies as they age. Reactions can vary and in some cases be life threatening.

A challenge faced by people with food allergies is trying to figure out what is actually in the packaged food they are considering buying, according to Lisa Gable, CEO of FARE (Food Allergy Research & Education), a non-governmental organization engaged in food allergy advocacy and the largest private funder of food allergy research. FARE has been advocating for the passage of the FASTER Act alongside Rep. Doris Matsui, D-CA, Rep. Anna Eshoo, CA, and more than 90 other legislative supporters for more than two years.

No longer will food companies be able to use such terms as spices and flavors that include sesame without specifying it as an ingredient. People allergic to sesame must also watch for the ingredients tahini, sesamol and gomasio.

Between now and 2023 consumers should also be on the lookout for foods that often include sesame. Such foods include falafel, hummus and certain rices. Sesame oil is commonly used as an ingredient in Asian cuisine. The allergen can also be found in chips, cereals, snack bars and a variety of other foods.

In addition to labeling regulations for sesame, the FASTER ACT requires the

Department of Health and Human Services to report on a variety of issues related to food allergies in 18 months.

EU gets stricter on black pepper from Brazil and peanuts from India

The European Commission has tightened checks on black pepper from Brazil because of Salmonella and peanuts from India because of aflatoxins.

These and other products entering the European Union from non-EU countries are now subject to a temporary increase of official controls. Revised legislation has also seen some checks become less strict.

The basis of the changes is the occurrence of incidents reported through the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) and information from official controls performed by member states on food and feed of non-animal origin.

Tighter controls

The frequency of identity and physical checks on black pepper from Brazil has been increased from 20 percent to 50 percent. This is because of the large amount of non-compliances with EU requirements for Salmonella contamination detected during official controls in 2019 and early 2020 and the high number of reports in the RASFF during that period.

This year there have been 28 RASFF reports of Salmonella in black pepper from Brazil with most reported by Germany. Serotypes include Rubislaw, Infantis, Saintpaul, Coeln, Matadi, Gaminara, and Javiana.

The frequency of identity and physical checks on peanuts, also known as groundnuts, from India because of aflatoxins has also gone up from 10 percent to 50 percent. Checks on peppers of the Capsicum species, other than sweet, for pesticide residues from Thailand will rise from 10 percent to 20 percent.

Sweet peppers from Turkey are already listed in the regulation because of the risk of contamination by pesticide residues but this has been amended to cover all peppers of the Capsicum species.

Reduced measures

Checks on goji berries from China because of pesticide residues and dried grapes from Turkey because of Ochratoxin A have been relaxed because of improved compliance in the second half of 2019 and first quarter of 2020.

For peanuts from Brazil, the rate of identity and physical checks has been set at 10 percent because of the risk of contamination by aflatoxins. The frequency of non-compliance with EU rules during official controls decreased in the second semester of 2019 and remained at low levels in the first few months of 2020.

Controls of this product from China because of the same issue are also at 10 percent.

The frequency of identity and physical checks for hazelnuts from Turkey because of aflatoxins has been reduced to 5 percent.

Foodstuffs containing betel leaves originating in, or being sent from, Bangladesh have been banned since June 2014 because of Salmonella contamination. However, the European Commission approved an action plan submitted by Bangladesh in July 2020 covering all steps of the production chain. The frequency of identity and physical checks will be set at 50 percent.

Foodstuffs consisting of dried beans from Nigeria remain suspended because of pesticide residue concerns. Peanuts and pistachios from the United States are being checked for aflatoxins at a rate of 10 percent.

Other products still subject to a temporary increase in controls include peanuts from Bolivia because of aflatoxins with checks at a frequency of 50 percent; sweet peppers from China because of Salmonella at a rate of 20 percent; sesame seeds from Ethiopia because of Salmonella at 50 percent; palm oil from Ghana because of Sudan dyes at 50 percent and turnips from Lebanon because of Rhodamine B at a frequency of 50 percent.

Austria checks raw milk, meat and honey compliance

Austrian officials have published results of different checks on raw milk, for antimicrobial resistance in meat and as part of Operation Opson.

A check on raw, unpasteurized milk looked at its microbiological status and for residues of cleaning agents. A total of 73 samples from across the country were taken and 23 were non-compliant.

Austria's regulation states that aerobic mesophilic bacteria in raw cow's milk must not exceed a count of 50,000 colony forming units (CFU) per milliliter. Officials said this count is a measure of hygiene during milking, filling and storage in the raw milk machine. It was exceeded in 23 samples and sometimes by a high amount. A note saying "raw milk, boil before consumption" must also be on vending distribution machines.

Shiga toxin-producing E. coli (STEC) was present in two samples and Listeria monocytogenes in one. Small amounts of benzyldimethyldodecylammonium chloride (BAC 12) were found in one test.

Fruit, vegetable and meat controls

Another control analyzed 83 samples of fruits and vegetables for pathogens and viruses. One sample of okra was non-compliant with a presumptive Bacillus cereus level of 100,000 CFU per gram. Three other products had presumptive

Bacillus cereus at 2,300, 11,000 and 24,000 CFU/g but were not for direct consumption and needed washing before eating.

Listeria monocytogenes was detected at a low amount in raspberries but below the 100 cfu/g level set in EU regulation so the sample was judged to be compliant, but measures to improve production hygiene and intensify self-monitoring were recommended.

Authorities also checked the domestic market for the presence of antibiotic-resistant bacteria in chicken meat. Of 316 samples, extended-spectrum beta-lactamase (ESBL) and AmpC producing-E. coli were detected in 58 of them. Carbapenemase-producing E. coli was not found.

The monitoring did not assess the levels of contamination in meat samples but found although there has been a decrease since studies in 2016, chicken is more often contaminated than pork or beef.

