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Voluntary fortification of bread with folic acid to remain the standard

Following a thorough review and consultation process, Food Safety Minister Kate Wilkinson has decided the standard will continue to provide for voluntary fortification of bread with folic acid.

This means both folic acid and/ or methyltetrahydrofolate, calcium can continue to be used to fortify bread.

The Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) conducted the eight-week consultation on four options for how bread could be fortified with folic acid in a future standard. The options ranged from all bread being required to be fortified through to a standard that allows voluntary fortification of bread with folic acid.

Of the 134 submissions received, 90 submitters supported voluntary fortification in some form.

The Minister issued the new standard – called *New Zealand (Permitted Fortification of Bread with Folic Acid) Food Standard 2012* – after considering all submissions and the latest scientific evidence. When women get enough folate (or folic acid which is a synthetic form of folate) in the four weeks before getting pregnant and for the first three months of their pregnancy, they reduce the risk of their baby developing a neural tube

defect (NTD) such as spina bifida or anencephaly.

Fortifying certain foods, such as bread, with folic acid (the synthetic form of folate) is seen as a way to increase folate levels of women of childbearing age. There are also Ministry of Health initiatives such as educational information and subsidised folic acid tablets available on prescription. The Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code requires that food labels contain information about any vitamins that may have been added and this includes folic acid. Where this information is included in the Nutrition Information Panel, the total amount of folate should include natural folate as well as the amount of folic acid that has



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been added. When folic acid or L-methyltetrahydrofolate, calcium is added to bread it will be listed in the ingredient list on the package.

New scientific research shows that New Zealand women's red blood cell folate levels have already increased in the past two years under the existing voluntary fortification of bread. In addition, scientific modelling shows that a good reduction of NTDs can occur by fortifying up to half of sliced bread while still allowing for consumer choice.

Industry submissions committed under a voluntary regime to work towards 50 per cent of packaged bread in New Zealand being fortified with folic acid. They also committed to an independent survey of fortified bread to monitor the levels of folic acid in bread. It is good regulatory practice to introduce new regulation only where it is required, for example because a problem cannot be adequately addressed through private arrangements.

MPI will work with the bread industry to achieve this target, including developing a voluntary code of practice for fortifying bread with folic acid. The code of practice will include best practices for fortifying bread and how the bread industry can monitor the levels of folic acid in bread.

MPI will also continue to monitor folic acid in the wider food supply and work with Ministry of Health and the bread industry to ensure that the range of breads fortified achieves the best effect on reducing NTDs.



More good news on agricultural chemical good practice

Test results from the fourth and final quarter of this year's Food Residues Surveillance Programme (FRSP) released last month indicates that growers are following good agricultural practice (GAP) in how they use pesticides.

The FRSP 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 good agricultural practice.

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

During quarter four testing was carried out on lemon, spring onion, feijoa, sweet corn and olive oil.

Of all 133 samples tested, only seven contained residues that did not comply with the relevant MRLs and none of the residues found posed health or food safety concerns.

The samples that had residues over the MRL or allowable limit were:

- one out of 26 lemon samples that contained non-compliant levels of the fungicide pyrimethanil
- six out of 24 olive oil samples that contained non-compliant levels of the fungicide azoxystrobin or the fungicide propiconazole. When the processing factor is taken into account, these results indicate that the raw olives would have likely breached the MRLs for those compounds.

While the non-compliant residues can suggest that some farmers have not complied with good agricultural practice, none of the identified non-compliances pose a risk to human health.

Nonetheless, MPI is following up with the growers concerned to ensure they know how to keep good records of chemical use and are interpreting label directions correctly.



MPI is developing a new Domestic Food Assurance Programme, which will merge the FRSP and the Imported Food Monitoring Programme.

Rather than focusing on imported or domestically produced foods separately, the Domestic Food Assurance Programme will look at the overall status of food available on the domestic market by testing for particular microbiological and chemical hazards.

By combining the two programmes MPI can better assess the risk to the New Zealand public from particular hazards that may be a concern due to concerns identified overseas. The information gathered can in turn inform MPI's standards setting work.

Developing new rules for health claims on food

MPI is helping to develop Trans-Tasman rules that will support innovation of health foods while giving consumers confidence these foods will do what their labels claim.

