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FSA urges consumers to become 'salt savvy'

The Agency has launched a new phase of its salt campaign, urging consumers to check the salt content of everyday foods and choose options lower in salt.

Since the first phase of the campaign in 2004, the Agency has been working to reduce the average salt intake of UK adults to no more than 6g a day. Children aged under 11 should have less.

The new campaign activity includes TV, radio, press and online ads, and posters on billboards and buses. The ads urge people to find out if their food is 'full of it' by checking the label. By comparing the salt content of similar foods and choosing those lower in salt, consumers can reduce their intake.

The press, poster and online advertising highlight 'surprising places' where salt can be found – in bread, breakfast cereals, pasta sauces, ketchup and soup. The salt content of these everyday products can vary considerably.

The TV ads, which feature comedian and writer Jenny

Eclair, aired for the first time on 5 October and run for four weeks. They can also be viewed online.

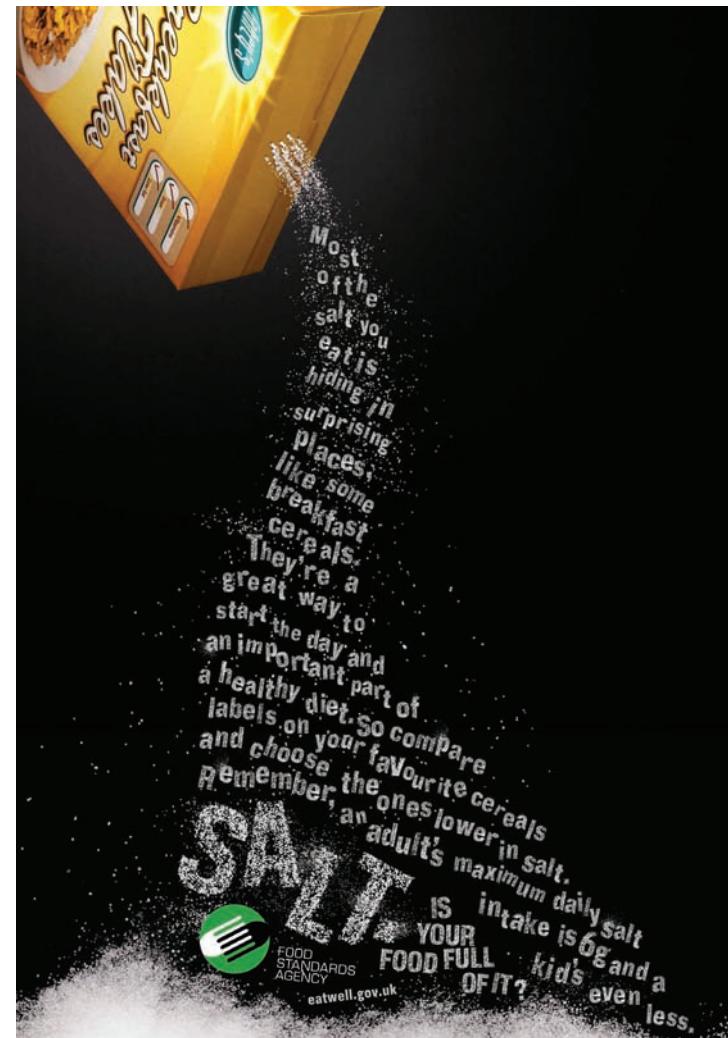
The Agency's Go Lower road show has also begun touring the UK, visiting major supermarkets during October, persuading shoppers to taste lower-salt varieties of everyday foods and giving them tips to help them become more 'salt savvy'.

Visitors to the Go Lower stand will be urged to take the four-week Go Lower Salt Challenge, using a Salt Challenge Diary, to try lower-salt varieties of one food each week.

Shoppers will also be given vouchers to get money off lower-salt products in the store.

FURTHER INFORMATION

To see which stores the road show is visiting, go to: food.gov.uk/golower
The ads can be viewed online at: food.gov.uk/saltads
More on the latest research on salt is on the next page.



Can't do the salt maths? Phone a friend...

Owners of web-enabled phones now can access a handy application that has been created for the Agency's salt campaign.

iPhone and iPod Touch users can download a free 'app' from the Apple store that will enable them to calculate whether the food they are about to pop in their basket is high, medium or

low in salt. They can check the recommended limit for their daily salt intake and get tips to reduce it. With a shake of the phone, the tip changes. Go to the Apple store and search for 'FSA salt'. Click on the 'free' button and then 'Install'.

Other web-enabled, or smart, phone users can go to

food.gov.uk/saltapp and use the calculator there.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The salt app is at: food.gov.uk/saltapp
More on shopper awareness is at: food.gov.uk/news/pressreleases/2009/oct/salt



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Survey reveals lack of knowledge about salt hidden in our food

More than three quarters of people (77%) are not aware that bread and breakfast cereals are among the daily foods that contribute most salt to our diet, a new Food Standards Agency survey reveals. The survey's publication marked the launch of the latest stage of the Agency's work to reduce people's salt intake.

The salt levels of these foods vary across brands, so the campaign encourages people to reduce the amount of salt we eat by checking labels on foods and choosing those that are lower in salt. Too much salt can lead to high blood pressure, which triples the risk of heart disease and stroke and doubles the chance of dying from the diseases.

Rosemary Hignett, Head of Nutrition at the Agency, said: 'Salt intakes are coming down, but if we are to get closer to meeting our target of reducing intakes to a maximum of 6g a day for adults, and lower levels for children, people need to become more aware of the foods that contribute the most, as it isn't just the obvious things we need to watch out for as far as salt is concerned.'

'We're not suggesting people stop eating these foods. In fact, we encourage people to eat bread and breakfast cereals, as they are an important part of a healthy diet. But we are saying take a

look at the labels to find those that are lower in salt. This could be a supermarket own-label product, and maybe one from the "value" range. If so, any cost saving is an added bonus.'

