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Good news on agricultural chemical good practice

A year-long MPI study looking at chemical residues in fresh, unwashed produce indicates that New Zealand growers are largely following good agricultural practice (GAP) in how they use chemicals.

In May 2012 MPI released test results from the second and third quarter of the annual Food Residue Surveillance Programme (FRSP). This programme targets locally-produced and imported crops prone to exceeding the maximum residue limit (MRL) set for agricultural chemicals, and crops where little data is available on chemical use. MRLs are used to determine whether growers have followed GAP.

This year's focus is on asparagus, eggplant, feijoas, hops, lemons, olive oil, persimmons, pumpkins, spring onion, sweet corn, tamarillos and walnuts. In total, more than 350 chemicals are being tested for.

The produce sampled in the second and third quarter included eggplant, lemons, walnuts, hops, spring onion, pumpkin, asparagus, and olive oil. No residues were found in hops and residue results for eggplant, pumpkin and lemon samples tested were all within the MRL.

Of all 247 samples tested in the two quarters, only 11 contained residues that did not comply with the relevant MRLs and none of the residues found posed health or food safety concerns.

"These results indicate that most growers are using pesticides responsibly in the recommended manner," Manager Food Assurance Paul Dansted says.

Results from this year's FRSP are available on our website. Answers to common questions about [agricultural compound residues](#) in food can also be found online.



Food Bill – the facts

The Food Bill, which is making its way through Parliament, has been a topic of some debate this year. Much of this debate has been based on misinformation about what the Bill aims to do and what effect it will have on people that produce food.

The Bill will replace the current Food Act, which is 30 years old and needs updating and modernising. Some of the rules under the Act are unnecessarily restrictive and don't do anything to improve food safety.

The new Bill encourages people who sell food to take responsibility for food safety. It rewards those who do well, and helps improve the standards of those who don't. It takes a risk-based, flexible approach and supports small business and food innovation, while still ensuring that food sold is safe and suitable.

MPI is looking at ways to improve the drafting of the Bill. The Minister for Food Safety intends to introduce amendments when the Bill is considered by Parliament at its second reading.

To help keep people up-to-date about this important legislation, MPI has developed three factsheets that explain the intent of the Food Bill and give details about how different sectors would be affected:

- *Food Bill – the facts* provides an overview of the Bill's proposals.
- *Food Bill – facts for the meat industry* gives operators in the meat industry specific information on how the Bill affects their day-to-day operations.
- *Food Bill – facts for food retailers* gives businesses that sell food – whether from a shop, a market stall or on the Internet – information on how the Bill affects their day-to-day operations. This factsheet will be on our website shortly.

MPI's food safety website has much more detailed information about the [Food Bill](#).

Consulting on the future of folic acid fortification of bread

MPI is currently consulting on options for the future of the standard on fortifying bread with folic acid in New Zealand.

The discussion paper outlines four options that range from mandatory fortification of most breads from 30 September 2012, to providing for voluntary fortification.

The options were developed in consultation with the Folic Acid Working Group (FAWG), which was established by the Minister for Food Safety in 2009 to contribute to the development and assessment of information about fortification of bread with folic acid.

FAWG includes baking representatives, health professionals, academics, government officials and groups who represent families affected by neural tube defects.

To inform the review of the future of the standard, MPI has released a scientific paper which looks at both international and New Zealand research on folic acid fortification of bread and women's blood folate levels.

Two of the research studies were commissioned by the Ministry for Primary Industries. One was carried out in 2011 and shows that women's blood folate levels have improved since 2008/09. The other was carried out in 2010 and indicates that only about a quarter of women understand the relationship between folate and prevention of neural tube defects.

Consultation closes on Monday 16 July 2012.

"All interested parties have the opportunity to consider the options and let us know their views. This is an important issue, we encourage people to go to our website and make submissions," says Julie Collins, Director of Biosecurity, Food and Animal Welfare Policy.

"MPI will analyse the submissions and give advice to the Minister for Food Safety."

The [discussion and scientific paper](#) are available on our website.



In brief

Meat inspection changes take another step forward

MPI has received advice from its major trading partners that a proposed new meat inspection programme meets their requirements.

The proposed programme is based on successful trial work and would allow for fully trained meat company staff to carry out some non-food safety aspects of meat inspections, known in the industry as 'suitability' or quality aspects.

Official government inspectors will continue to carry out food safety-related functions.

MPI, the Meat Industry Association (MIA) andASUREQuality have formed a team to develop a plan to implement the new inspection programme. This will require some changes to MPI standards and we will consult on these proposed changes.

Know what to do when staff are sick

With winter's ails upon us, it's a good time for food businesses to brush up on the basics of what to do when staff are sick. Our website has a section on [Health and Sickness](#), which provides information on the precautionary measures businesses need to take to ensure the food they sell isn't contaminated by having sick people make or serve it. The website also has information on exclusion controls for specific illnesses.