This work is being done in collaboration with Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ). It aims to develop a Health Claims Standard that will allow food manufacturers to make health claims based on a scientifically substantiated relationship between a particular food and the specific health benefit it produces.

Supporting the development of innovative foods for health is a priority for the New Zealand Government.

Development of the new standard is progressing well. In July 2012, the Legislative and Governance Forum on Food Regulation (FoFR) agreed the regulatory system for health claims should provide two options for companies developing 'general level' health claims: pre-market approval by FSANZ, or 'self-substantiation' by businesses.

Making these options available will create a regulatory framework that encourages and protects investment in innovation by ensuring intellectual property protection, as well as flexibility and speed to market for new products.

FoFR is the committee of food ministers from the Australian Commonwealth, state and territory governments and New Zealand that oversees the work of FSANZ.

At the July meeting, ministers also confirmed their support for the use of a nutrient profiling scoring criteria (NPSC) to ensure that health claims only appear on healthy foods.

A final decision on the Health Claims Standard is expected to be made by Ministers in December this year.

Halal exports focus of MPI's Halal Standards Advisory Council

The Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) has established a Halal Standards Advisory Council to ensure New Zealand's animal products export system stays at the forefront of Halal international best practice.

The council will provide Government with advice on religious technical matters when creating standards for the production and processing of Halal products. Its expertise will help to ensure New Zealand meat and dairy products continue to comply with increasingly stringent Halal standards set by markets around the world.

The Council was established under the Animal Products (Overseas Market Access Requirements for Halal Assurances) Notice 2012 certification rules, which aim to assist access for New Zealand meat and dairy product exports into overseas markets.

These certification rules apply to Halal certifiers and producers of Halal food exports. They were developed jointly by the meat industry, Halal certifiers and the New Zealand Food Safety Authority, now part of MPI.

Under these rules, destination markets continue to determine which businesses can provide Halal certification for their particular market. MPI's role is to enforce Halal standards required by overseas markets.

There is a great deal of development work being done globally on Halal standards for food, encompassing the paddock to plate spectrum.

MPI uses a number of technical advisory councils to engage with stakeholders, and the establishment of the Halal Standards Advisory Council ensures a similar depth of dialogue around the production and processing of Halal products.

The Council consists of practicing Muslim members who are experts in food safety, Islamic knowledge and quality systems management and audit, chaired by Dr Anwar Ghani. The two New Zealand based Islamic scholars bring an international



perspective and representation across New Zealand's Muslim community. The council also has a Government representative appointed by MPI.

MPI's market access team will work closely with the Council as well as religious authorities in our overseas markets to enhance access for New Zealand products into the world's major markets and ensure consumers' needs are met.

Meaty changes to slaughter house inspections

AFFCO's Imlay plant at Whanganui this month became the first meat plant in the country to take over some of the meat inspection roles previously carried out by Government-appointed inspectors.

Under the new post mortem examination regime, company inspectors take responsibility for detecting non-food safety related abnormalities with a reduced presence on the slaughter floor of official assessors who will continue to focus on food safety aspects.

At this stage the new regime is scheduled to be implemented at six premises.

The change marks a significant shift in meat inspection. Previously inspectors employed by AsureQuality and overseen by Government vets have been responsible for all inspection services at meat plants.

The change has been introduced on the back of a two-year trial, which has confirmed that company-employed processor examiners are as effective as official assessors in identifying and removing non-food safety defects.

Under the new regime there will be one Government-appointed official assessor per chain and one roving inspector per slaughter floor for every species of animal slaughtered. They will ensure food safety standards will not be affected by the changes.

The current level of government inspection and supervision of the red meat sector has far exceeded

the role played by government in other food industries. The new post mortem regime will provide more consistency with these industries.

As part of the meat inspection changes, MPI has introduced a change to the examination of sheep that have been vaccinated against Johnes Disease. The change has been introduced because of improvements to the vaccine, which make it less likely for animals to have a reaction resulting in a lesion that is still present at the time of slaughter.

Where an injection site lesion is found, it is treated like any other injection site lesion and the affected part of the animal is removed and discarded.



