

Victorian Food Safety News

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Consumers highly confident in the food they buy and eat

Victorians remain highly confident in the safety of the food they buy and eat.

A study conducted for the Department of Human Services shows that since 2002 there has been little change in consumer confidence with over nine in 10 consumers confident in the safety of the food they buy and eat.

The study, conducted for the department in 2005 by Campbell Research and Consulting, indicates that Victorians are highly confident in the safety of food they prepare in their homes, moderately confident in the safety of food from restaurants, and less confident in the safety of food prepared at takeaways and community events.

The level of consumer confidence can be an indicator of the effectiveness of the food safety regulatory system. The study indicates that over eight in 10 consumers believe food businesses sell safe food, about two in three consumers believe that the authorities are doing enough to keep food safe, and two-thirds of consumers believe food businesses follow food safety laws. These factors are the key drivers of consumer confidence.

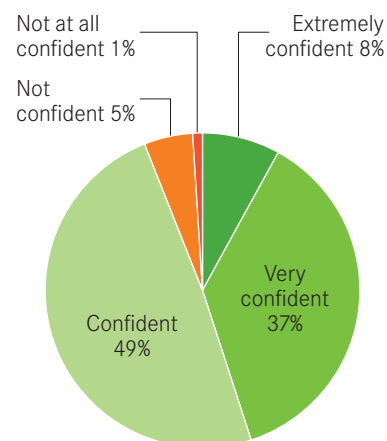
Consumer suggestions to improve confidence in food businesses include:

- Greater visibility of enforcement and evidence of recent inspections.
- Clear acknowledgement that food businesses meet standards through visible accreditation or awards.

- Visibly clean and visually appealing premises.
- Food prepared in front of consumers or in food preparation areas that can be seen by consumers.
- Evidence of high-turnover, food is recently prepared and looks fresh.
- Specialisation in a particular food type and experience of the food businesses and food handlers.

Confidence in the safety of food

94% of consumers in Victoria are confident that the food they buy and eat is safe.



(For more see pages 6 and 7)

Changes at the Food Safety Unit

Over the past 18 months the Public Health Branch of the Department of Human Services has developed new Strategic Directions and conducted an Effectiveness Review. The branch has been restructured and the Food Safety Unit is now located in the Food Safety and Regulatory Activities Unit.

Welcome to Carol Bate

Carol Bate is the new Assistant Director, Food Safety and Regulatory Activities overseeing the Food Safety Unit.

Carol has extensive executive experience in the food sector and government. She recently held the position of CEO of the Gardiner Foundation, an organisation developed to invest in commercial dairy industry research and development projects. She has served as Director, Biotechnology, Department of State and Regional Development and Director, ICT Skills and Communication, Multimedia Victoria, and has worked as Principal Policy Adviser, Food and Fibre Industries to provide high-level advice to the Premier and Ministers. Carol has served on a number of advisory committees, such as the Industry Advisory Committee Molecular Plant Breeding Cooperative Research Centre, Australian Logistics Council, Department of Primary Industries Our Rural Landscape, National Dairy Alliance.

Victoria's loss is the Commonwealth's gain

Jennifer McDonald, previous Manager, Food Safety and Water Regulation, is by now well settled in her new role in Canberra. Jennifer farewelled the Food Safety Unit in December 2005 to take up the position of Assistant Secretary, Food and Healthy Living, Department of Health and Ageing.

'Victoria is a leader in food safety and has made a significant contribution to the development of a national regulatory framework and whole of government approach.'

During the five years that Jennifer managed the Department of Human Services' Food Safety and Water Regulation, there were many developments in the sector and in the Food Safety Unit.

The Food Safety Unit has played a major role in the 'big picture' issues through its support and implementation of major legislative reforms. It has achieved a good understanding of its role and has worked hard to develop strong relationships across the sector—including with other government agencies and regulatory bodies and with the food industry.

'Victoria is a leader in food safety and has made a significant contribution to the development of a national regulatory framework and whole of government approach. Victoria has fostered cooperation between jurisdictions and between jurisdictions and standards bodies, which has led to greater consistency nationally,' said Jennifer.

According to Jennifer, a major challenge that the Food Safety Unit will need to continue to meet is keeping abreast of changes in the food sector, including emerging products and processes, and continuing to reflect and represent community expectations for food safety. 'As we expect more from our food, the regulatory system has to keep up with what that means for food safety', she said. 'We also need to bring together all stakeholders to foster understanding, cooperation and improved outcomes for the sector and the community'.

Move to Program Coordination

Roger Pierotti, who has been Food Safety Unit's Program Manager, Strategic Planning and Communications, and the editor of *Victorian Food Safety News* since mid-2003, has been transferred to a new unit in the Public Health Branch.

The Program Coordination Unit is an outcome of the Public Health Effectiveness Review and restructure. The Unit will coordinate strategic planning and program review across the Public Health Branch, as well as coordinate Emergency Management, Legislative Review and Biomedical Research.

Food for thought— Moose burgers

Moose struck by trains are being butchered by inmates at an Alaskan prison and distributed to soup kitchens and other charities serving the needy. Last year trains killed 183 moose Alaska-wide. A 450 kg roadkill Moose can yield more than 135 kg of mince meat.

Source: *DHS News Notes*,
Thursday 15 December 2005

Reports recommend administrative improvements in food safety regulation

Managing food safety in Victoria—Auditor General's Report

In November 2005, the Auditor General reported to the Victorian Parliament on a follow-up audit which examined progress made by the Department of Human Services and municipal councils in addressing the recommendations of the 2002 report *Management of food safety in Victoria*.

