



### Joint industry funded research on botulism risks associated with meat

The guidelines issued in June 2017 by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) on the safety and shelf life of vacuum packed (VP) and modified atmosphere packaged (MAP) chilled foods with respect to non-proteolytic *Clostridium botulinum* state that unless there are controlling factors to prevent the growth of the organism such as pH, salt content and water activity, then a shelf life of less than 10 days should be applied. Traditionally the UK meat industry has applied a much longer shelf life to VP and MAP fresh meat, and this FSA guidance has caused some debate as to what shelf life should be applied to these products.

A joint industry funded research project has conducted a risk based assessment on this, in addition to conducting challenge tests on beef, lamb and pork, and the results have recently been published.

The report started with a survey of all available literature and this failed to uncover any cases of botulism associated with fresh chilled VP or MAP meat.

Data provided by industry members of the project consortium indicated that UK industry applies a maximum chilled retail pack shelf life at 3°C to 8°C of up to 23 days for beef, 27 days for lamb, and 18 days for pork. Using a risk assessment approach, it was established that the current industry practice provides a high level of protection with respect to non-proteolytic *Clostridium botulinum*, and the report stated that there is no evidence that currently-applied UK shelf lives combined with current production standards are unsafe. The challenge test study demonstrated that samples of beef, lamb and pork inoculated with spores of non-proteolytic *C. botulinum* and incubated at 8°C, did not become toxic to day 50 for beef, day 35 for lamb, or day 25 for pork.

The report concluded that the ability not to be constrained by a 10-day shelf-life, as indicated in present FSA (2017) guidelines, and the freedom to adopt a shelf-life greater than 10 days provides significant benefits, and removes a technical barrier to trade and furthermore will result in lower food wastage.

### FSA Campylobacter survey latest results

The top nine retailers across the UK have published their latest testing results on Campylobacter contamination in UK-produced fresh whole chickens (covering samples tested from October to December 2018).

The latest figures show that on average, across the major retailers, 3.1% of chickens tested positive for the highest level of contamination (more than 1,000 cfu/g of Campylobacter), which is consistent with the levels recorded for the last 12 months.

### Increase in Salmonella positive Chicken flocks in Denmark

Denmark found Salmonella in 2.7 percent of chicken flocks that lay eggs last year which is above the limit set by the European Commission to qualify for special conditions.

The Danish Veterinary and Food Administration found Salmonella in 12 out of 454 tested chicken flocks that supply eggs to consumers in 2018. This compares to three positive flocks out of 446 in 2017 and one out of 426 in 2016. Salmonella was not found in tested flocks in 2015.

A common source for the increase has not been revealed but contributing factors may include insufficient biosecurity at some producers.

### Egg recall in Australia due to Salmonella contamination

Continuing on the chicken based theme, authorities in Australia are investigating a Salmonella outbreak linked to the consumption of eggs.

Confirmed cases have been reported in multiple Australian states which has led to the recall of shell eggs from several producers. Up to 130 people have been diagnosed with Salmonella enteritidis in New South Wales and the outbreak strain has also been detected in egg hatcheries in the region.

## Year 3 reports published by FSA on AMR and Campylobacter in poultry

The Food Standards Agency have published the Year 3 results of a survey to identify the proportion of Campylobacter isolated from the FSA's UK retail chicken survey that were resistant to a range of antimicrobial agents. The survey tested a subset of the Campylobacter isolates (Campylobacter jejuni and Campylobacter coli strains) from Year 3 of the UK retail chicken survey for Anti-Microbial Resistance (AMR).

Overall, the proportions of AMR Campylobacter isolates found in this study were similar to those reported in the previous survey year (July 2015 to July 2016), although the percentage of C. coli isolates with resistance to erythromycin was lower. Multi-drug resistance was similar to that found in the previous survey years.

The FSA has also published the Year 3 report for the UK retail chicken survey. This report collates the data for August 2016-July 2017 which has previously been published quarterly.

Compared to previous years of the retail survey, the report shows that the average proportion of fresh, whole chicken at retail sale in the UK that are contaminated with a high level of Campylobacter decreased considerably for this period.

## Food Standards Agency announce post Brexit plans

During this month's board meeting the FSA has confirmed that it has made the necessary preparations for maintaining protection for public health. The Board confirmed that the FSA had delivered, a full and complete replacement regulatory regime for food and feed safety, and that the department is prepared for the immediate demands of EU Exit.

However this statement came days after the Minister for Public Health and Primary Care Steve Brine MP, confirmed the U.K. would not be able to vote in the Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed or have access to the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) after the U.K.'s exit from the European Union later this month.

## An estimation of the financial cost of the South African Listeriosis outbreak

Putting aside the devastating and tragic personal consequences of last year's South African Listeriosis outbreak which affected 1,060 individuals and caused 216 fatalities, a recent article has attempted to put a financial figure on the costs in terms of victim compensation, medical treatment and loss of productivity of the affected people. The article acknowledges that no human life can be adequately compensated for in financial estimates alone, but it nevertheless calculated that the outbreak has so far cost a figure in the region of 500,000,000 US Dollars. This does not include the current or future medical costs to cover the long term treatment of the affected victims.

## Guidance on raw milk cheese in Scotland challenged by artisan manufacturers

Following on from last month's STEC position statement made by Food Standards Scotland, the Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland (REHIS) has endorsed guidance on the production of cheese from unpasteurised milk.

The guidance was produced by the Scottish Food Enforcement Liaison Committee's Joint Specialist Cheese and Risky Foods Short-Life working group and is for use during inspection and enforcement of food safety controls applied by cheesemakers producing cheese made from unpasteurised milk. It is focused on controlling microbiological risks, specifically Shiga toxin-producing E. coli (STEC) including E. coli O157 and applies to all sites producing cheese from unpasteurised milk from cows, goats, sheep, and buffalo.

However, representatives from the Specialist Cheesemakers Association (SCA) have recently met with Food Standards Scotland and the Scottish Food Enforcement Liaison Committee and it has been announced that the SCA have raised funds to launch a judicial review to challenge the government guidance.

## Rare Salmonella serotype (Salmonella agbeni) causes an outbreak in Norway

A Salmonella outbreak in Norway has expanded with 30 people now potentially affected.

The Norwegian Institute of Public Health (Folkehelseinstituttet) said the patients, aged between 2 and 91 years old, became ill in January and February.

Salmonella agbeni has infected 21 people with another 9 suspected cases. As yet, no food has been confirmed as the source of the outbreak but officials at the Norwegian Institute of Public Health say that several of the affected people had eaten a dry exotic fruit mix. Product samples have been sent for analysis, but as yet no results are available.

## 20<sup>th</sup> Listeria species identified

During a routine screening of food samples in Thailand, a phylogenetic and phenotypically unique Listeria species has been identified bringing the number of known Listeria species to 20. The proposed name for the new species is Listeria thailandiensis.