Celebrating innovation in food

MPI is proud to once again be a sponsor of the New Zealand Food Awards, which celebrate the quality and innovation of our food sector.



The annual awards showcase the best of New Zealand's food and beverage production, and companies that win awards can use these to promote their excellence in innovation to international markets.

This year MPI has sponsored two awards categories: The Bakery Award, and the Cereal and Breads Award.

"The food industry is the powerhouse of our nation's economy and currently contributes more than half of our country's export revenue," MPI DDG Standards Carol Barnao says. "However, innovation will be absolutely crucial to our producers staying competitive on the global scene into the future."

MPI's strategy – which has a vision of 'growing and protecting New Zealand' – focuses on maximising export opportunities and increasing sustainable resource use, along with improving sector productivity and protecting from biological risk.

"MPI's commitment to the Food Awards is one way of encouraging industry to put their creative ideas into practice and come up with new and exciting products," Ms Barnao says.

The New Zealand Food Awards are held in Auckland on 27 September, 2012.

Joint Border Management System and Trade Single Window

MPI and the New Zealand Customs Service are in the process of developing a joint border management system that aims to meet New Zealand's future border management needs.

The Trade Single Window (TSW) is one of the key components of the shared system. The introduction of the TSW in April 2013 will enable food importers and agents to:

- register with MPI as a food importer; and
- submit all information needed for food clearance.

Once registered, you will need to keep your information up to date. This registration information will then be used by MPI to manage our list of food importers.

The information provided for clearance of high risk (prescribed) foods will also be managed via TSW. Clearance will continue to occur when a Food Act Officer has been satisfied that the food complies with the Food Act.

To be able to make best use of the upcoming changes, you will need to be registered with TSW and use the new Import Declaration message that is being introduced as part of the JBMS programme.

If you have any questions or want know more, contact us via email on jbms@customs.govt.nz or jbms@mpi.govt.nz.

You can also find more information on these web pages, which we recommend you bookmark:

- [Joint Border Management System \(JBMS\)](#)
- [Online Discussion - JBMS Cost Recovery website](#)

You can also sign up to [Border Space](#) to receive JBMS e-news with developments on the programme and upcoming events.

Food safety management tool proves popular

MPI reached a milestone in August as the 2500th business signed up to a template Food Safety Programme (FSP).

A template FSP provides the operator of a food service business with a ready-written food safety management system, which identifies potential risks at each point of the operation – from receiving and storing goods to preparing, cooking and serving food. It also contains procedures for operators to follow, to assist in keeping food safe at each point. Businesses can adapt the template to their business.

Businesses can also develop their own custom FSP

The FSP is the same as a Food Control Plan (FCP), one of the three risk-based tools proposed by the Food Bill which is currently awaiting its second reading in Parliament. The FSP was

introduced as a voluntary initiative in 2008 under the current Food Act 1981 to ease the transition to the Food Bill.

There are plans under the proposed Food Bill to develop templates for other food sectors.

FCPs ensure businesses take responsibility for managing food safety risks for their own business rather than relying on an inspector checking them periodically. Food businesses that adopt an FSP are exempt from meeting the Food Hygiene Regulations, which – at nearly 40 years old – are out of date and include requirements not relevant to food safety.

Feedback from businesses that have adopted an FSP is that it helps achieve consistency in food safety practices and is a good staff training tool.

All councils within New Zealand are offering FSPs to businesses who are interested. Sixty one of the 67 councils have businesses listed on the public register. You can search for your favourite restaurant or café here.

Businesses that wish to adopt the template FSP should contact their local council environmental health officer for advice.



In brief

Ensuring food imports are compliant

The Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) is aware of a number of food consignments that have been imported into New Zealand without the relevant certification specified under either our Import Health Standards or Imported Food Requirements.

MPI is reminding importers that prior to bringing food products into New Zealand importers they must ensure that:

- the food is eligible for importation under biosecurity and food safety requirements, and;
- they obtain any required certification prior to the product being exported from the country of origin.

Failure to comply will, at best, delay clearance, but more likely end up in the destruction or re-shipping of the goods at the importer's expense.

Biosecurity requirements (Import Health Standards) can be found [here](#) and food safety requirements (Imported Food Requirements) can be found [here](#).

