

ACMSF opposes 5 day rule on VP/MAP packaged foods

CFA has welcomed the latest position of the Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food (ACMSF) regarding the proposed FSA Guidance to restrict the shelf-life of vacuum packaged/modified atmosphere packaged products (foods stored at 5–8°C) to 5 days.

At its June 2006 meeting the ACMSF endorsed its opposition to the 5 day rule and proposed a 10-day shelf life recommendation with the vacuum packaged guidance document to be revised from “less than or equal to 5 days” to “less than or equal to 10 days at 8°C”. CFA has repeatedly argued that the 5 day restriction was unnecessary as current measures (the 10 day rule) are effective in assuring the safety of chilled prepared foods. The FSA proposal would also create exceptional problems with the continued production of all chilled products other than sandwiches and sushi, which have particularly short shelf-lives.

The ACMSF decision follows an independent review of the current scientific evidence on vacuum and modified atmosphere packaged foods and the risk of *Clostridium botulinum*. The review, which was carried out by the Institute of Food Research, has now been completed and the results presented to the ACMSF who endorsed the 10-day shelf life recommendation. The Committee also identified a need for simple guidance for enforcers and industry and recommended that FSA set up a small group to deliver this. CFA’s Secretary General, Kaarin Goodburn, is involved in this drafting group.

In discussing the proposed recommendation to increase shelf life from 5 to 10 days the Committee noted that the 10-day shelf life recommendation for the UK was already quite restrictive and was not applied in many other countries. In particular, the ACMSF welcomed the epidemiological evidence included in the review which showed that, over the last 20 years, there were no reported cases of botulism linked to properly stored chilled prepared foods. The ACMSF also recommended that the guidance should be

brought to the attention of other Member States via the European Commission.

For further information read the ACMSF minutes on the FSA website at <http://www.food.gov.uk/science/ouradvisors/microbiog/safety/acmsfmeets/acmsf2006/>

CFA’s Best Practice Guidelines



Have you bought your copy of CFA’s **Best Practice Guidelines for the Production of Chilled Foods**? This latest 2006 edition is essential reading for all those in the chilled food industry and aims to help manufacturers demonstrate that hazards have been controlled and risks have been assessed. A decision tree with case study examples also helps to identify the minimum class of area hygiene standards required with areas clearly highlighted that are either required by law or considered essential by CFA to ensure food safety.

The Guidelines contain comprehensive information and guidance covering:

- Main hazards
- Control measures
- HACCP systems
- Shelf life assessment
- Decision tree for minimum hygiene status
- Regulatory requirements
- Traceability
- Product recall

The Guidelines provide information on HACCP including implementation and monitoring, verification and documentation. They are also useful to implement legal requirements at the production stage and may assist food businesses in complying with third party technical standards.

The CFA *Guidelines* are published in partnership with The Stationery Office and are available (price £100.00) through TSO bookshops and on line from <http://www.tsoshop.co.uk/bookstore.asp?DI=561965>

Micro criteria regulations - spreading the word

As part of CFA's continuing efforts to help food businesses understand and implement various legal and safety requirements, Kaarin Goodburn, CFA's Secretary General has given several presentations on the EC Regulation on Microbiological Criteria for Foodstuffs which came into force in January 2006.

Most recently Kaarin gave a presentation entitled *EU Micro Criteria Regulation - what it's all about!* to the Health Protection Agency as part of an internal HPA training course for laboratory personnel. In addition, on 23 August, Kaarin addressed over 70 London-based EHOs and other members of the Chartered Institution of Environmental Health on the subject, *The Micro Criteria Regulations - Don't Panic!* at the London Food Study Group. The presentation focused on debunking and clarifying the EU Micro Criteria Regulations and presenting the content of the CFA/British Retail Consortium (BRC) guidance. The same presentation was also given to the Northants Microbiology Network on 4 October at the University of Northampton.

The CFA/BRC **Guidance on the Practical Implementation of the EC Regulation on Microbiological Criteria for Foodstuffs**, (published December 2005) and CFA's **Microbiological Testing and Interpretation Guidance** are available as free downloads from the CFA website at <http://www.chilledfood.org/content/guidance.asp>.

New CFA associate member

CFA welcomes Speedibake, a subsidiary of Associated British Foods, and one of the leading UK producers of bakery products, as an Associate member.



CFA handwash poster

Since 1999 about 4000 CFA handwash training posters have been distributed in the UK and worldwide to food safety authorities, food companies, restaurants, EHOs, hospitals and day care nurseries. The posters, which are printed on splash-proof paper, are designed specifically for food businesses and show how and when to wash hands. A complimentary A4 poster is included with this mailing but additional posters can be ordered from the CFA webshop (http://shop.chilled-food.org/acatalog/Factory_Hygiene.html) price £25 per pack of two A3 and four A4 size posters. The price includes VAT and postage and packing within the UK.

CFA visits programme

Over the past 6 years, CFA has organised about 40 plant visits for more than 120 senior civil servants. The aim of these visits is to raise awareness of chilled food production systems and controls in practice, demonstrating the high level of development in CFA members' plants to assure food hygiene, including GMP and HACCP. They also show the 'just-in-time' approach and exceptional traceability systems used in the sector and how safety is designed into the product from the development stage through to the end-product. Speaking at a recent CFA meeting, Andrew Wadge, FSA's Chief Scientist acknowledged the usefulness of these visits stating that CFA should "...keep them going. These visits are very helpful in establishing and developing relationships between the Agency and CFA members".

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