The follow up audit found some improvement in the regulation of food safety in Victoria; however, it also identified areas where further improvement is needed.

Specifically, the Auditor General recommended:

- A. That DHS and municipal councils work together to address the work force issues that pose a risk to the effective administration of food safety regulation in Victoria.
- B. That DHS and councils implement the outstanding recommendations from our October 2002 report *Management of food safety in Victoria*, particularly those relating to the statutory obligations of councils and statewide coordination of the regulatory framework.
- C. That DHS evaluate the VicFIN system to determine how it can be reconfigured to meet the needs of DHS and councils; how to eliminate the barriers to its take-up; and to develop strategies to encourage councils to participate in its maintenance.
- D. That DHS review the regulatory framework for food safety in Victoria with a view to improving public accountability around the effectiveness of food safety regulation, in order to ensure that the performance of all councils and DHS are subject to appropriate scrutiny by the community.

The Food Safety Unit is proposing to establish a partnership with the Municipal Association of Victoria and with municipal councils to address these issues. The report *Follow-up of selected performance audits tabled in 2002 and 2003* can be downloaded from www.audit.vic.gov.au

Competition and Efficiency Commission recommends action on reporting

In 2004, the Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission conducted a review of regulatory barriers to Victoria's regional economic development. The Commission's final report *Regulation and regional Victoria: challenges and opportunities*, was handed to the Government in 2005 and makes recommendations on a number of key regulatory areas. In regards to food safety regulation, the report contains five specific recommendations:

- That councils should periodically report their performances against their obligations under the *Food Act 1984*, using performance indicators developed by the Food Safety Unit and local government, represented by the Municipal Association of Victoria.
- The results should be published. Performance reporting should be made mandatory after two years if negotiations have not achieved an acceptable outcome. The Department of Human Services should contribute to any additional costs incurred by councils to provide performance information in the first year.
- That PrimeSafe and Dairy Food Safety Victoria publish a timetable within 12 months, outlining the steps that they will take towards recognising private food safety audit systems, where this can be achieved without compromising food safety outcomes. Reports on achievements against the timetable should be published in its annual report.
- That, to assist with consultation and decisions about future audit regimes, PrimeSafe publish discussion papers on the scope and frequency of audits for the seafood industry, following the initial audits.
- That fees for licences administered by PrimeSafe and Dairy Food Safety Victoria be prescribed by Regulations to be statutory rules and consequently potentially subject to regulatory impact statements.
- That the Food Safety Unit, in conjunction with the Municipal Association of Victoria, work with councils to develop guidelines for setting registration fees. These guidelines and the fees charged should be reported publicly.

The Victorian Government has released a response to the Commission's report addressing the recommendations of the report. This can be downloaded from www.vcec.vic.gov.au



Evaluating food safety information resources

Food Safety Program Templates are the key information resource used by food businesses in Victoria, a recent evaluation project has revealed. The project also identified that local council Environmental Health Officers are the key information channel for most food businesses receiving information about food safety, especially for small to medium size food businesses.

In order to ensure that information resources for food businesses are effective and meet the needs of the audience, the Food Safety Unit conducted a research project in 2005 to evaluate the effectiveness of existing resources and understand the information requirements and preferences of food businesses.

Campbell Research and Consulting was commissioned by the Food Safety Unit to conduct the study. They assessed information requests received by the unit over the last three years and conducted consultations and focus groups with stakeholders, food business proprietors, food safety supervisors and food handlers including in-depth interviews and a telephone survey.

The study involved:

- statistical assessment of publication orders
- interviews with 37 intermediaries including local council Environmental Health Officers, registered trainers, franchise managers, Class 1 food business managers and industry association representatives
- 14 focus groups with a range of food business managers, food safety supervisors and food handlers
- a telephone survey of 400 food businesses from across the state.

Key findings

Information sources and channels

Food businesses received food safety information through a number of sources and channels. Intermediaries such as local council Environmental Health Officers and trainers are seen as key channels of information for small to medium food businesses. Information channels for larger business and franchises tend to be through 'head office' and franchise managers. Other information channels are food safety trainers, food safety auditors, industry associations and business colleagues.

Templates are the most used information resources

Food Safety Program Templates were the main information resource used by food businesses. Posters and, to a lesser extent, food hygiene brochures were used by food businesses as staff reminders.

Influence of information resources

Just over one quarter (28 per cent) of businesses that had obtained information indicated that the information resulted in a change in practice.

Communications to food handlers

Apart from posters, food handlers do not recall printed food safety information or videos. Communication from food business managers to food handlers seems to be mainly verbal.

Credible source of information

Even though the Department of Human Services is not recognised as the source of information, information from the department is believed to be more credible than other sources.

Limited demand for more information

Most food businesses do not perceive the need for more information. The use of information resources was primarily limited to setting up and implementing the mandatory Food Safety Program. During the last 12 months, few businesses had actively sought food safety information and almost half of all businesses had received no food safety information at all. For most businesses, food safety information was deemed to be required on a 'needs only' basis.

Demand for information seems to be limited to:

- new businesses (registering and setting up a food safety program)
- businesses slow to meet compliance standards
- training of new staff
- changes to legislation, regulations and standards
- avoiding bad publicity.