An assessment of 71 samples of raw sausages and raw cured products for pathogens and nitrite levels found the maximum amounts of nitrites were exceeded in two products.

Listeria monocytogenes was detected in seven samples of these products that have low water activity, meaning it won't grow, so they were found to be acceptable. Listeria innocua was found in five samples and Listeria grayi in four but both these types are not pathogenic to humans.

Erucic acid and honey authenticity

Elsewhere, official controls looked at erucic acid content in mustard oil with 15 samples taken. High amounts of erucic acid in food can be harmful to health so a maximum level of 50 grams per kilogram in mustard oils has been set.

Three samples had levels above the rules. One had an erucic acid content of 49.49 grams per 100 grams which corresponds to 494.9 grams per kilogram, another had 49.27 grams per 100 grams, corresponding to 429.7 grams per kilogram and the third was 18.32 grams per 100 grams which equates to 183.2 grams per kilogram. In another sample labeling issues were found, meaning it did not comply with the EU's food information to consumers regulation.

Another campaign assessed 55 cocoa products on the Austrian market for polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), mycotoxins such as aflatoxin and ochratoxin A, cadmium and aluminum.

In one sample of drinking chocolate powder, the maximum levels for benzo(a)pyrene and the sum of benzo(a)pyrene, benz(a)anthracene, benzo(b)fluoranthene and chrysene were exceeded and it was judged to be harmful.

A previous control in 2017 found two samples of cocoa powder had exceeded the maximum level for total PAHs based on their fat content.

Finally, officials published findings of testing on honey origin and authenticity, which was part of Operation Opson, an annual action coordinated by Europol and Interpol.

The aim was to check honey in Austria as part of the European Commission's Opson X project. Twenty samples from across the country were examined and issues were found with eight including incorrect botanical origin, addition of sugars and high hydroxymethylfurfural (HMF) content.

Two samples were judged to be adulterated, another two were misleading, a couple did not comply because of compositional reasons and five breached EU regulation on the provision of food information to consumers.

FDA says irrigation water most likely cause of onion Salmonella outbreak

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) on May 13 released a report on its investigation of the Salmonella Newport outbreak that caused more than 1,600 reported illnesses in the U.S. and Canada between June and October 2020.

The FDA worked with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), state partners, and Canadian officials (Public Health Agency of Canada and Canadian Food Inspection Agency) to investigate the outbreak, which was linked through epidemiology and traceback to whole red onions supplied by Thomson International Inc., headquartered in Bakersfield (Southern San Joaquin Valley) with additional operations in Holtville (Imperial Valley), California.

The outbreak is the largest Salmonella foodborne illness outbreak in over a decade. The report released today includes an overview of the traceback investigation, subsequent on-site interviews, visual observations of the growing fields, and environmental sampling, and various factors that potentially contributed to the contamination of red onions with Salmonella.

Although a conclusive root cause could not be identified, several potential contributing factors to the 2020 Salmonella outbreak linked to red onions were identified. These include:

- potentially contaminated sources of irrigation water;
- sheep grazing on adjacent land;
- signs of animal intrusion, including scat (fecal droppings), and large flocks of birds that may spread contamination; and
- food contact surfaces that had not been inspected, maintained or cleaned as frequently as necessary to protect against the contamination of produce.

In sampling conducted in Holtville, CA, the FDA found Salmonella Newport in 10 water (irrigation, seepage, and drainage) and one sediment subsamples. However, the whole-genome sequencing of these samples did not match the outbreak strain.

Although a conclusive root cause could not be identified, several potential contributing factors to the 2020 red onion outbreak were identified, including a leading hypothesis that contaminated irrigation water used in a growing field in Holtville, CA may have led to contamination of the onions.

In light of this report, the FDA encourages all farms to:

- assess growing operations to ensure implementation of appropriate science and risk-based preventive measures, including applicable provisions of the

FDA Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule and good agricultural practices;

- implement industry-led root-cause analyses to determine how the contamination likely occurred when pathogens are identified through pre-harvest or post-harvest testing of products, or microbiological surveys;
- be aware of and consider the risks that may be posed by adjacent and nearby land uses, especially as it relates to the presence of livestock and the interface between farmland, rangeland, irrigation water, and other agricultural areas;
- consider additional tools such as pre-harvest and/or post-harvest sampling and testing of products to help inform the risk assessment and clarify the need for specific prevention measures; and
- improve traceability by increasing digitization, interoperability, and standardization of traceability records; and
- follow good agricultural practices to maintain and protect the quality of water sources.

Thomson International Inc. cooperated with the FDA throughout the investigation and is continuing to engage with the FDA on the agency's findings and recommendations.

Food safety is a shared responsibility that involves food producers, distributors, manufacturers, retailers, and regulators. Recognizing the interconnection between people, animals, plants, and their shared environment when it comes to public health outcomes, we encourage collaboration among various groups in the broader agricultural community (i.e. livestock owners and produce growers, state government, and academia) to address this issue. The FDA is committed to working with these stakeholders to advance critical work.

Delays to checks on EU meat and seafood criticized

Great Britain should have introduced checks on European imports beginning in January 2021 to match the position taken by the EU, according to a report.

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Committee criticized the fact that controls on EU seafood and meat imports will not start until October 2021, with checks at the border commencing in January 2022.

The committee said the delay placed British businesses at a competitive disadvantage and reduced the incentive on the European Commission to negotiate measures that would lessen the burdens facing UK producers. It added that adhering to the revised timetable will be crucial to ensure food safety and create a regulatory level playing field.

In previous comments made in written evidence to the inquiry, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) said any further delays will present "challenges".

Call to modernize health certificates

Introduction of import controls has been revised twice. In February 2020, the government said it would introduce full controls beginning in January 2021 but in June 2020 pushed it back to April 2021 and checks at the border beginning in July 2021.

The committee called on the government to seek agreement with the EU on digitizing the certification of paperwork such as Export Health Certificates (EHCs).