'We've been working closely with food manufacturers and retailers to encourage them to use less salt in their foods, and are pleased with the progress

Look at the labels to find those lower in salt

that is being made. But there is still a wide variation of salt levels in different brands, which is why it is so important that people check the labels.'

About the survey

More than 2,000 people across the UK were asked about their attitudes to salt. When asked to pick the top three from a list of the 10 foods that contribute the most salt to our diets, only 13% of people mentioned bread, and 12% said breakfast cereals.

The survey also found that many people (40%) believe that supermarket 'value' ranges are higher in salt than other ranges, although this isn't necessarily the case. Sometimes the cheapest are

among the lowest in salt. In addition, supermarket own-label versions of some foods, including bread, are often lower in salt than the branded versions.

Other highlights from the survey include:

- when asked to pick the top three contributors from a list of the 10 foods that contribute the most salt to our diets, the foods most commonly mentioned were crisps and snacks (73%), ready meals (65%) and meat products (36%), but only meat products are actually in the top three
- 85% of people tend to stick to the same brands of foods they buy regularly, such as bread, ketchup and breakfast cereals. However, a quarter of these people (26%) said they would change from their usual brand if they knew that a lower salt option was available
- 37% of respondents were either 'very concerned' or 'quite concerned' about the amount of salt they ate

Background to the campaign

About 75% of the salt we eat comes from everyday foods. Foods that contribute the most salt to our diets are not necessarily the saltiest, but the ones we eat most often. The top three foods that contribute salt to our diets are bread,

followed by meat products, then breakfast cereals.

In the UK we are eating 8.6g salt a day on average which, although much higher than the recommended 6g, is almost a gram less than we were eating before the Agency launched its salt reduction programme in 2004. With the majority of the salt we eat coming from everyday foods, the Agency wants people to be more aware of this fact, and that it's possible to reduce the amount of salt we eat simply by checking labels, comparing products and choosing the ones with less salt.

Science behind the story

The Agency's advice on salt intake for adults and children is based on sound science, underpinned by the recommendations of the independent Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN), which carried out a thorough and comprehensive risk assessment on salt and associated health outcomes (see below).

FURTHER INFORMATION

The survey can be found at: food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/saltomnibusurveyaug09.pdf
 SACN's report on Salt and Health is at: www.sacn.gov.uk/pdfs/sacn_salt_final.pdf



Agency scores with Man United

Manchester United goalkeeper Edwin Van der Sar has launched a project, in partnership with the Food Standards Agency (FSA), to encourage schoolchildren to eat more healthily and live a more balanced lifestyle.

Local schoolchildren, teachers, FSA representatives and some famous faces from the world of football attended the launch at the Old Trafford stadium.

The project, which is called Something to Chew On, uses Manchester United players to teach primary school children about being healthy.

The Manchester United Foundation has received the funding to develop the project over three years and will work in partnership with the FSA, local and regional healthy schools teams,

and local authorities.

Each school where the Foundation delivers Something to Chew On will receive a full teachers' resource pack so that the project will be sustainable for future pupils.

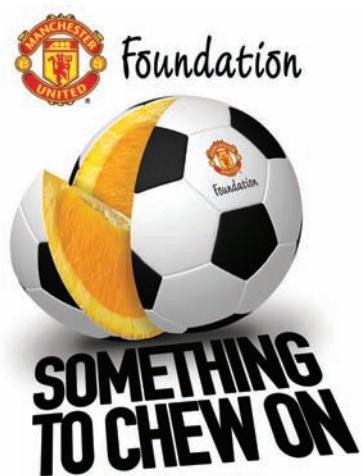
Something to Chew On, which is funded by the FSA and the Premier League/Professional Footballers' Association Community Fund, was piloted in Salford schools last year. The programme uses an interactive approach to teaching children about keeping healthy and covers food, nutrition and getting active, but with a football focus. Topics, based on the Agency's food competency

framework, include: diet and health, food safety, consumer awareness and food preparation. As well as classroom sessions, there are practical sessions that cover football, fitness and controlling body movement to motivate children to be active.

Edwin Van der Sar, Manchester United First Team goalkeeper, said: 'Aspiring to have and maintaining a balanced lifestyle for children and families is a message that is very important to me. I have been impressed with the Something to Chew On programme and I'm very pleased to be so involved.'

Rosemary Hignett, Head of Nutrition at the Agency, said:

'Learning how to choose, cook and eat safe, healthy food from a young age is an invaluable tool. The skills young people will develop through these activities will both be fun and interesting, but more



importantly they will hopefully have a positive and lasting impact through to their adult lives.'

Something to Chew On will be rolled out across Manchester, Trafford and Salford with a view to going national next year.

FURTHER INFORMATION

More on the Agency's work with schools is at: food.gov.uk/healthisereating/nutritionschools

More on football, fitness and food is at: eatwell.gov.uk/healthydiet/foodforsport/football

Edwin Van der Sar, centre front, at the launch of the campaign



Food Champion Awards launched

The Agency is pleased to announce the launch of the 2010 Food Champion Awards, which are open to all local authorities in England and Wales.

The awards aim to recognise and celebrate authorities that have shown innovation and real leadership in their work to improve food safety and standards locally, or improve the diet and nutrition of people in their communities.

A partnership with Food Vision has now been established to co-ordinate the awards process, and all case studies and applications will now be submitted through the Food Vision website to avoid duplication and ensure all projects are promoted properly.

The Food Vision website can be found at the link below.

Local authority initiatives completed since the closing date for Food Champions 2008 (the closing date was 17 December 2007) and submitted as case studies to the Food Vision website by 31 March 2010 will be eligible for the awards.

Any local authority that already has an eligible initiative on the Food Vision website will have the opportunity to confirm whether it wants its case study to be considered for the Food Champion Awards.

What is Food Vision?