A little bird told me...

MPI is now on Twitter. You can get up-to-date news about our work by following us at [@MPI_NZ](#).

Collecting food waste for pigs



MPI has produced a new factsheet for food service operators that collect [food waste for pigs](#) in an effort to help manage some of the risks associated with this practice. If raw meat or food

waste containing raw meat is fed to pigs, there is a risk that animal diseases such as foot and mouth disease can be spread.

The new guidance material highlights what wastes are safe to include in food waste for pigs. It also stresses the importance of notifying the person who collects the waste if it has not been separated, as the waste will need to be heat treated before being fed to pigs.

Homekill – what you need to know

Following increased public interest in homekill, MPI has developed a new [factsheet](#) to explain the rules that apply to anyone wanting to slaughter their own farmed animals for their consumption and use.

Homekill legislation has clear rules around who can slaughter the animals, where slaughter can take place, how long someone has to own the animal before they are eligible to have it slaughtered by a [homekill and recreational catch service provider](#), and who can eat the meat.

The factsheet outlines the requirements for homekill and recreational catch service providers who are listed with MPI and are entitled to carry out homekill on a client's behalf.

The penalties for breaking the rules around homekill are significant: The maximum fine can be up to \$100,000 for individuals and \$500,000 for corporations.

Anyone who isn't able to meet the requirements for legally carrying out homekill can buy an animal and send it to a [registered abattoir](#) for slaughter.

Because homekill is not subject to the same controls that apply to regulated meat, people consume it at their own risk.

Homekill meat cannot be traded.

Dairy Standards review

MPI is planning a review of dairy standards to ensure they are fit for purpose and relevant.

To inform this work, MPI has surveyed stakeholders to identify their priorities for the review.

These include clarification on which standards are mandatory versus guidance, and more clarity around how different standards fit together.

Having identified the highest priority items, MPI is currently scoping out the next steps of the review. Where MPI will be looking at specific technical issues, we will establish working groups with industry representatives and other relevant members. Any proposed changes to standards that come out of the review will be consulted on.

The last significant review of dairy standards was carried out in 2005.

The current review is taking place within a wider work programme called the Standards Integration Programme. This will ensure a consistent model for making requirements and guidance available to participants across multiple sectors.



Acrylamide study produces pleasing results

A new MPI report shows that the concerted effort by New Zealand's potato crisp manufacturers to lower acrylamide in their products is paying off.

The chemical acrylamide is produced naturally in foods by common cooking methods such as frying, roasting or baking at high temperatures. MPI monitors acrylamide in the food supply because its presence at high levels is potentially a human health issue. Data gathered helps MPI and manufacturers implement strategies that will reduce any risks associated with consumption of acrylamide.

The latest survey – which was carried out in 2011 – looked at the major contributors of acrylamide exposure in New Zealand. These are potato products, cereal-based foods and nut products.

The survey found that the contribution of potato crisps to overall exposure appears to have decreased between 2006 (when MPI carried out a similar survey) and 2011, while the contribution from potato hot chips and oven baked/roasted potatoes appears to have increased.

However, while the mean acrylamide concentrations in most other foods were very similar to the results from the 2006 survey, concentrations for potato crisps have significantly decreased to one-third (1,570 µg/kg to 581 µg/kg).

Mean levels of dietary acrylamide exposure in New Zealand are very similar to estimates made in 2006 (towards the upper end of the range derived internationally) and they are not associated with food safety concerns.

Industry has access to two resources to help reduce the levels of acrylamide: The Food Drink Europe Toolbox which was developed by industry, and the WHO/FAO Codex code of practice on the reduction of acrylamide in food. You can read more about the Toolbox [here](#) or view the Toolbox directly [here](#).

There's more information about acrylamide on the MPI food safety [website](#).

Minimising the risk of contaminated produce

MPI has launched a programme of work to help our country's growers avoid produce-related foodborne illness outbreaks.



As part of this work, MPI carried out a review to look at relevant assurance programmes and surveyed a small number of growers and packhouses to determine how they use water and natural fertilisers – such as manures, biosolid and

compost – and how well they understand contamination risks.

While the survey was limited, it revealed that the majority of the 40 organic and conventional growers interviewed throughout the country knew and managed the potential contamination risks associated with water and fertiliser use. However, the survey suggested that some growers and packhouses would benefit from the use of a more formal risk assessment and procedures.

MPI is working on identifying various ways of making information available to growers on the risks, as well as guidance on how these risks can be mitigated throughout the production chain.

We are also talking with industry to see whether further information and guidance can be incorporated into existing assurance programmes and industry standards, or whether MPI should provide more guidance to assist growers.

