

Food for Thought

Issue 2 - October 2008



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Welcome

We hope you enjoy the second issue of the Food for Thought newsletter. This issue will feature the events surrounding and actions of the Food Unit over the past three months and the most current national activities relating to food. In this months newsletter you will find topical information on; recent food related awards; the Food Unit seminars held on the 11th & 18th September; The Obesity Forum; and what's new in the Food Unit. We look forward to bringing you the next issue in the New Year.

Food Contamination - Melamine in China

In mid September 2008 Chinese health officials advised that melamine had been found in baby formula and in other Chinese dairy products. The contaminated milk powder may be linked to kidney problems found in Chinese infants and a number of infant deaths.

Melamine is used in the plastics industry and should not be used in food. It is an organic base chemical most commonly found in the form of white crystals which are rich in nitrogen. Levels of melamine may be present in low levels in foods due to leaching from food-grade contact materials, such as plastic packaging, but these levels are not a health concern. Melamine has allegedly been added to milk in China. The milk containing melamine has water added to increase its volume and tests higher in protein due to its elevated nitrogen content.

The Department of Health has been working closely with FSANZ, other Australian jurisdictions,

New Zealand and Local Governments to address the potential distribution of melamine contaminated milk and milk products originating from China

Australian jurisdictions are testing a targeted range of other products from China containing dairy products as a minor ingredient. More than 120 products have been tested to date including White Rabbit lollies pictured below.



White Rabbit Lollies

For further information see:

http://www.public.health.wa.gov.au/2/824/2/food_for_thought/pm

OR

www.foodstandards.com.au

OR

www.who.int/foodsafety/en

Food Unit Seminars



Emerging Issues in Nutrition

10 things you need to know about obesity

It is generally agreed that food is a key to health. Poor nutrition, foodborne disease and lack of secure access to good food contribute to disease and death. Conversely, better diets, food safety and food security will reduce or prevent suffering to individuals and societies; help cut health care systems costs; and bring social and economic benefits.

For further information see:

http://www.public.health.wa.gov.au/2/824/2/food_for_though.pm
OR

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Food Surveillance Network

The Food Surveillance Network oversees surveys undertaken as part of the Coordinated Food Survey Plan, including:

- 2007 National Food Handling Survey
- Prevalence of Salmonella and Campylobacter along the poultry meat chain
- Australian Total Diet Studies

For further information see:

http://www.public.health.wa.gov.au/2/824/2/food_for_though.pm
OR

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Communication Strategy

A communication strategy for the Food Unit moves attention away from communication **products** (leaflets, booklets, videos, workshops, events) and brings attention to communication **processes** (how interacting, networking, involving, participating, encouraging, enhancing, empowering can best be achieved).

For further information see:

http://www.public.health.wa.gov.au/2/824/2/food_for_though.pm
OR

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The Food Act 2008 - Implementation Update

Since July, the food unit has been kept very busy with a large number of tasks necessary to ensure successful implementation of the Food Act. To date these include:

- Developing the Food Act implementation strategy
- Distributing Food Unit Notices
- Information sessions
- Drafting of new food regulations to support the Food Act
- Briefings to the new Health Minister
- Development of the Food Unit's Communication Strategy
- Drafting of a Compliance and Enforcement Policy
- Updating of the Food Unit's webpage
- Drafting of policy statements on a number of key issues (i.e home based food businesses, risk profiling of food businesses)

In addition, the Food Unit has been consulting with key stakeholders and has plans to develop a Food Act working group with representatives from local government and WALGA.

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Healthy Dining for Kids

Gold Plate Awards for 2008- New criteria for children's menus



Dr Tarun Weeramanthri presenting the 'Excellence in Health Award to' Scusi Restaurant – Halls Head

The Excellence in Health Gold Plate Award was established in 1992 as a joint initiative of the Catering Institute of Australia (WA) and the Department of Health WA (DOH). The DOH sponsors this award which aims to raise standards and awareness in the food service industry to providing nutritious and safe food in their establishments. All restaurants that enter the Gold Plate Awards in any of the 29 categories are automatically assessed against these standards.

The Excellence in Health Award recognizes restaurants which offer a complete dining experience of healthy food choices, smoke-free dining areas complementing the dining ambience, excellent standards of food hygiene and cleanliness and a choice of non-alcoholic and low-alcoholic drinks to encourage socially responsible alcohol consumption for adults.

For the first time this year the DOH sponsored the **Family Dining Gold Plate Award**, which contains specific criteria to address children's menus. The aim is to encourage the industry to provide healthier menus for children and to support parents and children in selecting healthier meals when eating out.

The Food Unit developed specific nutrition criteria for the **Family Dining Gold Plate Award** to encourage restaurants and cafes to provide healthier menus for children. The criteria provide incentives for establishments to:

- Provide a variety of salad or vegetables with meals (eg half the plate full of colour)
- Provide healthy drinks (eg water and milk based drinks)
- Avoid high fat cooking methods (eg less deep fried foods)

- Provide appropriate portion sizes for children
- Provide children's meals at a reasonable cost
- Provide fruit based desserts
- Develop innovative and suitable presentation methods of children's meals

Changing children's eating habits when eating out by providing appropriate serving sizes, interesting, tasty and healthier meals will improve the health of children in Western Australia. We encourage all food establishments to make these important changes.

WA Chef of the Year 2008

On the 19th of September 2008 the Chef of the year, held in Forrest Place, Perth City was announced on the final day of the competition.

The 22 entrants showed their talents and skills in the competition which was run over a week. In the traditional form of Black Box cooking the ingredients were unknown until the event and on the day the competitors proceeded to produce entrée, main and dessert dishes. The standard was extremely high this year providing the judges with a difficult task.



