

ACMSF recommends 'universal adoption' of CFA principles

CFA has welcomed the call by the UK Government's Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food (ACMSF) for 'universal adoption' of hazard analysis and HACCP principles set out in CFA's Best Practice Guidelines for the Production of Chilled Foods (4th ed). CFA has also called for their universal enforcement.

ACMSF's Ad Hoc Group on Vulnerable Groups reported on 25 September on the evidence relating to the increased incidence of human *Listeria monocytogenes* infection in the elderly. In their report the ACMSF recognised the efficacy of the professional chilled prepared food manufacturing industry's measures to minimise *Listeria monocytogenes* contamination of foods and their clear differentiation from the approaches of other sectors. CFA's Guidelines are the only referenced industry document in the report [para 5.9 (part)] which states:

"Chilled ready to eat foods are produced using HACCP principles that aim to identify where the hazard can occur in the manufacturing process and at what steps measures can be put in place to eliminate the hazard or reduce it to an acceptable level (CFA, 2006)."

Stressing the importance of industry compliance with 'recognised' industry standards the report recommends the 'universal adoption' of HACCP principles which are enshrined in the CFA guidelines:

Para 5.32 and 6.39: "The principles of food safety management through the application of hazard analysis approaches such as HACCP are well established in the food industry. Universal adoption of these principles by the manufacturing, catering and retail industry, together with effective enforcement, are recognised ways of ensuring food safety."

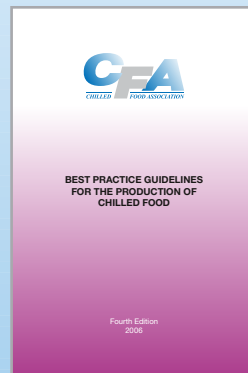
In addition the report (paras 5.12, 5.17) clearly differentiates between producers of chilled, ready-to-eat food operating to current recognised industry standards and catering and retail outlets that are not necessarily subject to the same controls as those employed by major manufacturing units operating high/low risk principles.

Listeria is minimised by careful selection of high quality raw materials, strict hygiene measures during processing, storage at low temperatures and thorough heating where appropriate. CFA members take great care to control potential risks from *Listeria monocytogenes* by following good manufacturing practice at all stages as outlined in CFA's Best Practice Guidelines for the Production of Chilled Food (2006 4th Ed). Developed in conjunction with retailers, distributors and Government scientists the guidelines set out in detail the procedures to be followed to ensure the safety and quality of the finished product. Compliance with the Guidelines is mandatory for all CFA Members.

For further information contact Kaarin Goodburn on +44 (0)1536 514365 or visit <<http://www.chilledfood.org>>.

CFA's commitment to standards throughout the food chain

CFA's "Best Practice Guidelines for the Production of Chilled Food" represent the gold standard for the chilled food industry to which all members of CFA must comply. Other CFA guidance on specific aspects of chilled food production are also widely acclaimed. CFA continues to work with UK, EU and UN authorities to improve manufacturing standards throughout the food chain and actively promotes and encourages CFA standards to be adopted by other sectors.



CFA presentations

CFA's Secretary General, Kaarin Goodburn, gave a presentation on the Microbiological Criteria Regulations at the Warwick University Applied Microbiology Course for Environmental Health Officers and Quality Assurance Officers held in Warwick on 17th September 2008.

Kaarin has also been invited to give a presentation at the Applied Food Microbiology Course for EHOs, food microbiology and food safety professionals to be held at Leeds in April 2009.

CFA secures £750k for sustainable shelf life extension research

A CFA proposal to Defra requesting funding for research aimed at extending the shelf life of chilled food has been given the go-ahead. The SUSSLE (Sustainable Shelf Life Extension) research programme is designed to provide data to better understand and explore the extension of the shelf life of chilled foods by using tailored reduced energy heat processes, enhancing quality without compromising safety.

In the UK the shelf life of the majority of chilled foods is limited to 10 days through a voluntary agreement of 1992. Last year CFA was successful in re-securing this '10 day rule' for the shelf life of chilled vacuum packaged/modified atmosphere packaged products (foods stored at 3–8°C) against FSA's proposed change to 5 days. A reduction to 5 days would have made the production and distribution of the vast majority of chilled foods impractical. Such a change was agreed in 2006 by the ACMSF to be unnecessary as the 10 day rule is demonstrably effective in assuring the safety of chilled prepared foods.

It is against this background that CFA made its research proposal to Defra. CFA is delighted that this major, unique project will go ahead. The research will be carried out at the Institute of Food Research, Norwich and will be funded jointly by CFA and the Defra LINK Food Manufacturing programme primarily. It will run for 3 years. Participation in SUSSLE is free, being restricted to CFA Full Members.

Minimising waste

CFA has been active in waste minimisation for more than 5 years, often playing a leading role in the development of research priorities and progressive industry and Government policy. Currently CFA is actively involved in a range of waste minimisation initiatives including:

- funding research at Sheffield Hallam University comparing energy usage and waste arising from domestic vs industrial production of lasagne;

- Defra-funded projects at the Open University investigating attitudes towards organic waste-derived materials, and at Cranfield/IGD on the impact of trade relationships on waste;
- Waste & Resources Action Programme (WRAP) projects on composted waste usage in agriculture - CFA's aim being to ensure that appropriate technical standards are in place to prevent the safety of crops being compromised.

Produce safety

Research into how some bacteria may attach themselves to salad leaves and other vegetables was widely reported in the media recently as suggesting that prepared salads are unsafe to eat. This view is not supported by the FSA or expert scientists including the one quoted by the media.

The UK retail prepared salads sector employs demanding controls, described as "excellent" and "stringent" by the FSA, unlike those seen elsewhere in the world. Products sold as "washed and ready to eat" are just that and the standards developed by CFA that are in place in the UK retail sector have assured a very high degree of control. The main issues are the lack of similar controls in other markets (eg wholesale & herbs) and the knock on effect from concerns raised in the USA.

The ACMSF agreed in March that it is not necessary to re-wash prewashed leaf. As an indicator of the Government's confidence in the industry FSA has now publicly issued this advice. In addition, in response to media coverage FSA reassured consumers stating: "Currently, there's no evidence to suggest that salads are a major source of food poisoning in the UK and very few incidents of contamination in pre-packed salads have been reported to the Agency in the past three years.The Agency works with producers and manufacturers who apply stringent controls on the leafy salad supply chain in the UK, minimising potential for contamination and providing for food safety assurance. In fact, while we advise that it's a good idea to wash salad items in general, there is no need for consumers to rewash ready-to-eat bagged salads unless it says otherwise on the packet....."

To read the full FSA statement visit http://www.fsa-science.net/2008/09/03/clean_greens_and_bagged_salads. CFA's Microbiological Guidance for Produce Suppliers to Chilled Food Manufacturers is available, price £50 from CFA's online shop.

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