Imported food must also comply with the requirements of the Food Standards Code (the Code). Products that do not comply with the compositional requirements of the Code are not permitted.

Where the labels of imported products do not comply with the labelling requirements set out in the Code and the Food Act 1981, these labels must be modified make them compliant before sale.

Food Standards Code Requirements can be found [here](#).



Business as usual for Japanese imports

In July 2012 MPI moved to business as usual for food imported from Japan with the removal of the last emergency border alert for Japanese food imports.

Following the Fukushima nuclear power plant accident in March 2011, MPI – like most countries around the world – put emergency border controls in place on all foods of interest from a range of Japan's prefectures. A testing programme of these foods was also introduced to ensure they complied with internationally accepted safety limits for radioactivity in food.

By the end of June 2012 a total of 279 samples had been tested at the border. All samples were well below acceptable levels.

Radioactivity was indistinguishable from the naturally occurring background radioactivity for 254 of these samples.

Based on these results, MPI has gradually removed border alerts for different commodities, and in July 2012 the last alert – namely that for tea – was removed.

MPI will continue ongoing surveillance monitoring of Japanese imports as part of the [Imported Foods Monitoring Programme](#). We will also continue to monitor the results of international surveillance programmes, including that of the Japanese Government.

It is important to note that products imported from Japan that are classified as “Prescribed Foods” will still be subject to the applicable [Imported Food Requirement \(IFR\)](#).

Chemical contamination no cause for concern in imported dried spices

A new [MPI survey](#) to assess general compliance of imported dried spices with regards to specific chemical hazards has produced excellent results.

The survey looked at hazards that have been identified as potentially posing a high risk of non compliance with standards set out by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) and the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

A total of 115 imported dried spice samples were collected from retailers and distributors in the Auckland and Wellington regions. The spices collected were pepper, paprika, cinnamon, curry powder, turmeric, garam masala and nutmeg. The samples were tested for specified heavy metals, pesticides and dyes / colours.

The survey identified only one non-compliance. This was one sample of cinnamon quills, which had a low level of the dye Auramine O. This dye is prohibited in spices under Standard 1.3.1 of the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code. However, considering the dietary consumption of cinnamon and the level



Auramine O was found at, the non-compliance posed no food safety risk to consumers.

MPI has contacted all the importers of the spices sampled to notify them of the findings and remind them of the obligations to ensure the product they import is compliant with Food Standards Code requirements.

The importer of the non-compliant cinnamon quills has advised MPI they are investigating the source of contamination to ensure imports comply with the appropriate standards.

New recall web portal gone live

A new web-based recall tool has been launched aimed at conducting faster, more complete recalls of faulty food products.

Developed with input from MPI, ProductRecallnz is designed to simplify and speed up the process of communicating a food recall to the distributors of affected products. It is intended to centralise recall information and eliminate the need for multiple paper based forms currently used to notify of a recall.

ProductRecallnz went live in July 2012 and already 130 businesses have subscribed to the service. Subscription fees are based on a business' annual turnover. There's an eight-week stand down period from time of registration until companies are able to use the service.

It is important to note that using this recall tool does not exempt food businesses from the statutory obligations for conducting a recall, and it does not replace MPI's own tools for working with industry during a recall.

More information about how to conduct a recall and develop a recall plan can be found on our website

New Animal Status Declaration for Pigs

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

The ASD for Pigs 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 necessary for determining that an animal is suitable for processing, and for determining export eligibility and certification.

The major changes to the form have been made to the shaded industry agreed parts only. These are:

- inclusion of an area to document the FarmsOnline number;
- rewording to improve clarity around feeding of meat or food waste under the Biosecurity (Meat and Food Waste for Pigs) Regulations 2005; and,
- adding a question asking whether the breeding herd has been vaccinated against leptospirosis if the pigs are not managed in accordance with a leptospirosis control programme.



Anyone who has existing stock of the previous ASD form (dated 1 March 2006) can continue to use them up until 30 November 2012. From 1 December 2012 everyone must use the new form. Anyone who has run out of forms can print the updated one [here](#) or you can go to the Pork NZ website www.nzpork.co.nz

More information about ASDs can be found on our website.