Information too complex

Existing information resources are perceived to be complex, verbose and lack relevancy to most food businesses. This may reflect the complex nature of food safety regulations, standards, guidelines and management systems. There is a demand for information to be simpler, more graphical and more relevant to the business function.

Limited demand for translated information resources

There was limited demand to have a large range of translated information as most of the managers and proprietors in culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) food businesses conduct their business administration functions in English, and CALD food handlers, like other food handlers, receive verbal information and not written.

Environmental Health Officers in areas with a high incidence of CALD food businesses indicated a need for resources in languages other than English and claimed the ones produced by the Unit had been of value. However, CALD food businesses indicated minimal need for information in other languages as they relied on verbal communication and preferred messages communicated graphically.

Community groups and volunteer organisations lack awareness

A lack of awareness by community groups and volunteer organisations of food safety requirements and information resources was identified. Community groups did not consider themselves as food businesses and did not perceive business information resources as relevant to them.

Preferred formats of information

- Printed resources were the preferred format for all stakeholders.
- Many staff would prefer food safety practices to be learnt by on-the-job demonstration and verbal communication.
- Posters were an appealing resource for many businesses, especially for CALD businesses.
- Videos were considered to have value for training; however, little use appeared to be made of them in the workplace.
- Electronic information was popular amongst larger businesses and franchises, but not for small or CALD businesses.
- Word of mouth was an established source of information among all stakeholders.

Quality of Food Safety Unit information resources

Businesses that had obtained information within the last 12 months rated its relevance, helpfulness and the ease with which it could be understood highly.

Issues raised included:

- Food Safety Unit website difficult to navigate and did not allow easy identification of available resources
- current information was too 'generic'
- some information was out of date
- there were inconsistencies in the interpretation of regulatory requirements
- terminology and acronyms used pre-supposed a level of knowledge
- there was no one source providing details of registered training courses.

Food Safety Unit as provider of information

Most businesses assumed that there was a government body responsible for the regulatory policy, compliance and information regarding food safety and this body was perceived to have greater credibility than other sources.

Awareness of the Food Safety Unit was low among most food businesses...

Awareness of the Food Safety Unit was low among most food businesses and only few could recall any information produced by the unit. Even though the Department of Human Services Food Safety Unit may be the producer of information, it is not recognised as the source by most food businesses.

Direct contact with the unit tended to be limited to when clarification on a compliance or interpretation issue could not be resolved via other sources.

A copy of the summary report can be downloaded from www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety/research/food_safety_knowledge.htm

Food for thought— Recycling

Cafeterias in 18 schools in the US state of Pennsylvania have been using plastic cutlery that was washed after each meal and reused, even though students have long expressed disgust at spoons and knives riddled with bite marks. The kids have begun eating foods like yogurt and apple sauce with their hands. The school authorities admitted that the recycling only saved \$15,000 a year.

Source: DHS News Notes, 1 February, 2006

Consumer confidence in food safety—survey findings

(Continued from page 1)

The 2005 study involved telephone interviews with more than 1,000 Victorians over the age of 15 years. Seventy per cent of those surveyed were from metropolitan Melbourne and 30 per cent from regional Victoria. Ten focus groups were held with consumers from differing demographic, cultural and confidence characteristics. Six of the focus groups were conducted in Melbourne and four in regional Victoria.

Differences between consumer segments

Victorians from different demographic segments had slightly different levels of confidence in the safety of food:

- Males were more confident than females, particularly in food that was consumed outside of the home. Males generally consumed more food out of the home than females.

- Younger Victorians were generally more confident than were older Victorians.
- White-collar Victorians were generally more confident than were blue-collar, unemployed and retired Victorians.
- Those claiming to have experienced food poisoning in the last 12 months indicated lower levels of confidence than those who had not.

Different food types and food businesses

Victorians did not readily distinguish food types from food businesses, but were quick to identify categories of food in which they felt less confident. Certain types of food business attracted higher levels of confidence than others:

- Supermarkets and butchers were seen as safe suppliers of food, with lower levels of confidence stated for other businesses, such as fishmongers and delicatessens.
- Restaurants were seen as relatively safe, whereas takeaways and temporary food businesses were seen as less safe.
- For some Victorians, certain ethnic foods, such as Asian and Middle Eastern, were seen to be less safe than other ethnicities, such as that of European cultures.

Key findings

- 94% of Victorians are confident that the food they buy and eat in Victoria is safe.
- Victorians have very high levels of confidence in the safety of food prepared and consumed in the home.
- More than eight in 10 Victorians were confident in the safety of food prepared in restaurants, cafes and sandwich shops.
- More than three in 10 Victorians were not confident in the safety of the food from takeaways and community events, with over six in 10 consumers not confident in the safety of food from food stalls and mobile vans, such as those found at festivals.
- Over 90% of consumers were confident that food purchased from butchers was safe.
- More than eight in 10 consumers were confident that food purchased from supermarkets and delis was safe.
- Consumers were less confident of food purchased from markets, seafood shops and takeaways.
- Demographic differences in the level of confidence also remained unchanged since 2002. Older, blue-collar and female demographic groups continue to be less confident in the safety of food from most sources compared with younger, white-collar males.
- Consumers who ate out of the home more often tended to be more confident in the safety of food.
- Victorians held the firm belief that the more recent food had been prepared—the fresher the food—the more confident they felt that it was safe to eat.
- Visibility and knowledge play a key role in Victorians' level of confidence. Victorians feel more confident if they can see food being prepared, know where the food has come from, and know how long the food had been stored.
- Consumers had greater confidence in specialist food providers, such as butchers, than in food providers with inexperienced and non-specialist food handlers.