An EHC must be signed and stamped by an Official Veterinarian (OV), or for seafood exports,an Environmental Health Officer or other local authority officer, with the exporter paying for certification. Increased demand for OVs to certify EHCs have reduced the number available to do meat certification work in slaughterhouses.

To help with the shortage of trained vets, the FSA and Royal Veterinary College have agreed to reduce the standard of English required as a temporary measure, to be reviewed after six months. The British Meat Processors Association (BMPA) voiced concerns about the move given the complex and technical nature of the job.

Playing field not level

Neil Parish MP, chair of the EFRA Select Committee, said adapting to the new processes for exporting meat and seafood to the EU hasn't been easy with checks causing delays and costs.

"We are concerned that in the absence of equivalent checks for imports from the EU to Great Britain, there will be serious long-term repercussions for our producers. As it stands, the playing field is not even, and the Government must ensure that the new timetable to introduce import checks is adhered to," he said.

"Even as teething problems are sorted, serious barriers remain for British exporters, and it is now imperative that the Government take steps to reduce these. By the end of the year, the Government must have developed a digital system for certifying EHCs for imports from the EU, enabling it to then negotiate a reciprocal arrangement."

The EU is not allowing import of live bivalve mollusks, such as oysters, clams and mussels, from class B waters unless they have been purified. Production areas are classified as A, B or C, with A as the least and C as the most contaminated. In April, the FSA revised classifications of some production grounds on a seasonal basis which allowed 11 sites to get Class A status for several months.

Gary McFarlane, Chartered Institute of Environmental Health Northern Ireland director, said the report is an important step in highlighting the public health dangers inherent in the current set up.

"We were pleased to see the committee include our call to make the process easier for UK businesses by digitalising the administration, and heartened that they share our concerns regarding the complete lack of food inspections for produce coming from the EU into the UK."

PEFSA scientist highlights key issues at IAFP Europe

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR), novel foods and emerging risks are some of the main topics facing the food system, according to EFSA's chief scientist.

Marta Hugas, from the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), said regulatory agencies face challenges ranging from current priorities, such as tackling AMR and food waste, to identifying emerging risks, where methodologies or data may be lacking, such as microplastics in the food chain.

Hugas told attendees at IAFP's European Symposium there are difficulties when providing scientific advice to policy makers and the public.

"First of all is the complexity, every time the volume of evidence keeps increasing so assessing thousands of papers takes a lot of time. We are experimenting with using Artificial Intelligence for pre-selection of papers and adding some inclusion and exclusion criteria. The methodologies are also evolving and we need to be able to capture and apply this methodology," she said.

"Societal expectations are also very demanding. They want us to have a holistic approach, so not to look at pesticide by pesticide but the whole exposure of chemicals to public health. Also, they want us to be transparent so they can scrutinize what we do and at the same time, the desire to participate, which is valid but poses some challenges on how to organize that."

Emerging risks and novel food

Policy developments such as the EU's Green Deal and product innovation like novel foods require risk assessors to identify potential issues and then advise risk managers to protect European consumers from food-related risks.

One of EFSA's tasks is emerging risks identification and the Emerging Risks Exchange Network (EREN) met this past month to discuss topics including the health risks of coconut oil, prohibited pesticide residues in food and Shiga toxin producing E. albertii.

"We identify an emerging risk when there is a new hazard that may pose a risk to health with adverse effects or it is a known hazard that has changed with increased exposure, the population has increased susceptibility, the hazard has increased pathogenicity or toxicity or product composition or intake has changed," said Hugas.

"Initially we call them issues as we don't know if they are risks or not. We use a process with expert knowledge and literature to help us identify if it may become an emerging risk. However, there is a lot of uncertainty so it is important not to create concerns."

Hugas said it can be difficult to assess innovation in the food sector.

"Industry is ahead and experimenting with innovation in their products. When an innovative product comes to us we need to be ready with a methodology to assess that product. One of these is alternative proteins, today there is a market and consumer drive for diversification of available proteins also to be less dependent on animal proteins. When we assess applications for novel foods, the focus is on the safety of the product taking into account its intended use," she said.

AMR and the circular economy

A recent report found resistance levels still were high in bacteria causing foodborne infections.

Hugas said antimicrobial resistance contributes significantly to the burden of disease and is a threat to public health.

"In EFSA we keep working on AMR. We see that it doesn't really improve a lot so we need to keep investing efforts in reducing consumption. In a report from several years ago it was clear that to combat AMR, we need to reduce the use of antimicrobials and replace them by other substances and rethink the way husbandry systems are implemented in the EU."

When asked what upcoming hazards in the food chain might be, Hugas said AMR could be the next pandemic if controlling resistance and the usage of antimicrobials is not taken seriously.

In 2020 to 2021, EFSA launched three projects to identify emerging risks related to the circular economy, food fraud, and new food and feed sources and production techniques.

The EU Green Deal calls for a circular economy and while this brings positives there may be some vulnerabilities, said Hugas.

"We have commissioned a project which aims to identify vulnerabilities of the circular economy for food and feed safety, plants and animal health and the environment. We know we have to be vigilant as in the past a threat to public health came from the BSE crisis. We need to be aware of possible disadvantages to prevent them as far as possible."

Sector's WGS approach

Another session at the event discussed Whole Genome Sequencing (WGS) from an industry perspective. The Forum for Food Microbiology is a network including 45 members from 28 companies that has quarterly meetings and will soon publish a guidance document.

Adrianne Klijn, of Nestlé, presented findings from a workshop and survey in 2019 involving 33 people from 18 companies although a further 12 firms declined the opportunity.

The included businesses were Arla Foods, Bonduelle, Cargill, Church Brothers Farms, Conagra Brands, Danone, Darling Ingredients, DSM, Fonterra, Greenyard, Hochdorf, Kerry, Kraft Heinz, Mars, Mondelëz International, Nestlé, Unilever, and Vion Food Group.

