

Campylobacter Risk Management Strategy

Update – March 2007

Overview

NZFSA's *Campylobacter* risk Management Strategy is progressing well, with only a few areas threatening to affect the timetable. This update covers the work that is being done on possible effective interventions at all steps along the farm-to-fork food chain. NZFSA's approach is in line with that being taken internationally to address the problem of the presence of *Campylobacter* in poultry, and aims to produce the greatest reductions in bacteria numbers as early as possible in the food chain (that is, as close to the farm as is practical and effective), as well as make further reductions at as many other points as are also practical and effective.

The strategy is also pragmatic and recognises that, because *Campylobacter* is a natural part of the gut bacteria of poultry that this hazard is very unlikely to be reduced to zero. For this reason, consumer information will always be a key element of poultry food safety, just as it is with many other foods.

One setback

Work is continuing as planned (with a few exceptions). The first of these involves industry-led industrial-scale trials of *Campylobacter* decontamination processes in an operational poultry processing premises. Due to a fire at the original site, further trial work at this premises has been delayed until later in 2007. NZFSA is in discussion with a number of poultry companies to look at other intervention options being trialled and has called for data to be submitted for consideration. NZFSA also is seeking alternative ways of getting valid data should further delays eventuate.

Majority of work on track

Major progress has been made, with the cooperation of the poultry industry, in the implementation of a data collection process for monitoring of the prevalence of *Campylobacter* in flocks and on carcasses. This will assist in realising key outcomes as per section 4.1.1.3 of the Strategy. The target for the system to begin collecting data is the end of March.

NZFSA, Massey University and MidCentral Health's work on determining the actual (rather than suspected) source of infection in order to enhance surveillance is on track. This work

involves an intensive analysis of current cases, as soon after diagnosis as possible, in Manawatu. This will allow in-depth investigation of the precise situation that is likely to have been the cause of the foodborne illness (for example, cross-contamination, under-cooking, etc).

Evaluation of packaging has begun. The results will provide an assessment of this hazard, and assist the evaluation of the feasibility of controls using leak-proof packaging, decontamination of the external surfaces of packages, and handling of packaging during food preparation.

NZFSA research work continues, with the first version of an internationally peer-reviewed risk model being finalised. This model will assist in evaluating the likely relative effect of different interventions, under a given set of conditions.

Work on international industry best-practice on farms and in processing is on-track, with these practices identified and determination of effectiveness underway. Work has started on Codes of Practices to describe appropriate control measures within these two parts of the food chain.

A study is underway to determine the level and impact of cross-contamination during handling in consumer environments.

A household study on poultry temperature profiles during freezing and thawing in the domestic environment is near completion, and studies on the degree of survival of *Campylobacter* after freezing are about to begin.

NZFSA is also looking at what can be done to better inform consumers of the risk poultry may pose from the presence of *Campylobacter*, with labelling being one of the key options being considered.

International leadership

NZFSA has been asked by the Joint World Health Organization/Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO/WHO) Codex Alimentarius Commission to lead, in cooperation with Sweden, the development of a new international 'Code of Hygienic Practice for *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* in Young Chickens (Broilers) and Chicken Meat'. About 30 countries, including Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Denmark, European Community, Finland, France, Ghana, Hungary, India, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Ireland, Netherlands, Peru, Thailand, United Kingdom, United States, FAO, WHO, ALA, and ICMSF have volunteered to be part of the working group. While not part of the 'NZFSA *Campylobacter* Risk Management Strategy', this international cooperation will greatly benefit New Zealand's domestic work in this area.