A new project being carried out to look at microbiological contamination of bagged leafy salads will further help MPI understand whether the controls put in place during the manufacture of ready-to-eat salads are effective.



Important information about aseptic processing and packaging

MPI is reminding businesses involved in aseptic processing and packaging of food products that these technically complex activities are subject to stringent rules.

Aseptic processing and packaging is the processing and packaging of a commercially sterile product into sterilized containers followed by hermetic sealing with a sterilized closure in a manner which prevents its re-contamination.

This type of operation requires a high level of expertise, as the consequences of getting it wrong can be severe.

MPI has identified some confusion about the standards that apply to aseptic processing. Some operators may not recognise that these processes fall within the category of low acid canned foods.

If you are involved in aseptic processing and packaging you are legally required to comply with [regulation 14 of the Food Safety Regulations 2002](#) if you operate under the Food Act 1981, or [clause 117 of the Animal Products \(Specifications for Products Intended for Human Consumption\) Notice 2004](#) (for non-dairy products) if you operate under the Animal Products Act 1999.

This legislation requires you to follow one of three codes for the processing of low acid canned foods, which include sections on aseptic processing. These codes are:

- the Codex “Recommended International Code of Hygiene Practice for Low-acid and Acidified Low-acid Canned Foods” which is available [here](#);
- the USDA “Requirements for Thermally Processed Low-acid Foods Packaged in Hermetically Sealed Containers”, as contained in [21 CFR Part 113](#), and Acidified Foods as contained in [21 CFR Part 114](#);
- the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council “Code of Practice for the Thermal Processing of Low-acid Canned Food”.

You must have competent people to supervise the aseptic operations in accordance with [regulation 13 of the Food Safety Regulations 2002](#) or clause 25 of the Animal Products ([Specifications for Products Intended for Human Consumption](#)) [Notice 2004](#) (for non-dairy products).

You must also have robust evidence to show that the process is valid and will produce safe product. This includes validation of heat treatment and the sterile filling and closure of containers.

MPI is in the process of developing guidance on aseptic processing and packaging for non-dairy food products. We are also looking into the competencies required for supervisors, evaluators and people developing and validating aseptic processes.

If you would like to be involved at an early stage in this work or have any queries please contact Specialist Adviser Production and Processing Sheryl Tuck on sheryl.tuck@mpi.govt.nz.

New Animal Status Declaration

MPI has made some important changes to the [Animal Status Declaration \(ASD\)](#), a mandated form under the Animal Products Act that must be completed when animals are moved between properties or sent to slaughter.

The ASD was introduced to transfer key information about an animal to the next person in charge of the animal, and ultimately to the processor. The information is vital for determining that an animal is suitable for processing, and for determining export eligibility and certification.

The major changes to the form are:

- Provision for the animal’s unique National Animal Information and Tracing (NAIT) number to be recorded. MPI recommends filling in this field as it facilitates traceability, risk management and biosecurity.
- Addition of an animal welfare statement aimed at raising awareness of the obligations outlined in the Animal Welfare Guide and the Codes of Welfare for various species.
- Changes to the declaration for Johne’s disease vaccination.
- Changes to animal history information.

The updated ASD form applies to the following species: cattle, deer, sheep, lambs, goats, ostriches, emus, horses, alpacas and llamas. There is a separate ASD for pigs, which is in the process of being updated.

Anyone who has existing stock of the previous ASD form can continue to use them up until 30 April 2013. However, anyone who prints off new forms from now on must use the updated [form](#).

More information about ASDs can be found on our [website](#).

Wine survey sparks reminder to importers

An MPI survey to assess imported wines' compliance with the labelling and sulphite requirements set out in the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code (the Code) has identified a number of non-compliances.

A total of 236 red, white, dessert and sparkling wines were checked for sulphite levels and general food labelling requirements, mandatory warning and advisory statements, legibility requirements and labelling of alcoholic beverages and food containing alcohol requirements.

Test results indicated that all 236 wine samples complied with the maximum permitted limit for sulphites in the Code. However, a number of non-compliant labels were identified including:

- Some labels that did not have supplier details listed in English
- A total of 22 wines (9 percent) that did not declare sulphites on the product label and 12 wines (5 percent) that carried a sulphite declaration, which was not in English.



- Some labels that did not state the number of standard drinks contained within the bottle.
- Some labels that had fonts less than the required minimum 3mm.

All food and beverages imported into New Zealand for sale must comply with the Food Act 1981 and any relevant regulations and food standards made under the Act. This includes labelling and compositional requirements of the Code.

MPI has written to the importers of the non-compliant wines to remind them of their obligations to ensure the product they import is compliant with the Code.

General information about importing food into New Zealand is available on our [website](#).