The winner for the second year in a row, Stephen Clarke (pictured above) – Clarkes of North beach Restaurant was presented with the Award by Peter Cooper General Manager of Fresh Ideas Market City.

As a sponsor of this event the Department of Health would like to congratulate Stephen and all other competitors. We can all look forward to tasting some of the culinary delights in our restaurants in WA.

For further information: on the Gold Plate Awards and WA Chef of the Year visit www.cateringinstitute.com.au
OR

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Obesity: Challenges and Opportunities

Overweight and obese people increase their risk of type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, stroke, and high blood pressure, a range of cancers, musculoskeletal disorders and psychological problems such as depression.

On Thursday the 21st August, a Forum was held at Curtin University by the Public Health Advocacy Institute of Western Australia. The Forum provided opportunities for those in the health profession to consult and discuss the roles and prevention against obesity.

The Forum consisted of presentations from expert facilitators in various areas with the Hon Nicola Roxon Federal Minister for Health and Ageing presenting a political view of challenges and opportunities and hopes to move forward in reducing the occurrence of obesity.

The roles of parents, families, communities, education, health services, government, the food sector, and non-government and community organizations, transport, urban design, sport and recreation, advertising, marketing and selling to children were all addressed.

The presentations were followed by workshops from a wide range of health professional, with each of the facilitators convening, at the end of day; recommendations were presented to the State and Commonwealth Government. With common themes arising across all recommendations from each workshop watch this space to see how the governments of Australia decide to tackle this weighty issue.



Dr Tarun Weeramanthri & Professor Mike Daube at the Forum

Fresh Ideas: Canning Vale Markets

On Friday the 15th August the new facilities for Fresh Ideas was launched by the Hon. Kim Chance, Minister for Agriculture and Food.

The facility contains a state of the art kitchen and visual technological equipment allowing its audience to participate in the cooking experience.

The Perth Market Authority is offering the venue for hire to facilitate cooking demonstrations, training and the promotion of fresh local produce.

Three final year students from Swan Tafe attended the opening and demonstrated their creativity in garnishing using fruit and vegetables.



For further information: on the Fresh Ideas venue contact Peter Cooper at Perth Market Authority on 0424 443 732.

City of Swan's Global Award

The City of Swan Environmental Health team have won an award at the 'SAI Global 2008 Australian Business Excellence Awards', for its 'Food Safety Risk Management Program'.

The ABE Awards describe themselves as 'Australia's premier business excellence awards' and consisted of an expert panel review of the City's program. The award was formally announced in Sydney and enables the City the right to display the ABE logo for 12 months.

The award provides a fitting recognition of the work of all City staff past and present, and especially recognises the risk management approach and unique role of an independent contractor in the risk assessment component of the program.

The theme for this year's award was 'sustaining excellence,' and the award particularly recognised the City's 8 year journey to date. This started from the day when the section realised the current system wasn't working and staff morale was low from continuing to battle to complete 'food premises inspections' all month and not much else, to the team workshopping the genesis of an idea to contract-out part of the program whilst also adopting risk management as a tool to further support the approach.

Congratulations to the team at City of Swan, past and present.

What's New?

Important food regulation drivers in Australia

Food safety issues such as foodborne illness have always been key drivers of food regulation. However, new contemporary food safety issues may be emerging. Food safety issues such as; a wider distribution of food due to globalisation, new innovative food technologies and processing methods, climate change and the emergence of antimicrobial drug-resistant bacteria and a number of viruses not previously recognised are now being assessed by FSANZ.

For more information see:

http://www.public.health.wa.gov.au/2/824/2/food_for_thought.pm

Dairy Industry Update

The Primary Production and Processing Standard for Dairy, requiring food safety plans for dairy farmers, milk transporters and processing businesses, became effective from 5 October 2008. A large proportion of the dairy industry has previously implemented a HACCP based food safety program as part of existing AQIS (export) or dairy processor requirements. Ongoing work to support and ensure compliance with the new standards is occurring.

For further information see:

http://www.public.health.wa.gov.au/2/824/2/food_for_thought.pm

Meet the Team - Belinda Lang

Belinda Lang is new to the Food Unit and is working for the policy team in the role of Senior Scientific Officer. Belinda's background is in Environmental Health; her last role was with the Environmental Health team at the City of Mandurah and prior to that she worked at a number of Councils in both metropolitan and regional Victoria as an Environmental Health Officer.

Food Unit Notices

The Food Unit is now making all Food Unit Notices available on the Public Health website. For the most current news visit:

http://www.public.health.wa.gov.au/2/879/2/food_unit_notice.pm

For Your Diary

- **The Department of Health Food Advisory Forum** in February 2009. This forum will comprise of helpful workshops with professionals from the UK. It will be focused around front of pack labelling, traffic light systems, health claims (consumers) and advocacy and what planning and implementation roles you can play at your level. Further details will be released closer to the date.
- **National Food Safety Week 2008** on 10-16 November 2008, will focus on food safety in light of Australians' spirit in adopting a wide array of foods in their diets, and new cooking techniques which are becoming mainstream. <http://www.foodsafety.asn.au/foodsafetyweek/nationalfoodsafetywe3947.cfm>

Interesting Websites

- **Food Magazine:**
Australia's leading food and beverage website for local, national and international news. <http://www.foodmag.com.au/>
- **Sustain Local Alliance:**
Check out this website for ideas on local government policies to improve nutrition and physical activity. <http://www.preventioninstitute.org/sa/policies/index.php>
- **Public Health:**
The Food Unit has recently launched its own section on the new Public Health website of the most up-to-date information regarding the Food Unit. <http://www.public.health.wa.gov.au/1/50/2/food.pm>

For food safety inquiries please contact the Food Unit on:

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Thoughts, comments and topic suggestions are also welcomed.