Food Vision is a project to promote safe, sustainable and nutritious food to improve local

community health and well-being. It is run jointly by the Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services, the Food Standards Agency and the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health. It is supported by the Local Government Association and the Improvement and Development Agency for local government.

Case studies and toolkits on the Food Vision website are designed to inspire those who would like to set up initiatives.



food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/enforcement/foodchampion2010leaflet.pdf

Alternatively, contact Jackie Jewett, email: jackie.jewett@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk tel: 020 7276 8932
The Food Vision website is at: foodvision.gov.uk

Healthier food mark seeks 'pilots'

A Government scheme, supported by the Food Standards Agency, to encourage and recognise best practice among public sector organisations buying and serving healthier, more sustainable food, is recruiting for its pilot phase.

The voluntary scheme, which has the working title 'Healthier Food Mark', is being set up by the Department of Health, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Food Standards Agency, working as part of a cross-Government group with the food industry, public sector organisations and other stakeholders.

The Healthier Food Mark will have three tiers (bronze, silver and gold) and will focus on areas that have the highest impact in terms of nutrition and sustainability, fully reflect current Government policy and have a strong evidence base.

It is expected that the majority of public sector organisations will be able to achieve the bronze level, progressive organisations will aim for silver and public sector organisations aspiring to meet high nutritional provision and sustainability criteria will strive for gold.

The scheme is being tested as a pre-consultation pilot in 2009-10. A full consultation on the scheme will follow in 2010 with the aim of rolling out the scheme in 2011.

FURTHER INFORMATION

A website providing more information is due to be launched later this month at: dh.gov.uk/healthierfoodmark



Trio sentenced in organics scam

Northamptonshire County Council Trading Standards, with the support of the Food Standards Agency, has successfully prosecuted One Foods Limited – the company behind an organic food scam worth more than half a million pounds.

The home delivery and wholesale business supplied a range of products falsely described as organic to consumers and businesses across the UK. The fraud took place over a five year period.

One Food Limited Director Neil Stansfield has received a 27 month prison sentence, while Company Secretary Kate Stansfield and Operations Manager Russell Hudson both received suspended sentences and 150 hours of community work. All three pleaded guilty to selling conventionally grown food as organic.

Sarah Appleby, Head of Enforcement at the FSA, said: 'I am delighted that justice has been done. The FSA takes all



food fraud very seriously and this is a perfect example of the FSA working closely with local authorities to stamp it out.'

The FSA has a range of resources available to help local authorities that suspect, or uncover, food fraud. These include the National Food Fraud Database and the Food Fraud Advisory Unit, which includes local enforcement officers with specific experience in tackling food fraud. One of Northamptonshire County Council's Trading Standards Officers involved in this investigation is a member of the

Food Fraud Advisory Unit. The Agency also has a 'fighting fund' that can be used, as in this investigation, to provide financial support to local authorities.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more on how to report food fraud and the Agency's resources on tackling fraud go to: food.gov.uk/enforcement/workwithenforcers/foodfraud
For Northamptonshire County Council's report of the case go to: northamptonshire.gov.uk/en/news/Newsreleases/Pages/2240one.aspx

Fraudsters extort money using Agency's name

The Agency is warning food business operators to be aware of fraudsters who are visiting food business claiming that they are from the Food Standards Agency.

The fraudsters state that they are there to carry out inspections and then extract substantial amounts of money as a fixed penalty fee for allegedly unhygienic premises.

The Food Standards Agency does not carry out food

inspections and there are no fixed penalties for food safety breaches. All inspections are carried out by local authority authorised inspectors who carry relevant identification when visiting a food business.

If a food business is visited by anyone claiming to be from the Food Standards Agency they should not part with any money and should contact the local police or their local authority.

They can also report the crime by email to the Agency (see below for details).

FURTHER INFORMATION

The Agency can be contacted about food fraud by email at: foodfraud@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk
The Agency's food fraud telephone hotline is: 020 7276 8527

EFSA health claims opinion published

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has published its opinion on a wide variety of health claims submitted by food businesses from across the UK and other EU member states.

The Nutrition and Health Claims Regulation requires a list of EU-permitted health claims to be developed, one aim of which is to increase consumer protection.

The next step in the process will be for the European Commission and member states to decide whether to authorise the claims for use on food,

taking into account EFSA's opinions.

Legislation will be developed by the Commission. Member states will then vote on what claims are to be included in a final list of permitted EU health claims.

Further information can be found on the EFSA website via the link below.

Issue for the UK

Many of the health claims have been made on products in the UK. Currently, all claims made by manufacturers on products must not be misleading to the consumer. The Nutrition and

Health Claims Regulation will provide assurance to consumers that any health claim a product makes is true and based on sound, substantiated science.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The EFSA opinion can be found at: efsa.europa.eu/EFSA/efsa_locale-1178620753812_1211902914361.htm

More companies drop colours associated with hyperactivity

Three additional food manufacturers – Mr Lucky Bags Ltd, Paramount 21 Ltd and Tricky Treats – have joined the list of companies that no longer use product lines that include colours associated with possible hyperactivity in children.

The list of 45 manufacturers now covers an A to Z of companies ranging from About Foods Ltd to Zipvit and includes big names such as Heinz, Northern Foods, Thorntons, Vimto Soft Drinks and Yeo Valley.

Domino's Pizza Group and Debenhams stores' restaurants and cafes have been added to the list of caterers and restaurateurs signed up, which already includes Burger King and McDonald's.

And retailers with product ranges free from the colours now include Asda, Co-operative group, Holland & Barrett Ltd, Iceland, Londis, Marks and Spencer and Sainsbury's.

The list, which is available on the Agency's website (see below), includes companies whose product ranges have never contained the six colours and product ranges that have been reformulated to remove the colours.