In total, 83 percent said they used WGS either frequently or infrequently. However, 12 said they were still using serotyping routinely meaning it was unlikely WGS will replace all other typing tools in the near future. Klijn said there are good subtyping tools for Salmonella but there is room for improvement when it comes to Listeria and Cronobacter.

Lab cross contamination is a good example of where the discriminatory power of WGS is needed, according to Klijn.

From 16 companies, 15 said they were only using WGS for pathogen source tracking while just a few were doing it for strain characterization.

The survey and workshop found the laboratory part is mostly outsourced with only two having in-house sequencing. Most used Illumina sequencing platforms. Bioinformatics was split three ways between in-house, outsourcing and doing both.

"The authorities deal with positive samples with isolates all the time, in the food industry we have a lot less positive samples, so we have fewer isolates and this low sample throughput means the cost per analysis is high with a low return on investment in the equipment. The reason [bioinformatics] is less outsourced is there is a lack of method standardization and analyzing the data in house will ensure a consistent approach," said Klijn.

Barriers that remain include the regulatory pressure to share WGS data, absence of a legal framework, a lack of clarity on data ownership, time to result and total cost including equipment, IT infrastructure and expertise in sequencing, bioinformatics and microbial genomics.

Poland promises action to reassure UK on poultry meat safety

Officials from Poland and the United Kingdom have met virtually to discuss the safety of Polish poultry meat after it was linked to several outbreaks.

Grzegorz Puda, Polish minister of Agriculture and Forestry, spoke remotely this past week with George Eustice, secretary of state for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Puda said he had taken direct charge of the issue of Salmonella in Polish poultry meat.

"Despite the difficult pandemic situation, Poland will take all measures to minimize and eliminate the UK's concerns about the quality and safety of Polish poultry," he said.

"Poland is ready to cooperate with the UK on sequencing of the Salmonella genome in poultry products."

Link to illness in several countries

Puda told Eustice about measures Poland has implemented to ensure the high quality and safety of chicken products after Salmonella outbreaks from the country's poultry meat.

Great Britain is Poland's second largest trading partner in agri-food trade. Currently the entire poultry production chain in the country is under veterinary supervision.

Two strains of Salmonella Enteritidis in frozen, raw, breaded chicken products from Poland have caused almost 500 illnesses since January 2020 and at least one death in the UK. The outbreak strains have been traced to two suppliers in Poland.

One of the strains has also affected people in Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Poland and Sweden since May 2018.

Eustice said there are no plans to introduce import restrictions on poultry meat from Poland.

"We note a significant improvement in the situation regarding Salmonella infections in poultry products."

In March, Victoria Prentis, parliamentary under secretary of state at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), said the agency was keeping the possibility of introducing import restrictions under review whilst in contact with the European Commission, Polish authorities and suppliers to resolve the issue.

"We do not consider it acceptable for the UK to be sent poultry products contaminated with Salmonella," she said.

After illness was linked to Polish chicken, the UK's Chief Veterinary Officer Christine Middlemiss called for action in a letter to her Polish counterpart in December 2020.

FSA's Salmonella chicken research

Emily Miles, chief executive of the Food Standards Agency (FSA), previously said the agency was working with retailers and informing the public of the issue.

"We suspect these illnesses are coming from undercooked products but it's also our view that we shouldn't be receiving chicken with Salmonella in from Poland," she said.

The FSA has started two projects to look at consumer habits on frozen partially cooked chicken products and Salmonella, E. coli and antimicrobial resistance in these items on retail sale in the UK.

A microbiological survey will establish the prevalence and levels of Salmonella and E. coli detected in frozen, partially cooked breaded and battered poultry products. Samples will come from across the UK and cover large supermarket chains and small business owners.

The consumer survey will collect about 2,000 responses to an online questionnaire focusing on how people transport, handle, store and cook these frozen poultry products at home. Both are planned for completion by January 2022.

Salmonella sickens up to 50 in Denmark and Sweden; food source suspected

Danish authorities are investigating Salmonella Braenderup infections that are related to an outbreak in Sweden. In Denmark, 24 people have fallen sick since late March while in Sweden, there are 22 confirmed patients since mid-April.

An international outbreak investigation is ongoing and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) is helping with cross-border coordination.

Between March 26 and April 26, 24 cases of Salmonella Braenderup have been reported to the Statens Serum Institut in Denmark. Those affected live all over the country with 17 women and seven men aged 1 to 90 years old sick. The median age is 67 years of age.

Work is underway to clarify the cause of the outbreak and identify the source of infection, which is suspected to be a widely distributed food.

Whole genome sequencing found the strains were sequence type 22 and closely related to each other. That means a single source is likely.

Earlier this month, the Public Health Agency of Sweden (Folkhälsomyndigheten) reported that a Salmonella Braenderup outbreak had affected 14 people in less than two weeks in 10 different regions of the country.

Sweden now has 22 confirmed cases, 17 females and five males, between less than 1 to 91 years old. The median age is 40. Onset of disease ranges from April 13 to May 1.

The Swedish Food Agency (Livsmedelsverket) and the Public Health Agency of Sweden are involved in the outbreak investigation.

About Salmonella

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 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. Some people get infected without getting sick or showing any symptoms. However, they may still spread the infections to others.

Food Standards Scotland vows to tackle foodborne illness

Taking action to prevent foodborne illness is one of the priorities identified by Food Standards Scotland (FSS) as part of its new 5-year strategy.

Reported cases of foodborne disease have remained relatively consistent during the past 15 years.

Jacqui McElhiney, head of science at FSS, said foodborne illness continues to be an important public health problem for Scotland.