Food safety not a conscious consideration

For many Victorians, food safety is not a conscious consideration in everyday purchasing and consumption of food; it was often referred to as something that was 'in the back of the mind'.

While many were able to identify foods that were cause for concern, almost all were confident that they could identify these foods and take appropriate actions to avoid negative consequences. Food safety was typically assumed unless proven otherwise, and could become a conscious consideration or behavioural influence if evidence of unsafe practices were observed.

Attitudes to the food safety regulatory system

While the survey showed Victorians have little knowledge about the regulatory system and the role of government, they were generally confident that there were agencies at all levels of government, and that these agencies were maintaining high standards of food safety in Victoria.

While knowledge of local council involvement in food safety was partial, knowledge of State and Commonwealth Government food safety agencies and activities was virtually non-existent. While many consumers are familiar with the function of local council officers as health inspectors or food inspectors, few would refer to them as Environmental Health Officers. There was confusion as to the frequency, intent and nature of inspections performed by council officers on food businesses.

Suggestions were raised for improving confidence in the food safety regulatory system, including some form of indicator as to which food businesses were maintaining high safety standards, and a greater frequency and visibility of inspectors and inspections.

Fortification of food acceptable in certain circumstances

Fortification was seen as generally acceptable, with few concerns raised. Victorians were quick to point out that fortification was not an acceptable substitute for a balanced diet, and was more appropriate to people with specific dietary requirements, such as vegetarians and pregnant women.

Victorians were less approving of fortification of products that would not have otherwise contained the ingredient in question. For example, it was seen to be acceptable to fortify milk with calcium, or orange juice with vitamin C. However, the reverse, such as fortifying orange juice with calcium, was seen as less acceptable.

Concerns over genetic engineering

Most people considered that there were some genetically engineered food products currently for sale in Australia, either made locally or imported. Even for those who were not aware of genetically engineered products currently on the market, there was a general sentiment that genetically engineered products would be on the market in the future.

Many consumers confuse genetic engineering with other food-related processes, such as use of hormones, selective breeding and antibiotics in animals, and hybridization, chemical treatments and glasshouses in plants.

Some consumers surveyed were concerned that while genetic engineering might be safe now, the long term implications of consuming genetically engineered foods were not known.

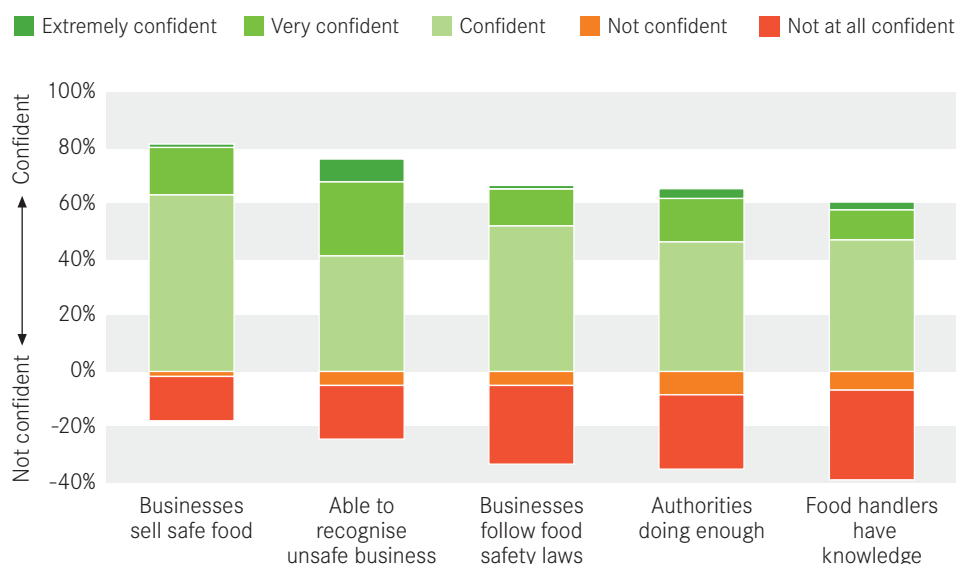
Food borne illness over the past year

Around one in four consumers surveyed claimed that they or someone in their household had experienced food borne illness in the last 12 months. Of those:

- about half of those claimed to have had moderate or severe symptoms
- 35% took days of work
- 29% sought medical attention
- 17% made a complaint
- 13% had food allergies or intolerances
- 4% had a pre-existing condition with similar symptoms.

A copy of the summary report can be downloaded from www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety/research/food_safety_knowledge.htm

Attitudes to food safety in businesses



Study identifies 'low confidence' foods

Many Victorians are concerned about the safety of particular food types as well as food safety practices such as storage and preparation.

In a study conducted by Campbell Research and Consulting in 2005, respondents were asked to identify types of food that caused them concern about food safety. Those surveyed claimed to easily identify types of food in which they feel less confident. These foods generally fell in to three broad categories:

- **Food stored for long periods**—including food served at buffets and in Bain Maries, salads, shaved meats, and roast chickens at delicatessens. Victorians held the firm belief that the more recent food had been prepared, the more confident they felt that it was safe.

- **White meats and seafood**—these were identified as being particularly risky as they were believed to be more prone to harbouring bacteria and other pathogens. Victorians reported that these foods either required particular care and attention when storing and preparing, or should be avoided.



