

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

Wednesday 2 September 2015

Summary of meeting outcomes

The NSW Dairy Food Safety Consultative Committee held a meeting in Sydney on Wednesday 2 September 2015. Specific issues considered by the Committee at its meeting are detailed below.

Industry updates

Members provided updates on key and emerging issues from their industry sectors. Issues discussed included the work currently underway to develop a new tool to model the growth of pathogens in the raw milk cheese making process; questions regarding the identification of small dairy manufacturers; and concerns on length and duplication of the audit process by the Food Authority and private customer auditors.

Level of risk for ice cream

Following concerns raised at the last meeting in relation to inconsistency across councils in determining the level of risk for ice cream, members were advised that the Food Authority will be conducting work with local councils to work through any areas of conflict in terms of how rules are applied and develop clear compliance policies based on science risk. This work will include issues related to home based businesses and jurisdictional rules around markets, as well as issues around mobile food vehicles and temporary events which is a growing area that often operates across council areas. The Committee will be kept informed of this work as it progresses.

NSW Food Authority food safety program compliance report

The Committee noted the dairy sector compliance report for the period 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015. Activities undertaken by the CIE Branch during this period included 700 acceptable rated audits with 38 failed audits (5.1% failure rate compared to 7.6% in the previous period) and 1,293 inspections on dairy food transport vehicles with only 13 failed inspections (1% failure rate). This indicated a very high level compliance rate of 99.6% which is a great outcome for the dairy sector.

Comparative trend and audit data analysis on compliance rates and corrective actions for the dairy sector over the last three years were noted. As the overall compliance rate for the sector is very high there are currently no long term issues. The major areas where defects are being found at audit relate to monitoring records, analytical and testing and food safety program issues.

The Committee noted tables showing industry trends for the last three years for bulk milk cell count, total plate count and pickup temperatures. The Food Authority now has 100% compliance from companies in submitting this data and all milk picked up in NSW will be trended through this system. It was acknowledged that the ability to use this type of data will provide a more targeted and efficient approach to verification and give a better picture of how food safety trends are going with businesses overall. The Food Authority undertook to provide further data to members to benchmark requirements and assist with setting targets for bulk milk cell counts.

Also noted for the reporting period were antibiotic and pathogen notifications, and enforcement activities. There were no foodborne illness investigations conducted in the dairy sector during this period.

The Committee were also updated on a review of the Third Party Auditor (TPA) program for dairy farms which will involve unannounced verification inspections from the Food Authority of facilities recently audited by a TPA to confirm the audit findings. This will also enable dairy farmers to provide feedback to the Food Authority on the TPA program. It was noted that there was a 100% compliance rate for all farms inspected in the 2014-15 financial year as part of this verification program.

Testing procedures for milk sampling collection

The Committee noted a paper tabled following concerns raised on behalf of dairy farmers at the previous meeting about inconsistencies in plate count readings on bulk tank samples and the need for training of tanker drivers on handling of raw milk. It was noted that for the last 15 years since dairy deregulation the Food Authority has not been involved in contractual disputes between dairy farmers and processors relating to milk quality testing, or in the training of tanker drivers. However the Food Authority continues to pay close attention to hygiene and food safety issues in the milk supply.

It was recommended that farmers with concerns about their results should arrange to do their own testing of samples and look at their own herd recording figures. Members discussed the difficulties in obtaining parallel samples from a tanker, and were still concerned that there is no through-chain testing standard for handling the samples. This issue will be raised further as the NSW Dairy Industry Plan develops.

Starter cultures

Members noted a paper following discussion at the previous meeting on the limited number of raw milk cheese starter cultures available in Australia. A list of starter cultures approved for import to Australia was also tabled for information. Cheese makers wishing to import other starter cultures not on this list would have to make application with the Department of Agriculture (Biosecurity). It was noted that this issue will be raised with the Raw Milk Cheese Technical Committee.

Blue Bell ice cream *Listeria monocytogenes* outbreak and recall

A paper on the Blue Bell ice cream *Listeria monocytogenes* outbreak and recall in the US between January 2010 and January 2015 was tabled for information. The paper outlined the background and contributing factors to the outbreak and provided an update on actions the company was required to put in place before it could commence selling product again. It was noted that a major contributing factor to the outbreak was the lack of any mandated testing and clearance programs for pathogens. The incident reinforced the need for constant vigilance in relation to *Listeria*, but at the same time gives confidence with the systems that are in place to detect and control pathogens in processing facilities in New South Wales.

Third Party Auditor workshop

The Committee noted a report on a workshop hosted by the Food Authority for dairy sector Third Party Auditors (TPAs) and Dairy Industry Farm Service Management to discuss a wide range of issues including dairy farm auditing trends, antibiotic use and residues and dairy farms, acceptable cattle identification, raw milk and raw milk cheeses, verification programs and the BYTE mobile auditing system planned to be rolled out for TPAs in 2016. Feedback from the workshop was very positive and further industry specific workshops are being planned for next year.

Small dairy processors workshop

A report on a NSW Small Dairy Processor Forum hosted by Dairy Innovation Australia Limited (DIAL) was tabled for information. The workshop was designed to provide information and discussion opportunities focussing on the 'top 10 tips' and 'best practice' on milk quality for NSW small dairy manufacturers and processors. The Food Authority will continue to engage with DIAL and keynote speakers from this event to develop targeted training programs for industry.

Staged repeal of the Food Regulation 2010

The Committee received an update on the staged repeal of the *Food Regulation 2010*. The significant changes in the new Regulation that will impact on the dairy industry sector were outlined. No submissions had been received from the dairy industry sector during the consultation period. It is expected that the new Regulation will come into effect on 30 October 2015.

Dairy food safety scheme evaluation

The Committee noted a paper tabled for information on the proposed evaluation of the Dairy Food Safety Scheme, outlining its purpose, scope, timing and methodology. This scheme has never been subject to a formal evaluation, and this is being undertaken to review its effectiveness and ensure that it achieves the desired outcomes. Dairy industry stakeholders will be contacted as part of the consultation process with the aim of completing the final report by June 2016.

Year in review – NSW dairy food safety sector

The Committee noted a report entitled *A year in review – NSW dairy food safety sector* which was tabled for information. The paper captures a summary of work done by the Food Authority in the last 12 months with particular emphasis on activities and achievements in the dairy sector during that period. This information will inform the Food Authority's annual report to be published by the end of November 2015.

Communications update

Members noted a paper providing 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 Dairy FAQs Regulation Review 2015; articles in *Foodwise* on Raw milk vs Raw milk cheese (Food Australia) and Review of the Third Party Auditor program for dairy farms; and a Year in Review: NSW dairy food safety sector.

The next meeting of the NSW Dairy Food Safety Consultative Committee will be in the first half of 2016 – date to be advised.