The six colours, identified by a Southampton University study financed by the Food



Standards Agency, are:

- sunset yellow FCF (E110)
- quinoline yellow (E104)
- carmoisine (E122)
- allura red (E129)
- tartrazine (E102)
- ponceau 4R (E124)

The Agency is publicising the product ranges to encourage the food industry to participate in the voluntary ban. The voluntary ban was agreed to by Ministers late last year.

Consumers who are particularly concerned about the presence of the colours should continue to check labels, especially in the case of products with a long shelf-life where the availability of reformulated products may vary.

Any food manufacturer, retailer or caterer wishing to notify the Agency that their brands or products are free of these colours, should email details to Clair Baynton, at clair.baynton@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

FURTHER INFORMATION

The updated list of companies is on the Agency website at: food.gov.uk/safecreating/chemsafe/additivesbranch/colour/colourfree/caterers

More advice on additives is on our eatwell website at: eatwell.gov.uk/healthissues/foodintolerance/foodintolerancetypes/foodadditiv

'Broad band' for Scores on the Doors

The Agency has announced further progress on the development of the national 'Scores on the Doors' scheme for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, which will provide consumers with information about hygiene standards in food businesses.

Following discussions with the UK-wide steering group that was set up to advise on the scheme, the Agency has decided to opt for a broad top band for the new six-tier rating scheme.

Sarah Appleby, Head of Enforcement at the Food Standards Agency, said: 'A broad top band represents a fairer scoring system for food businesses. It will mean that local authorities can concentrate their resources on helping the high-risk establishments at the lower end of the scale to improve their rating.'

The steering group includes representatives from industry, local authorities, consumer groups and the Agency.

FURTHER INFORMATION

More on the scheme and details of the steering group can be found at food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2009/sep/broadscores

Volunteers needed for aspartame study



The Food Standards Agency has issued an appeal for volunteers to take part in a new pilot study looking at aspartame. The research is focusing on people who have reported bad reactions

to the artificial sweetener, including headaches and upset stomachs.

The study was launched in June and researchers are asking people who have experienced

these symptoms to consider taking part in the study.

Andrew Wadge, Chief Scientist at the Food Standards Agency, said: 'We launched this new study following on-going anecdotal reports of bad reactions to aspartame. We are urging those who have reported these symptoms to take part in our study. We really want to address consumer concerns.'

'The Agency's view remains that aspartame can be consumed safely and we are not recommending any changes to its current use. However, we know that some people consider they react badly to consuming this sweetener so we think it is important to increase our

knowledge about what's happening.'

The Food Standards Agency expects the pilot study to take 18 months. People interested in taking part in the study should contact the Agency at the email address below.

FURTHER INFORMATION

More details of the study can be found at: food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2009/jun/aspartame
To register an interest, email: aspartame@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

More advice on e-numbers is at: eatwell.gov.uk/foodlabels/understanding_enumer

Choose fish – choose sustainably



The Agency has updated its fish and shellfish advice to help consumers make informed, sustainable choices as part of its commitment to taking sustainability into account in all of its policy making.

As the evidence for the health

benefits of fish consumption remain clear, Agency advice is unchanged: people should be eating at least two portions of fish a week, one of which should be an oily fish.

But the advice is being set more firmly in the context of wider

sustainability, and consumers are now being asked to think about the choices they make when they choose which fish to eat.

Consumers are, for example, encouraged to:

- try to choose fish that has been produced sustainably or responsibly managed
- look for assurance scheme logos
- be adventurous and eat a wider variety of fish species

The updates to the fish and shellfish advice, which appear on the Food Standards Agency's consumer website eatwell.gov.uk, are supported by links to sources of useful information and follow work with a range of stakeholders and partners and a public consultation.

The Agency worked with the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, the Department of Health, the Scottish Government and other Government departments, responding to recommendations from stakeholders such as the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution and the

Sustainable Consumption Roundtable.

The eatwell fish page continues to provide advice on preparing, storing and cooking fish and shellfish, fish allergy, and specific advice for pregnant women. There is also detailed advice about the recommended limits for adults and children because of the low levels of pollutants in certain fish – advice based on the joint report of the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition and the Committee on Toxicity.

To find updated fish advice on eatwell, see further information.

FURTHER INFORMATION

See the report at:
food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2004/jun/fishreport2004
 More about the Agency and sustainable development is at:
food.gov.uk/aboutus/how_we_work/sustainability
 eatwell pages on fish can be found at: eatwell.gov.uk/healthydiet/nutritionessentials/fishandshellfish/

Shellfish classification agreed for 2009 – 2010



The Agency has agreed the classification of shellfish production areas in England and Wales for 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010, including areas in the long term classification system.

The Agency works with the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science, Weymouth, in determining the classification in accordance with EC Regulations 853/2004 and 854/2004.

Shellfish production areas are classified according to the results of monthly microbiological sampling, based on E.coli counts per 100g of shellfish flesh. Production areas can fall into the following categories:

- Class A: areas with less than 230 E.coli

- Class B: areas with 230 to 4,600 E.coli in at least 90% of samples
- Class C: areas with 4,600 to 46,000 E.coli
- Designated Prohibited: areas with more than 46,000 E. coli, considered unsuitable for shellfish harvesting

Shellfish must meet Class A standards before being placed on the market. Shellfish from Class B and C areas require further processing (depuration or heat treatment) before they can be sold. Harvesters are responsible for appropriate end product testing.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The list of classified shellfish production areas can be found at: food.gov.uk/foodindustry/farmingfood/shellfish/shellharvestareas/shellclassew0809
 More details are available from Karin Lemler, tel: 020 7276 8955; email: karin.lemler@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

Residues committee annual report published

The 2008 annual report of pesticide residues on food in the UK has been published by the Pesticide Residues Committee (PRC) – an independent committee that advises the Food Standards Agency.

Of the 4,129 samples tested, 50 (1.2%) contained a residue that was above the legal maximum residue level (MRL). Limits are set to ensure that any traces of pesticides left on food are at safe levels. The MRLs are the maximum amount of residues that should be found on food when the pesticides are being used correctly. However, foods with traces of pesticides above the MRL do not necessarily mean that the levels of residues are harmful to people's health.