- **Certain ethnic foods**—foods from some ethnicities are considered to be less safe than others. Middle-Eastern food (such as meat on rotating spits), Asian food (such as ducks hung in Asian restaurant windows) and Japanese food (such as sushi) attracted particular concern. Recent media reports of food borne illness incidents associated with these cuisines were frequently cited—'The Pork Role Incident' has become the ubiquitous example of why certain food types should be avoided.

Food labels and health claims—consumers' views

Most Victorians read food labels, particularly when selecting a product that they have not tried before. A study for the Food Safety Unit, conducted by Campbell Research and Consulting in 2005, found that consumers in Victoria read food labels as a way to confirm the safety of a certain product and to ascertain freshness by checking use by dates.

Some types of information on food labels were read more frequently than others. List of ingredients, sugar content, salt content and country of manufacture were read frequently, while information about trace ingredients was read with less frequency.

Whether or not a product was 'Australia Made', as indicated by food labels, was a factor in determining confidence for some Victorians, as these products were

seen to be made to a higher and safer standard than imported products.

Health claims on products raised few concerns for those people surveyed. Victorians largely viewed health claims as an advertising ploy and these claims seemed to exert little influence on purchasing decisions. Many Victorians were suspicious of the accuracy of many health claims, particularly if the claims were made by the manufacturer of the product in question.

There was a general concern that the Australian public is unaware of the amount of food that is genetically engineered. Consumers questioned the safety of genetically engineered products and whether product labels reflect the presence of genetically engineered ingredients.

Common factors across these 'low-confidence' foods and food businesses were:

- The notion that bacteria or other pathogens may have the chance to develop during prolonged display and storage. This was a particular issue for perceived 'high risk' foods such as meat.
- The storage of foods seemed to be a greater consideration than other food safety factors, such as hygiene.
- Visibility and knowledge play a key role in level of confidence. Victorians feel more confident if they can see food being prepared, know where the food has come from, and know how long it had been stored.

Monash awards golden plate to local eateries

As part of Food Safety Week, Monash City Council held its annual Golden Plate Awards Ceremony in November 2005.

The Golden Plate Awards were introduced by Monash Council in 2002 to encourage and recognise local food premises that were leading the trend towards better and safer standards of nutrition, hygiene and supportive environments.

Open to retail food outlets that serve food for immediate consumption, such as restaurants, hotels, cafes, sandwich bars and school canteens, the Awards showcase those premises that are achieving excellence. They also give consumers a way of choosing establishments that offer healthy food alternatives with a degree of confidence.

At the 2005 ceremony, Golden Plate Awards were given to 47 food premises within Monash. As a result, these premises are publicly recognised and acknowledged for providing a healthy environment, and can take advantage of business promotion opportunities offered by Council.

For more information about the Golden Plate Awards, contact Monash Council's Health Promotions Officer, Megan Kelly, on (03) 9518 3542.



Golden Plate Award winners.

Meals on Wheels video promotes safety

Meals on Wheels volunteers in Victoria's Hume Region now have access to a video that shows them how to maximise their own safety and the wellbeing of people receiving delivered meals, and how to transport and deliver food safely.

Launched during 2005, the 18 minute video 'Meals on Wheels—a delivery guide for volunteers' is believed to be the first of its kind.

Ms Karen Rumbold, chair of the Hume Region Food Services Group (HRFSG), highlighted the value of the video: 'Safety of our volunteers is paramount,' said Ms Rumbold, 'It is estimated that this video will reach over 2,260 current volunteers and have benefits for over 1,250 meal recipients across the Hume Region.'

The HRFSG comprises chefs, dietitians, volunteer coordinators, catering managers, Department of Human Services staff and other community care staff with an interest in Meals on Wheels and other food service initiatives. The Hume Region covers 12 local government areas.

The video is a joint project between Department of Human Services and the HRFSG. It was filmed in Wodonga and Wangaratta by The Occasion Studios Wangaratta and the overall project was coordinated by Project Partnerships, Mansfield.

For more information contact Chadia Bastin, Dietitian, Ovens and King Community Health Service, on (03) 5723 2062.

Understanding the Temperature Danger Zone

A comprehensive research project focusing on point-of-sale information about food safety, has found that consumers lack understanding of the temperature danger zone, how to safely thaw frozen foods and which foods are high-risk.

While eight in 10 Victorians believe that their knowledge of food safety practices is high, when pushed to provide details, most had limited knowledge. In fact, 58 per cent of respondents gave incorrect answers to food safety questions.

Food safety is not a top of mind issue for Victorians and they are unlikely to seek food safety information unless prompted. However, nearly all respondents believed that it would be useful to receive more information on food safety at retail food outlets, and many agreed that point-of-sale information is likely to influence them. The need for information to take home in a format that can be used as a reminder was also raised.

The study to assess consumer and food retailer attitudes towards point-of-sale information was conducted for the Department of Human Service Food Safety Unit in 2005 by marketing and communications specialists Socom Pty Ltd, in association with Roger James and Associates. The study also developed strategies to provide point-of-sale food safety information at retail outlets.

Responses from retailers reflect the competition in the food industry. While retailers generally support the concept of a point-of-sale information campaign, this would need to be fully resourced externally and promotional space in retail stores would need to be paid for. Issues highlighted by the retailers included the need for any point-of-sale campaign to focus on one element of food safety and the fact that the campaign would be competing with other commercially funded in-store product campaigns.