"We therefore aim to take a more targeted approach to reduce the burden of infection by making better use of the data collected by both ourselves and Public Health Scotland (PHS) to identify where we can make the greatest impact: helping to control transmission and protect the population groups that are most vulnerable," McElhiney said.

Reducing Campylobacter

Campylobacter is the most common cause of bacterial foodborne illness with about 6,500 cases reported in Scotland annually, although it could be as high as 54,000 because of underreporting with direct healthcare costs of about £3 million ($4.2 million) each year. Next come norovirus and Salmonella. Work with Public Health Scotland has shown that 14 percent of Campylobacter cases require admission to hospitals.

"Chicken is the most important source of Campylobacter infection and the UK poultry industry has made significant progress in controlling contamination from the farm through to retail," said McElhiney.

"Our surveillance has indicated that there is still scope to reduce the risks of transmission through the handling of raw chicken both in retail settings and in the home. Research we have conducted with PHS has also shown that in Scotland, Campylobacter infection has the most serious consequences for older people and those living in more deprived areas. We can use this evidence to tailor our guidance and advice to areas of risk – helping businesses and consumers to adopt the controls and good hygiene practices which are effective in tackling Campylobacter."

Reducing illness caused by Shiga-toxin producing E. coli (STEC) is also a priority for FSS. Compared with Campylobacter, STEC is responsible for significantly fewer reported cases each year, however, it can result in more severe illness. Rates of STEC infection are highest in children.

Make the most impact

The 2021 to 2026 strategy states that FSS will make better use of epidemiological and genomic sequencing data to identify the best ways to reduce the burden of

foodborne illness.

"Advances in data science have transformed methods for identifying the sources and transmission routes for foodborne illness through the advent of Whole Genome Sequencing (WGS)," according to the document.

Geoff Ogle, FSS chief executive, said the agency will continue to ensure food is safe and authentic.

"Significant issues and societal changes such as EU Exit and COVID-19 have dramatically changed our way of life and will have an impact for years to come, while climate change presents future challenges with respect to security, nutritional quality and the safety of our food chain," he said.

"Online food sales is a challenge in terms of the changing environment and it is an issue a number of regulators are dealing with. In terms of unregistered food businesses, clearly even if you are setting up in a home to sell some cakes online you have to register with the local authority and we have put reinforcement messages out around the importance of that."

Ian McWatt, deputy chief executive and director of policy, science and operations, said the authority is well placed with the development of the Scottish National Database (SND), which offers a real time link into 32 local authorities, to collect data from environmental health officers dealing with food businesses.

"We are tracking very closely the number of unregistered businesses and we are working with the Scottish Food Enforcement Liaison Committee and that's where we address some of the key priorities that are coming out from the data that we find from SND. Online sales is an area of key focus during this strategy period."

Food crime focus

The strategy also covers the Scottish Food Crime and Incidents Unit (SFCIU), which gathers intelligence on areas of the food chain most vulnerable to fraud. Evidence suggests smaller businesses manufacturing perishable foods and high value products with Scottish provenance can be particularly at risk.

Ron McNaughton, head of SFCIU, said the agency hasn't seen an increase in food crime during the pandemic.

"The vast majority of food businesses are reputable and strive to produce safe food, unfortunately there are a small minority of individuals who will look to profit from those fraud opportunities that may arise, such as the pandemic," he said.

"We have seen quite a few academic commentators that have suggested we may still have to see what the outcome is because we are not far enough into the pandemic. As it stands at the moment we are not seeing an increase in intelligence highlighting an increase in food crime but there is always that opportunity because of pressures on global food supply chains."

McNaughton also spoke about Operation Opson, which is coordinated by Europol and Interpol, and the Global Alliance on Food Crime, which includes the UK, U.S., New Zealand, Australia and Canada.

"We've been involved in Operation Opson for the last six years although the pandemic restricted the operation last year we will be starting to plan over the next few months with a view to commencing activities around November," he said.

"The aim of the Global Alliance on Food Crime is to reduce the threat from food

crime, reducing the vulnerability to industry and consumers and building domestic and global capability. Our main focus of this work over the coming year will be to build a global intelligence sharing network."

FDA Releases report on foodborne illness risk factors in delis

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has released its report on a study of foodborne illness risk factors in retail food store deli departments.

This study is part of a 10-year initiative that examines when foodborne illness risk factors, such as employees practicing poor personal hygiene, and food safety practices, like improper handwashing, occur; and their relationship to Food Safety Management Systems (FSMS) and Certified Food Protection Managers (CFPM). Data for this study were collected between 2015 and 2016.

The FDA observed that delis with well-developed Food Safety Management Systems (FSMS) were more likely to properly control foodborne illness risk factors than delis with less developed FSMS. Also, delis with a Certified Food Protection Manager (CFPM) who is the person in charge have significantly better developed FSMS than delis that do not have a CFPM.

Analysis of the study data showed that deli departments had the best control over:

- ensuring no bare-hand contact with ready-to-eat foods
- cooking raw animal foods to required temperatures

In contrast, the most common food safety behaviors and practices needing better control included:

- ensuring employees practiced proper handwashing
- holding foods requiring refrigeration at the proper temperature
- cooling foods properly

Foodborne illness remains a major public health concern in the U.S., causing approximately 48 million illnesses and 3,000 deaths each year and costing roughly $77.7 billion dollars annually. Food safety practices in retail food establishments continue to play a critical role in preventing foodborne illness. Studies such as this serve as a source of information to help decision-makers take steps that will reduce the occurrence of risk factors responsible for causing foodborne illness, according to the FDA.

Germany records Salmonella infections linked to poultry meat

German officials have urged people to follow hygiene rules and take care when handling raw meat following a number of Salmonella infections linked to poultry.

The number of confirmed people sick stands at more than 20 in six federal states which is up from the six mentioned in a European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) assessment in February.