The PRC oversees the UK surveillance of residues of pesticides in both food produced in the UK and imported foods. It advises Ministers, the Director

of the Chemicals Regulation Directorate and the Chief Executive of the Food Standards Agency on its work and the importance of its results.

The Agency's role is to advise on the UK surveillance overseen by the PRC, and act upon the findings. The Agency has a nominated member of staff on the committee and also has representatives at meetings. More information on the role of the committee and its work can be found on the PRC website. See below for details.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The Pesticide Residues Committee Annual Report can be found at: pesticides.gov.uk/uploadedfiles/Web_Assets/PRC/PRC_Annual_Report_2008.pdf
 For the Pesticide Residues Committee website go to: pesticides.gov.uk/prc_home.asp

'More needs to be done' on campylobacter in chicken

The Agency has published the findings of a new survey testing for campylobacter and salmonella in chicken on sale in the UK.

The survey showed that campylobacter was present in 65% of the samples of chicken tested. Salmonella was in 6% of samples, 0.5% of these samples contained *S. enteritidis* and *S. typhimurium*.

Andrew Wadge, Director of Food Safety at the Food Standards Agency, said: 'The continuing low levels of salmonella are encouraging, but it is disappointing that the levels of campylobacter remain high. It is obvious that more needs to be done to get these levels down, and we need to continue working with poultry producers and retailers to make this happen. Countries such as New Zealand and Denmark have managed to do so. We need to emulate that progress in the UK.'

As part of the Agency's work to reduce levels of campylobacter in UK-produced chicken, an international conference on campylobacter is being organised for 2010, where a range of options for tackling the bug will be discussed.

Campylobacter is the most common bacterial cause of food poisoning. It is responsible for about 55,000 cases of illness in

the UK every year, and is therefore one of the key organisms the Agency is tackling in order to reduce levels of foodborne illness.

Campylobacter can be found on meat, unpasteurised milk, and untreated water. However, there is strong evidence that chicken is the most common cause of illness.

The Agency emphasises that while campylobacter is still present in a significant proportion of fresh chicken sold in the UK, cooking chicken properly all the way through will kill the bug, so consumers can avoid the risk of illness.

Taking simple measures in the home can reduce the risk of food poisoning. If food is prepared, handled, and cooked properly, avoiding cross-contamination with other food, then food bugs will not have a chance to spread and cause harm.

The UK-wide survey of fresh chicken at retail was carried out from May 2007 to September 2008. During the course of the survey, 3,274 samples were tested for the presence of campylobacter and salmonella.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The survey can be found in full at: food.gov.uk/science/surveillance/fsisbranch2009/fsis0409



The continuing low levels of salmonella are encouraging, but it is disappointing that the levels of campylobacter remain high

GM engagement project chair announced



Professor John Curtice

Professor John Curtice of the University of Strathclyde, is to chair the independent steering group that will advise the Agency on its forthcoming consumer engagement work on genetic modification (GM).

Professor Curtice has considerable experience in conducting research into social and political attitudes.

The Agency has been asked by the Government to lead a dialogue project to explore the subject of GM with consumers. This project will provide an opportunity to discuss with consumers their understanding

of GM and what they think it might bring in terms of risks and benefits. It will also explore how people can be helped to make informed choices about the food they eat.

The Agency, as an independent Government department, will set up a small steering group that will include stakeholders involved in different areas and with different views of GM. At this stage, it is anticipated that this work will take about 12 months.

The Agency is absolutely committed to representing the interests of UK consumers and,

while this work will not directly change UK Government policy, it will help to inform future discussions in this area.

The Agency will carry out this dialogue in an open and transparent way and will publish any updates on this as appropriate.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more on the Agency's work on GM foods go to: food.gov.uk/gmfoods/gm/
For consumer advice on GM see: eatwell.gov.uk/healthissues/factsbehindissues/gmfood/

Veterinary Residues Committee annual report published



The VRC oversees the surveillance that checks for antibiotics in honey

The Veterinary Residues Committee's (VRC) 2008 Annual Report on the surveillance of veterinary residues in food in the UK is now available online. The report details the checks that have been done for a range of residues of veterinary medicines in food.

The VRC is an independent advisory committee overseeing UK surveillance of residues of veterinary medicines in UK-produced and imported foods. It advises the chief executives of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) and the Food Standards Agency on the committee's work and the importance of its results. The

There was a fall of 12% in the number of alert notifications

UK programme of residue surveillance is operated by the VMD. More information on the role of the committee and its residue surveillance work, as well as its Annual Report, can be found at the VRC website. (See further information.)

A couple of results were of particular interest to the Agency:

- There was a fall of 12% in the number of Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) notifications for fish and crustaceans raised by the Agency on veterinary medicines residues in 2008. RASFF is a European Union-wide system for alerting Member States when a residue of potential concern has been detected in home-produced or imported food. These products have been found with residues that have been banned in the EU due to concerns that they may damage DNA and/or

Simplification action plan published

The Food Standards Agency has drawn up an action plan to address recommendations from the third annual Simplification Stakeholder Event held in June. Stakeholders wanted to see positive action as a result of this event and, as promised, an action plan has now been published.

A report of the event, a summary of ideas and suggestions raised in discussion groups, and the action plan can be found online (see further information below).

The Agency will monitor its implementation of the action plan and report progress to stakeholders.

cause cancer. There are several possible reasons for this fall, one being that some countries had introduced effective measures to reduce the levels of these residues in food.

- The Agency supported the VRC brand-name survey on chloramphenicol, coccidiostats, nitroimidazoles and nitrofurans in imported poultry products, such as chicken nuggets and burgers. These substances are either prohibited for use in the treatment of food producing animals in the EU due to consumer safety concerns or authorised medications used in feed that may be present at higher than expected levels.