Key findings

Food safety knowledge

- Only 63% of consumers considered leaving frozen food to defrost on the bench or in the kitchen sink as unsafe.
- Only 65% of consumers considered storing cold foods at above 8°C as unsafe.
- 70% of consumers considered eating cooked rice or pasta that has been left at room temperature for more than six hours as unsafe.
- 80% of consumers considered eating cooked foods left at room temperature for more than five hours as unsafe.
- 89% of consumers considered eating smallgoods and cold meats left out of the refrigerator for more than four hours as unsafe.
- Over 84% of consumers purchased most of their fresh foods from supermarkets.

Food safety information

- As well as factual information, consumers require emotional triggers to cut through and provide a reason to register food safety messages and subsequently change behaviour.
- Consumers believe that food safety messages from the government body responsible for health is more credible than food safety messages from the food industry.
- No systematic differences emerged that would indicate the need for different communications tactics or targeting of people from different geographic, demographic or cultural communities.
- Retailers did not see the business value in providing food safety information to consumers and are unlikely to contribute towards a point-of-sale or other food safety promotional campaigns.

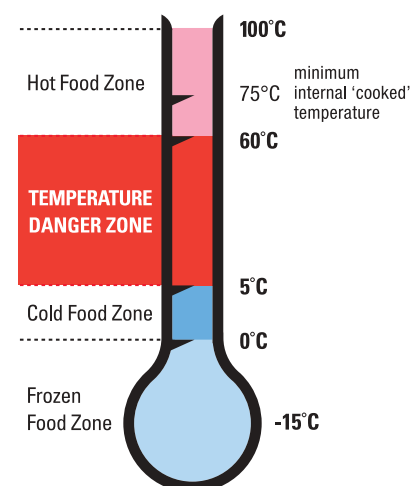
The study involved:

- eight focus groups with consumers from diverse socioeconomic and cultural groups across Melbourne and regional Victoria
- a telephone survey of consumers
- seven in-depth interviews with senior personnel from supermarket chains and fast food franchises
- 30 store visits and interviews with retail store proprietors in Melbourne and regional Victoria
- a workshop with senior supermarket chain executives to seek feedback on potential point-of-sale concepts.

- As retail staff are not trained to provide food safety advice to customers, considerable effort would be required to skill staff.

As a result of this study, the department will be considering alternative methods to disseminate food safety messages to consumers when shopping.

A copy of the study's summary report can be downloaded from www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety/research/food_safety_knowledge.htm



Food safety supervisor training

Every registered Victorian food business must have a food safety supervisor who:

- is able to supervise food handling in the food premises
- has the authority to supervise food handlers and ensure food handling is done safely
- will ensure that the food handlers know how to handle food safely.

The minimum competency standards required by a food safety supervisor depend on the type of business the food safety supervisor is working in.

There are a number of ways of demonstrating competency. The easiest way is to have a *statement of attainment* issued by a Registered Training Organisation (RTO).

The Food Safety Unit's website [www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety] provides an information sheet outlining the Food Safety Supervisor Requirement and lists the units of competency required to meet this requirement.

The Food Safety Unit receives a range of enquiries about food safety training including the availability of training in other languages. Most RTOs respond to demand when deciding whether to offer food safety training in another language. If you have a group of people with a need in a particular language, speak to your local RTO. Some RTOs will offer this training in your workplace or organise sessions at a time that fits with work schedules. Other RTOs regularly offer food safety training in other languages. Contact the short course department of RTOs to find out more about their courses.

The following table provides the minimum competency standards for different food sectors.

Food sector	Minimum Competency Standard
Food Processing Businesses such as manufacturers including flour mills, canneries, packers, bakers, and breweries	FDFCORFSY2A 'Implement the Food Safety Program and Procedures'
Retail Businesses such as supermarkets, convenience stores, grocers, and delicatessens	WRRLP6C 'Apply retail food safety practices'
Health Businesses such as hospitals	HLTFS7A 'Follow basic food safety practices' HLTFS 10A 'Apply and monitor food safety requirements' HLTFS9A 'Oversee the day-to-day implementation of food safety in the workplace'
Community Services Businesses such as childcare centres, nursing homes and hostels, Meals on Wheels	Use units from the health sector
Hospitality Businesses such as restaurants and hotels	THHGHS01B 'Follow workplace hygiene procedures' THHBCC11B 'Implement food safety procedures'
Transport and distribution Businesses such as warehouses	Use relevant units from other sectors

Vietnamese food safety supervisor training

Kangan Batman TAFE Food Industry Training Unit will conduct a Food Safety Supervisor course in Vietnamese over two evenings, 26 and 27 July 2006, from 5.30–9.30pm.

Designed in consultation with Environmental Health Officers, the Food Safety Supervisor course covers the requirements necessary to qualify as the nominated Food Safety Supervisor for a hospitality business such as a restaurant, cafe or take away food shop.

The course covers:

- basic hygiene and sanitation
- how to prepare your food safety plan
- how to compile and implement your food safety plan

This incorporates units THHGHS01B Follow workplace hygiene procedures and THHBCC11B Implement food safety procedures.

Where: Kangan Batman TAFE
44 Buckley St, Essendon

Cost: \$125

Enquiries: Ann O'Neil ph: 9279 2458
or email aoneil@kangan.edu.au

National food safety developments

Ministerial Council progresses standards and strategies

The Australia and New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council considered a range of policy issues and projects at its seventh meeting, held in October 2005. A snapshot is provided below.