At that time, 193 cases of a certain sequence type of Salmonella Enteritidis had also been reported in Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom (UK) between May 2018 and December 2020.

Another sequence type of Salmonella Enteritidis has sickened about 300 people in the UK. One person from Canada with a travel history to Europe was ill in 2019.

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has warned people three times about breaded chicken linked to Salmonella infections and issued consumer advice. Earlier this month, Grzegorz Puda, Polish minister of Agriculture and Forestry, spoke with George Eustice, secretary of state for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs about the problem.

Frozen breaded chicken products traced to different meat suppliers, slaughterhouses, and farms in Poland have tested positive for Salmonella Enteritidis matching the outbreak strain.

More cooking at home during Coronavirus

The Robert Koch Institute (RKI), German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) and Federal Office of Consumer Protection and Food Safety (BVL) are investigating the outbreak in Germany.

The BfR said as a result of measures to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, people are increasingly cooking at home and more convenient products such as frozen food are being used. The agency added it is not always immediately apparent whether such products contain pre-cooked or raw meat.

Official food control data from 2018 shows that Salmonella was found in 5.6 percent of the chicken meat samples examined and Campylobacter in every second sample.

Salmonella is killed during the cooking of poultry meat if a high enough temperature is reached. However, it can be transferred to hands, household appliances and kitchen surfaces, and other foods can be contaminated.

Advice includes storing and preparing raw poultry products and other foods separately, carefully disposing of packaging materials, not washing the chicken, washing hands thoroughly with warm water and soap between the individual preparation steps and clean equipment and surfaces that have come into contact with raw poultry products before using them again.

Salmonella sickens up to 200 across EU and UK

More than 200 people in 11 countries could be part of a Salmonella outbreak

across Europe. Investigations to find the source of the Salmonella Braenderup infections are ongoing.

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) confirmed to Food Safety News that it was supporting countries in their investigations and following the incident closely with the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA).

The hardest hit country is the United Kingdom with 52 confirmed infections while France only has one confirmed patient. Denmark has 27 and Sweden 25 confirmed infections with the Netherlands recording 13 people sick.

Mostly women sick in Denmark and Sweden

There are four confirmed and 37 probable cases in Belgium and 13 confirmed and 21 probable in Germany.

The Czech Republic has reported four probable patients, Finland has three confirmed and two probable, Ireland has four confirmed cases while Norway has five.

In Denmark, between March 26 and April 28, a total of 27 cases of Salmonella Braenderup have been reported to the Statens Serum Institut.

Whole genome sequencing found the strains were sequence type 22 and closely related to each other meaning they are likely linked to the same source.

Those sick live all over the country with the majority being women but eight men are ill. They are aged 1 to 90 years old and the median is 68 years of age.

Sweden has 25 confirmed cases with women mainly affected. Patients range in age from under 1 to 91 years old. The median age is 40. Onset of disease started in mid-April.

The Public Health Agency of Sweden (Folkhälsomyndigheten) reported the outbreak had affected people in 10 different regions of the country.

About Salmonella

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 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. Some people get infected without getting sick or showing any symptoms. However, they may still spread the infections to others.

Enterprise News

New testing program seeks to shed light on leafy greens outbreaks

The Food and Drug Administration announced today that it will be collecting and testing samples of lettuce grown in California's Salinas Valley from local commercial coolers from May through November 2021.

The agency will test the samples for Shiga toxin-producing Escherichia coli (STEC), including E. coli O157:H7, and Salmonella spp. as part of ongoing surveillance efforts following reoccurring outbreaks linked to this region, including most recently in the fall of 2020.

The FDA testing program will direct sampling to be conducted at commercial cooling and cold storage facilities where field heat is removed from harvested lettuce and where the product is cold-stored before processing.

Testing may include a pre-cooled product, which is preferred, or a post-cooled product. Sample collection at commercial coolers helps the FDA efficiently obtain samples from multiple farms at centralized locations and facilitates prompt traceback and follow-up if contamination is detected, according to the announcement.

The agency plans to collect and test about 500 post-harvest samples of the iceberg, leaf, and romaine lettuce. Each sample will consist of 10 subsamples, each made up of one head of lettuce (trimmed, cored, and possibly wrapped), or in the case of romaine lettuce, loose leaves, or one package of hearts. The FDA's laboratories will conduct all testing.

During this testing program, the FDA will take extra precautions to help ensure the safety of agency investigators and firm employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. FDA investigators will pre-announce their visits to firms per the agency's COVID-19 safety practices. They will be outfitted with personal protective equipment (PPE) and will carry out their work while adhering to local, state, and applicable CDC guidance.

"Helping to ensure the safety of leafy greens remains a high priority of the FDA. This assignment adds to another work underway in collaboration with stakeholders in the California Central Coast growing region to identify where the recurring strain of pathogenic E. coli is persisting and the likely routes of leafy green contamination with STECs," according to FDA's announcement.

"This includes continued implementation of actions identified in the recently updated Leafy Greens Action Plan, including a multi-year longitudinal study to assess the environmental factors impacting the presence of foodborne pathogens in this region."

If the FDA detects a pathogen such as E. coli O157:H7, the agency will conduct a follow-up investigation to identify potential sources and routes of contamination. Such investigations are designed to inform what additional preventive measures may be needed to help prevent outbreaks of foodborne illness.

Bean supplier for Costco expands recall over compromised seals on beans

Faribault Foods Inc. is expanding their Apr. 22 recall of certain cans of S&W Organic Black Beans and Chili Beans sold at Costco stores because the cans may have compromised seals that could lead to botulism poisoning.

The compromised hermetic seals may affect can integrity and may cause the cans to leak, bloat or allow bacteria, such as Clostridium botulinum, to grow inside the product which could lead to serious illness

The recalled products were distributed to retail stores in California, Washington, Utah, Oregon, Arizona, Colorado, Arkansas, Hawaii, Texas, Georgia and Idaho.