The Agency is pleased with the findings of the survey as the results showed no evidence of the use of these substances in the production of the poultry products which could have led to consumer food safety concerns.

The Agency acts as a watchdog to ensure that food safety is given high priority during the authorisation and monitoring of veterinary medicines. This ensures any residues in food are kept as low as practically possible and within safe limits.

The Agency advises on the UK surveillance overseen by the VRC, and acts upon the findings. Agency staff attend VRC meetings as advisers and nominates a member to the committee.

FURTHER INFORMATION

More on the VRC can be found at: vet-residues-committee.gov.uk

FURTHER INFORMATION

The action plan can be found on the Agency's website at: food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/stakeholderaction.pdf
More on the simplification programme can be found at: food.gov.uk/foodindustry/regulation/betregs/simplify

Post-Chernobyl reports published

The Agency has published three monitoring reports on sheep at farms remaining under post-Chernobyl restrictions in England, Scotland and Wales. None of the farms in the 2008 survey were considered to be suitable to have their restrictions lifted.

In 1986, an accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in the former USSR (now Ukraine) released large quantities of radioactivity into the atmosphere. Some of this was deposited on certain upland areas of the UK where sheep are farmed.

In 1986, almost 9,000 farms were under restriction in the UK. Since then, the levels of radioactivity in sheep meat have fallen and the number of farms still under restriction is now 369, of which over 95% are located in north Wales.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The current report and previous reports can be found at: food.gov.uk/science/surveillance/radiosurv/chernobyl/chernobyl



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To join or update the mailing list contact Marfot Miah: tel: 020 7276 8849; email: marfot.miah@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

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Taking a strategic view

The Agency should use its new Science and Evidence Strategy to show how science and evidence reflects and informs the Agency's work and responds to developments, the independent General Advisory Committee on Science (GACS) says. In the face of budgetary pressures, the Agency should also strive to maintain its support for a robust science and evidence base, the GACS adds.

At its fourth open meeting, held on 8 September, the committee considered a first draft of the Agency's next Science and Evidence Strategy, which draws on consultations, workshops and internal analysis over the spring and summer. The strategy is being developed in parallel with the Agency's Strategic Plan for 2010-15. The GACS also discussed the Agency's plan to implement its response to the Science Review of the Agency by the Government Office for Science.

Advising and challenging the Agency on the how the Agency collects and uses scientific evidence is at the centre of the committee's work, and its views will help guide the Agency as it develops the Science and Evidence Strategy and implements its action plan.

The GACS also considered a report of a horizon-scanning workshop on future developments

in food production, hosted by the committee on 24 June. The GACS suggested that further analysis to pick out the key ideas that are likely to be taken up in practice would add value to the workshop outputs. The Advisory Committee on Animal Feedingstuffs and the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition will help with this work.

The committee also decided to set up a small working group to develop a plan to look at the clarity of the distinction between risk assessment and risk management, and how this is observed in practice.

The next open meeting of the GACS will be on 4 March 2010.

The committee will discuss progress on the issue of risk assessment and risk management, return to its periodic review of the outcomes of scientific horizon-scanning in the Agency, and look at priorities for Agency science and evidence in light of the new Science and Evidence Strategy.

Further information

More on the GACS, including agendas and papers for meetings, can be found on the committee's website at: food.gov.uk/science/ouradvisors/gacs/ To contact the GACS Secretariat telephone 020 7276 8277 or email: gacs@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

Latest news from EFSA

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has published the fourth in its series of newsletters covering all aspects of the Authority's work relating to food, plants and animals.

Each newsletter provides information on:

- key topics – work that EFSA currently considers to be the most important
- updates on work that is being undertaken in specific areas
- important events, including

announcements of future EFSA and other events

- consultations, calls for data and research contracts
- a list of scientific opinions, mandates and other recent EFSA publications

Further information

The newsletters can be found at: efsa.europa.eu/EFSA/NewsPressRoom/efsa_locale1178620753812_1211902694890.htm

Response to review of Agency's science

The Food Standards Agency has now submitted a formal response to the independent review the Government Office for Science published on the Agency's science in April, writes FSA Chief Scientist Andrew Wadge, below, in his monthly update.



The Government Office for Science review of the Agency's science, published in April, applauded the Agency for its practice, use and management of science. It highlighted the open and transparent way in which the FSA operates and in particular made reference to the Agency's pioneering work in holding committees and Board meetings in public. It also praised the Agency's use of scientific evidence and its commissioning of new research.

The Government's Chief Scientific Adviser Professor John Beddington said: 'The review findings indicate that the FSA's approach to the use of science has generally been impressive. It is important that this is maintained and enhanced going forward.'

The response takes into account the views of the General Advisory Committee on Science (GACS), the secretariats of the scientific advisory committees (SACs), the food advisory committees in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, Agency staff and the Agency's industry and consumer stakeholder groups. The Agency accepts most of the report's recommendations, which it regards as being fair and constructive, and acknowledges that improvements can be made in response to many of the report's recommendations. In most cases, work to implement them is already underway, and in four cases is complete. At the fourth GACS meeting, on 8 September, I set out our work programme to improve further the quality and use of the Agency's science.

Aspartame pilot study

The Agency has launched a pilot study to examine the effects of aspartame on individuals. The study aims to recruit 50 individuals self-reporting as sensitive to aspartame and 50 age/sex matched controls. Volunteers will be asked to consume a product that may or may not contain aspartame; any resulting effects will be

recorded. The aim of this work is to investigate anecdotal claims made by individuals and to test the suitability of a food product developed by the Agency for use in 'blinded' trials. This pilot study will inform the design and feasibility of a larger-scale study.

The European Food Safety Authority is currently undertaking a review of aspartame, which includes publications in the scientific literature since the 2002 Scientific Committee on Food's opinion on aspartame and analysis of some anecdotal reports.