Country of origin labelling

The new Country of Origin Food Labelling Standard for Australia has been gazetted and will come into full force for unpackaged fruit, vegetables, nuts and seafood products in six months' time, for unpackaged pork products in 12 months and for packaged goods in two years' time.

This standard will see comprehensive country of origin labelling on many products sold in Australia. It provides for broader requirements on unpackaged foods and increased requirements for packaged foods.

The new standard and a user guide are available on the FSANZ website at www.foodstandards.gov.au

Fortification of food with calcium

The Council agreed to permit the addition of calcium to fruit and vegetable juices, drinks, soups and savoury biscuits, and endorsed work currently underway by FSANZ, which includes a review to assess the impact of voluntary fortification, a process to align vitamin and mineral claims into the new health claims standard, and a workshop to consider a range of issues relevant to voluntary fortification.

FSANZ will now gazette this Standard. The Foods Standards Code can be viewed at: www.foodstandards.gov.au/foodstandardscode

Reviewing assessment and approval process

The Council has finalised its review of the FSANZ assessment and approval processes. To assist FSANZ to expedite food standards development and protect commercially valuable information, Ministers have made recommendations relating to:

- prescribing the form of an application, to reduce the number of times additional information has to be requested from applicants
- reforming the assessment and consultation processes
- reducing the number of rounds of reviews, 'stop the clock' provisions, and giving 'directions' to FSANZ
- the protection of commercially valuable information in relation to health claims.

The Ministerial Council will get regular updates on progress towards achieving the implementation of these recommendations, and the effectiveness of the changes in expediting the food regulator's processes.

Consistency in implementing and enforcing food regulation

Agreement was reached on a *Strategy for Consistent Implementation and Enforcement of Food Regulation*. This strategy provides a framework for collaborative work amongst Australian food safety regulators (and New Zealand regulators as appropriate) leading to a consistent approach to implementation of food regulations and standards.

Strategy objectives and implementation

The objective of the Strategy is to form a basis for enforcement agencies to work cooperatively to achieve a consistent approach to interpreting and enforcing regulations and standards across jurisdictions. It addresses the need for a more efficient food regulatory system that reduces overlap, duplication, uncertainty and inconsistency.

The strategy incorporates an agreed three year work plan which identifies the highest priority work required. As this is a rolling plan, each year work that needs to be completed will be added. The work plan identifies State/Territory agency sponsors for each program component. The sponsors will be responsible for strategic leadership, monitoring and facilitation of progress on the activities to ensure appropriate delivery of the desired outcomes.

A copy of the Strategy is available on the Food Regulation Secretariat website at www.foodsecretariat.health.gov.au then click on the links to 'The Implementation Sub-Committee (ISC)'



Kingston Council focuses on food transport

Over the past 18 months Kingston Council's Environmental Health Officers have been involved in an exercise to regularly intercept and check food transport vehicles to ensure compliance with food safety regulations.

This effort is part of a larger exercise involving Victoria Police, WorkSafe, VicRoads and the Sheriffs Department. Roadside checking points are set up to intercept commercial and other suspect vehicles. Each agency then performs its necessary checks.

On average, 25 food transport vehicles are checked each morning. As a result, some notices have been given out and other issues have been followed up with businesses and other councils.

The City of Kingston and its Environmental Health Department see this exercise as an opportunity to raise their public profile, create awareness through the food transport industry by highlighting the fact that they can and will be checked while in transit, and to monitor food coming and going from the Kingston municipality. Environmental Health Officers are able to put their powers under the Food Act to good use with the support and backup of the Victoria Police.

All agencies have described the exercise as a great success and it will continue to run on a regular basis.

For more information, contact Nicholas Lund, Environmental Health Officer, City of Kingston on (03) 9581 4750.



Food for thought—Meat substitution

A restaurant in northeast China has been raided and closed after listing stir-fried tiger meat on its menu—a dish that turned out to be donkey dressed with tiger urine. The restaurant, located near a Siberian Tiger Park, was offering a dish of tiger with hot peppers for \$130, and raw tiger meat at \$1,100 per kg. Diners could wash it down with a bottle of wine pickled with (alleged) tiger bone.

Source: DHS News Notes, 13 October, 2005

Legal bites

Acland Street café fined \$40,000

A well-established café in Acland Street, St Kilda, has been fined over \$40,000 for unhygienic food practices.

In September, the Magistrates' Court heard 13 charges against the café's former proprietor. The charges, brought by the City of Port Phillip, related to offences under the *Food Act 1984* and Australian Food Safety Standards.

Five inspections conducted by council Environmental Health Officers at the premises between 9 March and 23 August 2005 found a failure to:

- keep the premises in a clean and sanitary condition
- adequately protect the food from contamination
- prevent an infestation of cockroaches.

The café also neglected to implement a Food Safety Program.

Notices were issued to the former proprietor who, despite several written and verbal warnings, failed to comply.

The Magistrate found the charges proven with conviction and fined the former proprietor \$35,000 and his company a further \$5,000. He also ordered the former proprietor to pay the agreed costs of \$3,400.

Café gets burnt on food safety breaches

In 2004 and early 2005, Environmental Health Officers conducted six inspections and seized most of the food at a Fitzroy Street café in St Kilda, due to concerns for public safety.

As a result, 16 charges were brought against the proprietor. In April 2005, the Fitzroy Street café was prosecuted in the Magistrates' Court for offences under the *Food Act 1984* and breaches of the Australian Food Safety Standards.