The recall was initiated after the firm had received consumer and customer complaints regarding the failure of the hermetic seals.

Consumers should check their homes because of the long shelf life of the beans, which do not expire until 2023.

To identify recalled products consumers should look for the following label information:

Product	Date/Lot Number	Distribution Dates
S&W Organic Black Beans, 15 oz.	Best By JUL 19 2022 1329A 202 20	August 2020-October 2020
S&W Organic Black Beans, 15 oz.	Best By JUL 20 2022 1329A 203 20	September 2020-March 2021
S&W Organic Black Beans, 15 oz.	Best By JUL 23 2022 1329A 205 20	August 2020-November 2020
S&W Organic Black Beans, 15 oz.	Best By SEP 13 2022 1329A 258 20	November 2020-March 2021
S&W Organic Black Beans, 15 oz.	Best By SEP 14 2022 1329A 259 20	November 2020-March 2021
S&W Organic Black Beans, 15 oz.	Best By SEP 15 2022 1329A 260 20	October 2020-December 2020
S&W Organic Black Beans, 15	Best By MAR 11	March 2021-April 2021

oz.	2023 1329A 071 21	
S&W Organic Black Beans, 15 oz.	Best By MAR 14 2023 1329A 074 21	April 2021
S&W Organic Black Beans, 15 oz.	Best By MAR 15 2023 1329A 075 21	April 2021
S&W Organic Black Beans, 15 oz.	Best By MAR 16 2023 1329A 076 21	March 2021-April 2021
S&W Organic Black Beans, 15 oz.	Best By JAN 31 2023 1329A 032 21	February 2021-April 2021
S&W Organic Black Beans, 15 oz.	Best By FEB 01 2023 1329A 033 21	February 2021-April 2021
S&W Organic Black Beans, 15 oz.	Best By FEB 02	February 2021-April 2021

	2023 1329A 034 21	
S&W Organic Black Beans, 15 oz.	Best By FEB 03 2023 1329A 035 21	February 2021-April 2021
O Organics Organic Black Beans, 15 oz.	Best By FEB 03 2023 981A 035 21	February 2021-April 2021
O Organics Organic Chili Beans, 15 oz.	Best By FEB 04 2023 978A 036 21	February 2021-April 2021

Consumers who may have purchased the recalled products should return them to the store where they were purchased for a refund or replacement.

About botulism poisoning

While a variety of illnesses can result from eating under-processed, canned or jar foods, one of the most dangerous is botulism poisoning. Untreated, botulism can paralyze the muscles needed for breathing, resulting in sudden death.

Anyone who has developed signs of botulism poisoning should immediately seek medical attention, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention (CDC).

"In foodborne botulism, symptoms generally begin 18 to 36 hours after eating contaminated food. However, symptoms can begin as soon as 6 hours after or up to 10 days later," according to the CDC website.

The symptoms of botulism may include some or all of the following: double vision, blurred vision, drooping eyelids, slurred speech, difficulty swallowing, difficulty breathing, a thick-feeling tongue, dry mouth, and muscle weakness. People with botulism poisoning may not show all of these symptoms at once.

These symptoms result from muscle paralysis caused by the toxin. If untreated, the disease may progress, and symptoms may worsen to cause paralysis of specific muscles, including those used in breathing and those in the arms, legs, and the body from the neck to the pelvis area.

Company recalls 1.6 million cases of beans from 22 states for processing mistake

Randall Foods Inc. is recalling all lots of its Randall-brand beans because of manufacturing deviations that may pose a potential health risk. The recall includes 1.6 million cases of glass jars.

" The manufacturing deviations included a nonfunctioning temperature indicating device raising the possibility that the product was not effectively processed," according to the Cincinnati, OH, company's recall notice posted by the Food and Drug Administration.

"Processing at temperatures below a required temperature could create a condition that could lead to premature spoilage or foodborne illness; however, there have been no illnesses reported."

The product is sold in 48-ounce, 24-ounce, and 15.4-ounce glass jars with tan labels with "Randall" at the label top.

Approximately 1.6 million cases of affected products were distributed between March 1, 2019 and May 15, 2021 at retail locations in the following states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Iowa, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Carolina, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Wisconsin and West Virginia.

There is concern that consumers may have unused portions of the beans in their homes because of the long shelf of the products, which have best-by dates through 2025.

Consumers can use the following label information to determine whether they have the recalled beans:

Brand	Description	UPC	Batch/Lot Numbers	"Best By" Date
Randall	RANDALL GREAT NORTHERN BEANS 48OZ	070095000100	ALL	Prior to January 1 2025
Randall	RANDALL GREAT NORTHERN BEANS 24OZ	070095000117	ALL	Prior to January 1 2025
Randall Randall	RANDALL GREAT NORTHERN BEANS	070095000131 070095000209	ALL ALL	Prior to January 1

Brand	Description	UPC	Batch/Lot Numbers	"Best By" Date
	15.4OZ RANDALL PINTO BEANS 48OZ			2025 Prior to January 1 2025
Randall	RANDALL PINTO BEANS 24OZ	070095000216	ALL	Prior to January 1 2025
Randall	RANDALL PINTO BEANS 15.4OZ	070095000230	ALL	Prior to January 1 2025
Randall	RANDALL MIXED BEANS 48OZ	070095000407	ALL	Prior to January 1 2025
Randall	RANDALL MIXED BEANS 24OZ	070095000414	ALL	Prior to January 1 2025
Randall	RANDALL MIXED BEANS 15.4OZ	070095000430	ALL	Prior to January 1 2025
Randall	RANDALL KIDNEY BEANS 48OZ	070095000308	ALL	Prior to January 1 2025