Quinquennial reviews

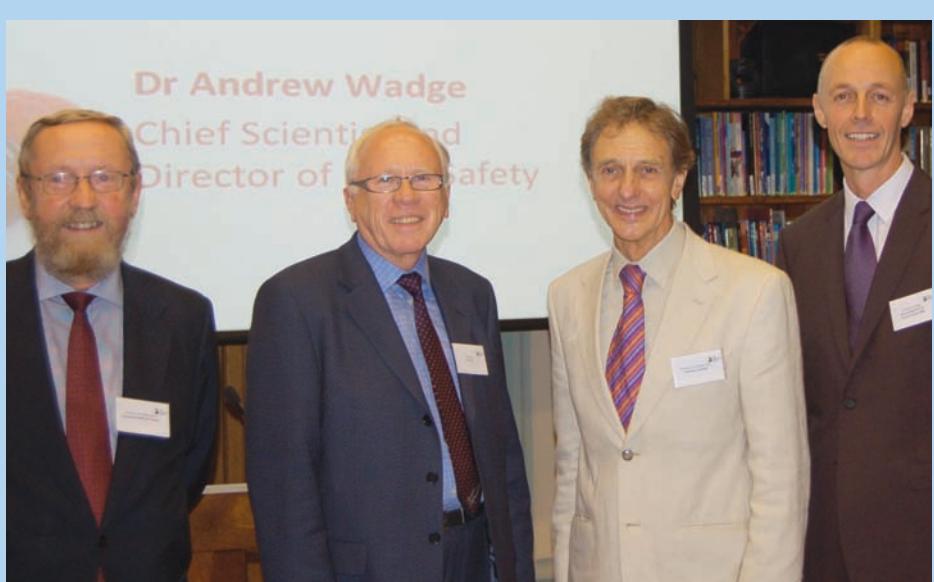
The Agency is committed to carrying out quinquennial reviews of the scientific advisory committees (SACs) that advise the Agency. All SACs with a secretariat led by the Agency will be reviewed. The Advisory Committee on Animal Feedingstuffs (ACAF) is the first SAC to be reviewed. It is being carried out by an external independent consultant and will be completed by the end of the year. The main objectives of the review are to assess: whether there is a continuing need for the committee; its role, methods of operation and effectiveness, including its terms of reference and composition; the openness and transparency of its procedures; the relationships between the committee, the commissioning

The Agency accepts most of the report's recommendations, which it regards as fair and constructive

department and other bodies with related responsibilities, in particular the other scientific advisory committees that advise the Agency; and the implementation of the recommendations of the Agency's 2002 review of the SACs, the revised code of practice for SACs and the current governance structure. This review is helping to ensure that the Agency continues to receive independent scientific expert advice of the highest quality in the areas where it is needed. In addition, the GACS will undergo a 'light touch' review, to be carried out by the end of the year, as requested by the Agency Board when it established the committee. This will assess if the GACS is meeting its objectives.

Further information

The GACS paper presented to the Board can be found at: food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/board/fsa090705.pdf



The Agency's third 'Annual Report of the Chief Scientist' was launched on 23 September at the Royal Society of Chemistry, in London. Opening the event, which was attended by eminent scientists and key Agency stakeholders, Agency Chair Jeff Rooker (second left) mentioned the successful independent check, earlier this year, of the Agency's scientific performance by the Government Office for Science (see story above). The Government's Chief Scientific Advisor, Professor John Beddington (left), said that the review findings 'indicate that the Food Standards

Agency's approach to the use of science has generally been impressive'. Professor Colin Blakemore, Chair of the Agency's General Advisory Committee on Science (second from right, next to Agency Chief Scientist Andrew Wadge), added: 'The Agency's commitment to evidence-based policy is clear.' The Chief Scientist Annual Report, which includes the Agency's response to the science review, is at: food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/publication/annualscientistrep0909.pdf

Final reports of research published and made available by the Food Standards Agency

For the following research reports published by the Food Standards Agency, go to: foodbase.org.uk

Further information

Contact Dr Esther Heller in the Chief Scientist's Team, Food Standards Agency, 125 Kingsway, London WC2B 6NH. Tel: 020 7276 8756 Email: esther.heller@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

B15014: Review of current practices and recommendations for *Campylobacter* reduction in extensively reared flocks

This research project reviewed current farm practices used in the free range and organic sectors. Practices thought to reduce the likelihood of chicken flocks becoming colonised with *Campylobacter* were investigated and conclusions validated by microbiological testing.

The first phase of the project reviewed farm practices to:

- identify those thought to reduce campylobacter flock colonisation
- extend the time taken for birds to become infected (the so called lag phase)

The second phase evaluated the effects of practices on nine farms, and the prevalence of *Campylobacter* among the flocks was monitored for one year. Recommendations will be produced based on these intervention studies on best practice and could be used to produce guidance material for the UK poultry industry.

Only one of the 32 flocks studied was negative for *Campylobacter* when birds were sent to slaughter (at clear).

Neither the management system nor production type (free-range or organic) had any significant effect on *Campylobacter* colonisation 'at clear'.

Several factors were found to effect the campylobacter status of four-week-old birds, these include:

- the condition of the houses
- presence of a hygiene barrier or an ante room with foot-dips

- use of mains water when compared to borehole water
- control of vermin
- whether the site housed birds of multiple ages

The findings support the need to practice biosecurity to prevent transmission of *Campylobacter*. Multi-age sites were also found to be a significant risk factor for flock colonisation.

Survival of *Campylobacter* on-farm suggests a need to remove or disinfect litter pads after use and for pasture rotation on sites with mobile houses or increased rest periods for static housed sites.