Charges related to a failure to:

- keep the premises in a clean and sanitary condition
- maintain foods under temperature control
- adequately protect food from contamination
- adequately comply with notices issued by Port Phillip Council Environmental Health Officers.

The proprietor was fined \$10,000 and ordered to pay the council's \$1,550 legal costs.

In handing down his verdict, the Magistrate emphasised that it was that the responsibility of proprietors to ensure that Food Safety Programs in cafés and restaurants were satisfactorily implemented. It appeared that the proprietor was putting the bottom line above the hygiene and safety of his customers.

Sushi bar fined for unhygienic practices

Despite several written and verbal warnings, a sushi bar owner in St Kilda failed to address unhygienic food practices at his premises and was subsequently fined a total of \$6,400.

The eight charges brought by the City of Port Phillip against the former proprietor were heard in the Magistrates Court.

Council Environmental Health Officers had inspected the sushi bar nine times between May 2004 and March 2005. On each occasion, council inspectors found that the proprietor failed to:

- keep the premises in a clean and sanitary condition
- clean benches and other surfaces and didn't have grade sanitiser to sterilise them
- maintain the fridge at the appropriate temperature
- adequately protect the food from contamination.

The former proprietor failed to comply with warnings and, as a result, was prosecuted for breaches of the *Food Act 1984* and Australian Food Safety Standards.

A recent inspection of the sushi bar revealed some areas still required attention and, while the former proprietor no longer owns the business, inspectors will continue to monitor standards at the sushi bar.

Food for thought—Sweet tears

British shops now sell an onion sweet enough to be eaten like an apple. The latest Lincolnshire-grown Supasweet onion crop is Britain's mildest-ever. It registers 1.5 to 2 on the Pyruvate scale of pungency and flavour in garlic and onions. This compares to 7 out of 10 for a standard brown onion. Soil type, rain and sunlight affect the vegetable's taste.

Source: DHS News Notes, 28 July, 2005

Food safety resources

Auditors Handbook, 2nd edition

The *Food safety auditor's handbook (2nd edition)*, released in September 2005, provides details on the roles and responsibilities of the Department of Human Services, local councils and auditors involved with auditing of food premises under the Victorian Food Act. The handbook includes processes for applying to become a Food Safety Auditor and for notifying and reporting non-conformances in food premises. A range of forms are included to assist food safety auditors conduct audits. The handbook can be downloaded from the Food Safety Unit's website at: www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety/auditing.htm

Food safety in emergency situations

A series of factsheets and checklists have been produced to provide advice on food safety in emergency situations, such as during bushfires and floods. The factsheets cover:

- Donating food to emergency services
- Emergency catering food handlers checklist
- Emergency catering supervisors checklist
- Food safety and power failure
- Power failure food storage checklist.

The factsheets can be downloaded from www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety/keeping.htm



Website updates

Food poisoning and how to prevent it

The factsheet *Food poisoning and how to prevent it*, which explains what food poisoning is, why it happens and some ways to prevent it, was updated in November 2005. The updated factsheet can be downloaded from www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety/keeping.htm

Safe food storage and display

Also updated in November 2005, the *Food storage and display in food business* factsheet provides guidelines and tips on preventing food poisoning and the appropriate storage and display of food. The factsheet can be downloaded from www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety/keeping.htm

Hygienic food preparation and handling

This factsheet provides food handling guidelines and tips for people working with food in businesses and volunteer organisations. Updated in November 2005, the *Hygienic food preparation and handling in food business* factsheet can be downloaded from www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety/keeping.htm

Personal hygiene for people working with food

This recently updated factsheet provides advice and tips on preventing food poisoning by practising good personal hygiene when preparing food. The *Personal hygiene for people working with food* factsheet can be downloaded from www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety/keeping.htm

Your contributions

Victorian Food Safety News is a journal focusing on news in the food and food safety industry. We welcome your input. If you have any comments or stories of interest, please contact Danielle Walker on 1300 364 352 or email: Danielle.Walker@dhs.vic.gov.au.

Please note that articles and information provided may be edited.

2006 Premier's Food Victoria Awards



The Premier's Food Victoria Awards recognise excellence in Victoria's food processing industry in the areas of export, marketing and innovation.

Along with receiving a framed glass award, winners have the opportunity to use the award in marketing and promotions and receive exposure through media coverage including articles in *Taste of Victoria* and the *Food Victoria* website. Finalists in this year's awards will also be showcased at *Fine Foods Australia—Melbourne 2006*.

This year's Award is open to organisations that are:

- food or beverage processors or manufacturers
- food or beverage research institutes or company research divisions that focus on creating new or improving existing food products.

Eligible organisations need to demonstrate that:

- the product they produce is post farm-gate
- they have a manufacturing, packing, laboratory or processing asset in Victoria that has been in operation for at least 24 months as of 31 January 2006

- they have good work safety practices (businesses with a significant breach of the law will not be eligible)
- they have sound financial, food safety and environmental practices.

There is no entry fee and public and private organisations are eligible to enter.

Applications are assessed before a judging panel chosen for each category. The judges are drawn from the public and private sectors and have extensive national, international, small business and regional business experience. A brief and confidential background check is undertaken on the finalists' food safety, workplace safety, financial and environmental history.

Applications close at 4.00 pm on Wednesday, 31 May 2006.

For information about the 2006 Premier's Food Victoria Awards and how to enter, visit www.food.vic.gov.au or contact Regional Development Victoria on (03) 9651 9033 or email: Kate.Cini@rdv.vic.gov.au

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