Brand	Description	UPC	Batch/Lot Numbers	"Best By" Date
Randall	RANDALL KIDNEY BEANS 24OZ	070095000315	ALL	Prior to January 1 2025
Randall	RANDALL KIDNEY BEANS 15.4OZ	070095000339	ALL	Prior to January 1 2025
Randall	RANDALL NAVY BEANS 48OZ	070095000506	ALL	Prior to January 1 2025
Randall	RANDALL NAVY BEANS 15.4OZ	070095000537	ALL	Prior to January 1 2025
Randall	RANDALL BLACK BEANS 48OZ	070095000605	ALL	Prior to January 1 2025
Randall	RANDALL BLACK BEANS 24OZ	070095000612	ALL	Prior to January 1 2025
Randall	RANDALL BLACK BEANS 15.4OZ	070095000636	ALL	Prior to January 1 2025

Brand	Description	UPC	Batch/Lot Numbers	"Best By" Date
Randall	RANDALL GARBANZO BEANS 24OZ	070095000711	ALL	Prior to January 1 2025
Randall	RANDALL GARBANZO BEANS 15.4OZ	070095000735	ALL	Prior to January 1 2025
Randall	RANDALL ULITMATE 4-BEAN MIX 48OZ	070095000902	ALL	Prior to January 1 2025
Randall	RANDALL ORGANIC GREAT NORTHERN BEANS 48OZ	070095005105	ALL	Prior to January 1 2025

Consumers who have purchased jars of Randall-brand beans, regardless of the "Best By" date, should return them to the place of purchase for a full refund. Consumers with questions may contact the company at 513-793-6525.

Tesco fined £7.5 million for out-of-date food sales

Tesco has been fined £7.5 million ($10.4 million) for selling food past its use-by date at three stores in an English city.

The retailer pleaded guilty at Birmingham Magistrates Court in September 2020 to 22 offences and was fined this past week. The violations included 67 items of out-of-date food being on sale between 2015 and 2017 in three store locations.

The first incident at a Tesco Express saw Birmingham City Council environmental health officers (EHOs) visit the store in June 2015 after a public complaint and they found six items on display beyond their use-by dates.

They were invited back for another check in April 2016 when they found various items including own-brand pizza, soup, pork belly slices, potato salad, trifle and flavored milk, out of date for between one to 17 days.

Missed opportunities to remove products

A separate complaint in May 2017 led to a visit to a Tesco Metro store in June where 25 items displayed for sale beyond their use-by dates were discovered including own-brand scotch eggs, quiche lorraine, and Little Dish chicken and vegetable risotto and pasta bolognaise which were children's meals.

At the third store, own-brand falafel and hummus wraps, grapes and strawberries, and berry medley pots were on sale past their use-by dates in June 2017 with mold found on grapes.

Mark Croxford, head of Environmental Health for Birmingham City Council, said the case sends a warning to retailers to ensure their stock is in date and if they are found to be breaching the rules action will be taken.

"The manufacturers put the date on their products to guarantee the food is safe and ignoring this date completely undermines consumer safety. There were numerous missed opportunities to check the dates on these products and remove them from display – and the fact incidents were found on several occasions, in different stores and over 14 months, is a major concern."

Judge Shamim Qureshi said the decision from Tesco to invite EHOs back in 2016 after the 2015 incident was an "own goal" because out of date items were found again.

Richard Reichman, a partner at BCL Solicitors LLP, said this is a surprisingly common feature in food safety cases and urged businesses to be careful when inviting a regulator back to re-visit and not to do so prematurely.

Judge: A reluctant guilty plea after running out of options

Qureshi said he agreed that Birmingham City Council had been made to jump every conceivable hurdle.

"Tesco has tried to avoid being prosecuted and avoided pleading guilty at the earliest opportunity for the 2016 offences. They tried Hertfordshire County Council, the Office for Product Safety and Standards and the High Court but failed dismally," he said.

"In my view it is not that they have been uncooperative, but my criticism is that this guilty plea must rank as probably the most reluctant guilty plea in legal history. Since 2014 the law has been absolutely clear that food cannot be sold after the use-by date. Tesco says the law needed to be clarified. It was crystal clear but Tesco tried to make it confusing.

"Tesco are only pleading guilty because they have run out of options. The Sentencing Council desperately needs to introduce another table into their sentencing tables. They need to give guidance on multi-billion pound companies."

The retailer has an overall good safety and hygiene record as offences were at three of its 2,900 stores and it took steps to reinforce training and resolve problems in 2016 and 2017, added Qureshi.

Out of date food still safe to eat?

Tesco used evidence in their defense from food microbiologist Slim Dinsdale, who compared the cotton-like mold on grapes to the mold in blue cheese and found food was not unsafe to eat after the use-by date.

Qureshi said this was at odds with the feeling of disgust that the public would have on seeing the mold on grapes.

"If I am wrong about that, then perhaps someone might pioneer a new market amongst the public for moldy grapes to be eaten with moldy cheese, moldy biscuits and pungent wine."

Tesco, which could appeal the fine, said it was disappointed that a small number of out-of-date products were found on sale in three stores.

"The safety of our customers is always our priority and these incidents are not

representative of the high standards of safety and quality we expect in Tesco stores."

Katie Vickery, International Regulatory and Compliance Partner at Osborne Clarke, said it is a challenge for a business of scale to ensure there is no food beyond its use-by date on shelves.

"While technology has helped in recent years, typically this is a manual process and people make mistakes. Legally the position is that if you sell food that is beyond its use-by date you commit an offense," she said.

"Tesco tried to challenge this last year when it argued in the Divisional Court that the law was wrong to presume that food that was past its use-by date was automatically unsafe. Tesco presented compelling evidence from a leading microbiologist that the out-of-date food found in the stores in Birmingham was still safe to eat. The Divisional Court disagreed and confirmed that simply selling food past its use-by date was enough to commit the offense."

MARKET NEWS - REPLY

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