Further Information

Louise Knowles, tel: 020 7276 8966, email: louise.knowles@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

B18011: Review of past and current surveys investigating the microbiological surveillance of food

As part of its forward look for surveillance of foodborne pathogens, the Agency identified the need for a review of past and current surveys investigating the microbiological safety of food. The eight month, commodity-based literature review identified published microbiological surveys from UK and non-UK surveys, and pointed to the priorities for a rolling programme of Agency-funded surveillance.

Reports of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Department of Health and the Food Standards Agency microbiological studies and strategies were included, as well as information from the Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services and Health Protection Agency studies.

The key output from the project was the development of a database containing more than 400 survey entries. It contains searchable fields on food types included in the survey, micro-organisms examined, geographical location and the type of food outlets from which samples were obtained. The report includes analysis of different food types, for example raw meat has been examined in several retail surveys, but surveys on post-intervention pig and sheep carcasses in slaughterhouses are somewhat lacking, as most studies have been concerned with beef. Data is also lacking on poultry meat other than chicken and turkey.

Further Information

Bobby Kainth, tel: 8958 email: bobby.kainth@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk



C03056: Development of improved methods of analysis for the determination of T-2 & HT-2 toxins in foodstuffs

T-2 and HT-2 toxins are type-A trichothecene mycotoxins produced by different fusarium species, including *F. sporotrichioides*, *F. poae* and *F. acuminatum*, that may develop on a variety of cereal grains especially in cold climate regions or during wet storage conditions.

Three methods of analysis were investigated and developed:

- gas chromatography with mass spectrometry detection (GC-MS)
- high performance liquid chromatography with fluorescence detection (HPLC-FD)
- high performance liquid chromatography with tandem mass spectrometry detection (HPLC-MS/MS)

Different sample clean-up methods were investigated, and analytical parameters optimised to improve sensitivity. The methods were validated for raw cereals (barley, maize, oats and wheat) and a selection of their products, selected to reflect UK consumption patterns. Methods were assessed against performance criteria specified by European legislation for mycotoxins.

The work undertaken in this project has resulted in the development of three improved methods for the determination of T-2 and HT-2 in cereals and final food projects. All the methods achieved the required limit of quantification (LOQ) for the two trichothecene mycotoxins of 8 µg/kg for the combined toxins (5 µg/kg and 3 µg/kg for T-2 and HT-2 respectively) and all have been single laboratory validated in multiple matrices (raw wheat, maize, barley, oats and processed foods thereof).

Further Information

Gavin Shears, tel: 020 7276 8713, email: mycotoxins@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

D03007: Distinguishing between the impact of economic and social conditions as contributory factors leading to poor dietary choice

Economic theory distinguishes between economic factors and preferences as determinants of people's consumption choices. Thus differences between households' consumption decisions may be due to differences in:

- incomes
- prices paid
- their preferences
- a combination of all three of the above

Research Supplement

This report disentangled the influences of income, prices and preferences on consumer food choice by attributing differences in influence to differences in the socio-demographic characteristics of households, using econometric modelling techniques.

The report's overall conclusion is that while prices and income clearly contribute to poor dietary choices, differences in preferences between households are more significant in explaining the relative composition of the diet. In particular, preferences seem to explain large differences in dietary choice among:

- households with children
- younger households
- households in the north and in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland

Further information

Rosie Jaffer, tel: 020 7276 8328,
email: rosie.jaffer@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

S14046: An Exploration of the use of a dataset of supermarket purchases for the analysis of red meat purchases in Scotland

This project examined whether using a dataset of representative supermarket purchases could help address a policy need in Scotland for more information on patterns of red meat purchases.

Data, based on a panel of loyalty card holders, from one of the 'big four' supermarkets was used. A dataset of two years of weekly aggregated data on individual red meat purchases was obtained and grouped into categories; the main ones being beef, pork, lamb, burgers and meatballs, meat pies, sausages, bacon and gammon, and ham. Purchasing differences were assessed according to geographical location, socio-economic status and lifestage. Sausage products were further analysed in relation to nutritional criteria.

Overall, there were considerable limitations in the use of this data and information from one supermarket chain was not equivalent to established methods of nutritional surveillance. However, results for those customers who bought red meat revealed little difference in the proportion of expenditure on each meat category within socio-economic and lifestage groups in Scotland, and between Scotland and the rest of the UK. Further analysis suggested that the more affluent bought more expensive sausages and that these were not necessarily healthier. The value of engaging with producers, suppliers and retailers to improve the nutritional composition of less healthy products was highlighted.

Further information

Anne Milne, tel: 01224 288 377,
email: anne.milne@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

FSA funded research published in peer reviewed journals

Programme C03 – Mycotoxins and process contaminants (including nitrate)

Burch RS, Trzesicka A, Clarke M, Elmore JS and Webber N. (2008). The effects of low-temperature potato storage and washing and soaking pre-treatments on the acrylamide content of French fries. *Journal of the Science of Food and Agriculture*; 88 (6): 989-995

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S14 – Research, surveillance and monitoring in Scotland

Dallas JF, Forbes KJ, Gormley FJ, Macrae M, Maiden MC, McGuigan C, Ogden ID, Reay KW, Rotariu O, Sheppard SK, Strachan NJC and Williams A. (2007). Local outbreaks of campylobacteriosis in Scotland involving more than one strain: a CaMPS study. *Zoonoses and Public Health* 54, 43-43.

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Other reports on Foodbase

- The nature of infant formula and follow-on formula
- Review of the effectiveness of the controls on infant and follow-on formula: primary research
- Follow-on milk analysis (identifying shoppers buying follow-on milk formula)
- G03022 – Refinement of GMO screening methods by combining existing multiplex PCR approaches with lab-on-a-chip capillary electrophoresis endpoint detection.

This supplement was published by the Food Standards Agency in October 2009. For more about the Agency's newsletter, *FSA News*, contact: fsanews@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

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For more on the Agency go to: food.gov.uk or: eatwell.gov.uk
To contact the Agency's Chief Scientist Team, telephone: 020 7276 8762; or email the unit at: CST@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk