

Summary of meeting outcomes

NSW Dairy Industry Consultative Committee convening as NSW Dairy Food Safety Consultative Committee

20 September 2016

The NSW Dairy Food Safety Consultative Committee held a meeting in Sydney on Tuesday 20 September 2016. Specific issues considered by the Committee at its meeting are detailed below.

Food safety program compliance report

Members noted the dairy industry compliance report for the period 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016. During this period there were 692 acceptable rated audits (of these 87% were A rated, 12% B rated and 1% C rated), and there were 53 failed audits (with a 7.1% failure rate). 249 inspections were conducted during the period with a compliance rate of 83%. These inspection compliance rates are impacted by the low number of inspections conducted for the key licence permissions.

The number of licensees in the dairy sector over the last 12 months has remained steady along with the high compliance rate and there has been a slight improvement on last year's figures. The overall compliance rate in the sector for the financial year 2015-16 was 93%.

A large amount of the audits conducted during the year were under the Third Party Audit (TPA) program with 321 TPA audits on dairy farms conducted with a high level compliance rate of 97.5%. The Food Authority has commenced an electronic auditing program for TPAs who will start using iPads during their audits and this will guarantee greater consistency with audits.

The Committee noted a full breakdown on areas where critical Corrective Action Requests (CARS) are being identified. The top three audit items where these are being observed were in relation to process control issues, failures with monitoring of food safety programs, and product testing issues. However due to targeted efforts within the audit program to address areas where failures are occurring, the observed occurrences of critical CARS were reduced in comparison with previous financial years.

There were no prosecutions in the dairy sector since the last Forum meeting. During the period 35 Improvement notices, 6 Penalty notices and 2 warning letters were issued and there were 6 product seizures all relating to a project to target unpasteurised milk. No food borne investigations were conducted during the period and there was an overall positive result for the dairy sector.

Food safety program implementation

The Committee received an update on the revised Food Safety Program (FSP) which is currently being rolled out in the meat retail sector through a targeted pilot program to educate poor performing businesses and increase overall sector compliance. The revised program document is outcomes based with 14 specific outcomes, and gives guidance and information on how to simplify food safety controls. There has been positive feedback on the program so far, and if successful it is envisaged that this will be rolled out to the wider industry later in the year including the dairy sector.

Third party auditor workshop

Members were advised that the Food Authority hosted a Third Party Auditor (TPA) workshop on 24 & 25 August 2016. It is anticipated that this will occur on an annual basis to provide a forum for professional development for TPAs and to drive consistency through education on developments in the audit program including standardisation of reporting systems and audit processes, discussion on industry developments, emerging trends in auditing, auditing performance and other food safety specific topics related to the daily duties of TPAs. Industry representatives will be invited to give presentations at future forums on their areas of expertise.

Anti Microbial Resistance (AMR) strategy

The Committee received a presentation on the national strategy developed by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Department of Agriculture in partnership with government and industry stakeholders to minimise the spread of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and to ensure that over time there is continued access to effective antimicrobials. This strategy has been developed because of global issues with increasing resistance to modern drugs and medicines in both human and animal health.

The key objectives of the strategy are to increase awareness and understanding of AMR and its implications; to implement effective AMR practices across human health and animal care settings to ensure appropriate prescribing and use; to develop nationally coordinated surveillance of AMR and antimicrobial usage; and to conduct further research and partner on development of new antibiotics.

In NSW preliminary scoping work to progress the national AMR strategy has been undertaken between NSW DPI and NSW Health, and further workshops will be held to determine next steps and responsibilities. In terms of potential impact on the dairy industry, there may be a review of current AMR use by the industry; concern around the use of ceftiofur on farm (3rd generation cephalosporin); and surveillance opportunities through the use of new or existing testing data from dairy producers. There was also discussion on the importance of updating dairy farms about new drugs on the market and the need for pharmaceutical company representatives to liaise on a regular basis with vets. The Committee will be kept updated on these issues.

Regulation of Australian Agriculture Productivity Commission report

An update was tabled for information on the Productivity Commission review on the burden of regulation on Australian farm businesses. The Productivity Commission report covered a broad range of issues and was released for public consultation on 21 July 2016. Public submissions for the draft report are now closed. 190 submissions were received and an inquiry report will be prepared by the Productivity Commission by 15 November 2016.

Update on dairy product transport for NSW Farmers' Association

Further questions from the NSW Farmers' Association Dairy Committee were tabled for discussion in relation to the licensing and legal requirements for transportation of milk to cafés and restaurants and the perception that there is not a level playing field for licensed milk vendors and people sourcing milk for their retail business.

The Food Authority advised that it does not retain or source information from local councils on instances of non-compliance or enforcement action relating to dairy product transport. Councils provide the Food Authority with an activity report once a year which is published on the Food Authority's website; they inspect businesses according to a standardised check list which includes checking temperature control of potential hazardous ready to eat food (including milk and dairy products) at receipt, storage, transport and display for sale. If any incidents of concern are observed, these would be reported.

It was explained that temperature control requirements are different for licensed vendors who drive long distances over a long period of time; for a retail business sourcing and buying milk from a supermarket for their café, they would fall into an exemption under the 2 hour / 4 hour rule for temperature control.

Members were reassured that this issue is on the Food Authority's radar and that they have been in contact with the Dairy Milk Vendors' Association who have similar concerns. Members were advised that any information they can pass on would be welcome.

Country of Origin Labelling requirements

A paper was tabled for information outlining changes to the Country of Origin Labelling (CoOL) requirements for food which will move from the Food Standards Code to come under the Australian Consumer Law. The new standard commenced on 1 July 2016 but stakeholders have a 24 month transition period for compliance to 1 July 2018. The Committee was advised that the ACCC has developed extensive guides which are available on their web-site to enable businesses to seek more answers and information. This includes an on-line decision tool to assist businesses in deciding on types of labels to display on their foods. For specific questions it was suggested members should contact the ACCC.

Members were advised that the Food Authority is developing a new portal on the new Country of Origin Labelling laws. This will give clear guidance and assist in understanding the new requirements through the use of visuals and graphics. The portal is likely to be up and running in around 4-6 weeks and it is hoped it will start to demystify and clarify issues around labelling. There will be links back to the ACCC and other web-sites. Members were invited to contact the Food Authority with any suggestions that might add value to this portal.

High Pressure Processed (HPP) milk

The Committee noted a paper giving background to the lengthy verification process undertaken by the NSW Food Authority to approve the production of high pressure processed (HPP) milk by a NSW business. The HPP process used by the business was verified as equivalent to milk pasteurisation, but without using heat, and it is not raw milk. Any future processors of HPP milk will be expected to go through the same staged approval process.

The Food Authority has an on-going agenda to educate consumers on the dangers of consuming raw milk.

Communications update

Members received an update on work the Food Authority's communications team has been doing since the last meeting in relation to the dairy industry sector, including articles in Foodwise v41, media releases and social media posts, and a number of recalls of chocolate that had contained undeclared dairy/milk allergens.

Biosecurity legislation update

The Committee noted a brief update on the development of new legislation under the Biosecurity Act 2015 being conducted by the NSW Department of Primary Industries. Work is underway to draft the Regulations and develop a Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) for stakeholder consultation which will occur around November 2016. A newsletter was tabled for information and members will be kept updated on this process.

The next meeting of the NSW Dairy Food Safety Consultative Committee will be held in 2017 (date to be advised).