

# Food for Thought

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## Introduction

The Food Unit would like to welcome you to the sixth issue of the Food for Thought newsletter.

We hope you enjoy the first publication for 2010 which includes information of recent food poisoning outbreaks, emerging issues, legislative updates and past and upcoming events.

## Growing food a growing problem?



There has been a recent interest in community and school gardens and whether the *Food Act 2008* (the Act) applies to these activities.

Gardens; such as vegetable and herb gardens which are run on a volunteer basis and where no money is exchanged (the primary purpose is a community or educational activity) are not registrable or notifiable under the Act. This is because the activity does not include the sale of food to the public.

If the produce is sold at a school or community fair as a fundraiser however, then this activity would be notifiable.

Although the activity is not covered under the provisions of the Act, owners and local governments should consider:

- The application of pesticides, insecticides, fungicides etc in regards to withholding periods and the accessibility of the garden to the general public;
- General safe food handling practices such as visible dirt being brushed off before entering a food preparation area and produce thoroughly washed before consumption;
- General public liability; and,
- Council liability if the garden is on Council owned land.

## Food Bourne Outbreaks

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### Food Safety Eggsplained



WA Health recently stressed the importance of correct food safety techniques following a significant increase in the number of Salmonella infections in Western Australia since October 2009. The Salmonella infections were linked to the consumption of improperly handled uncooked or lightly cooked egg products.

The recent outbreak investigations have highlighted the need for accurate information about the practices involved in, and predominance of, the onsite production of egg based sauces by food businesses to facilitate a greater understanding of the food safety risks. In order to collect this information, the Food Unit intends to undertake a survey of egg based sauces made on-site at food businesses.

A state wide survey titled *Survey of Egg Based Sauces and Salmonella* coordinated by the Western Australian Food Monitoring Program will be conducted between April and June 2010. This survey will aim to produce robust data on the microbiological quality of egg based sauces and spreads containing pasteurised and unpasteurised eggs. The information and data collected will be used to evaluate whether products containing raw eggs are a significant source of Salmonella contamination and whether the main cause of contamination is from preparation practices.

To prepare and cook eggs safely:

- Always wash your hands before and after handling eggs;
- NEVER use cracked or dirty eggs even if you are planning to cook them thoroughly;
- Refrigerate cooked eggs and dishes containing eggs which are not eaten immediately; and,
- Take care not to splash raw eggs onto other food, surfaces or utensils.

The proper understanding of risks associated with the use and production of eggs products was stressed to consumers and food businesses through recent documents placed on the Public Health website

[www.public.health.wa.gov.au/1/50/2/food.pm](http://www.public.health.wa.gov.au/1/50/2/food.pm)

The Food Unit also recently produced a new Egg Safety brochure which will be placed onto the website shortly

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### Tour bus

A recent suspected toxin mediated food poisoning outbreak was linked to the consumption of a lunch meal served to tourists on a bus tour. The lunch meal was obtained in Perth the night prior to the tour and served for lunch after being held in conditions that would have been unable to maintain the food at a temperature of <math><5^{\circ}\text{C}</math>.

Investigation revealed that the most likely contributing factor to the outbreak was inappropriate storage of food. Enforcement Agencies should consider including tour operators in their notification system, to determine whether the activities they are performing are covered under the provisions of the Act.

## Food Unit Update

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### Policies and Guidelines

The Food Unit continues to develop policies and guidelines for the implementation of the Act. The following publications have been uploaded onto the Public Health Website:

[www.public.health.wa.gov.au/1/50/2/food.pm](http://www.public.health.wa.gov.au/1/50/2/food.pm)

- *Food Act 2008* Fact Sheet 2: Registration of a food business
- *Food Act 2008* Fact Sheet 3: Exempted Food Businesses
- *Food Act 2008* Fact Sheet 4: Authorised Officers
- WA Food Regulation: DOH Compliance and Enforcement Policy
- WA Food Regulation: Compliance and Enforcement Guideline
- WA Food Regulation: Publication of Names of Offenders Policy
- Guideline on the Appointment of Authorised Officers
- Guideline on the Appointment of Authorised Officers - Designated Officers Only
- The Publication of Names of Offenders webpage has been updated to reflect the compliance with the Act, *Food Regulations 2009* and *Food Standards Code*

### WA Regulatory Food Safety Auditor Framework

WA Health is currently developing the WA Regulatory Food Safety Auditor Framework (Framework) in association with relevant stakeholders.

The Framework will be the management system for the approval of auditors for the purposes of the Act. The approval of auditors is outlined in Part 8 of the Act.

The Framework is being developed in alignment with the National Regulatory Food Safety Auditor Guideline to ensure it is consistent with others states.

### National Indigenous Food Security Strategy

In July 2009, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) requested the development of a National Strategy for Food Security in Remote Indigenous Communities. Environmental Health Directorate staff (Dr Christina Pollard (Food Unit), Matthew Lester and Pernilla Ellies (Science and Policy Unit)) working with the Department of Indigenous Affairs (DIA) guided the development of Food Security in Remote Indigenous Communities Strategy.

On December 8, 2009, COAG agreed to the National Strategy for Food Security in Remote Indigenous Communities and to trialling standards and options for the National Quality Improvement Scheme (QIAS) in 10 remote Indigenous communities, commencing by March 2010. Up to eight of those stores will be in Western Australia.

For more information visit:

[http://www.coag.gov.au/coag\\_meeting\\_outcomes/2009-07-02/docs/20090702\\_communique.pdf](http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-07-02/docs/20090702_communique.pdf)

### Food Act 2008 Implementation

The Food Unit is in the next phase of raising awareness on the implementation of the Act with local government. This will be in the form of interactive workshops which will focus on the risk management aspects for successful implementation of WA food legislation. Compliance and enforcement will feature in a series of events being rolled out at the end of May and June.

### Reporting Requirements

The Food Unit is drafting the reporting requirements for enforcement agencies under Section 121 of the Act. Once agreed, the draft will be available on the Public Health Website for comment. The timeframe for reporting by local government to the DOH is December 2010.

## Food Monitoring and Surveillance

### Poultry Microbiological Survey



As part of the Western Australian Food Monitoring Program, the Food Unit participated in a national survey to determine the baseline Prevalence and Concentration of Salmonella and Campylobacter in Chicken Meat on-farm and at primary processing which was coordinated by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ).

As this survey was testing live chickens and raw chicken carcasses, it was expected to find Salmonella and Campylobacter in these products and the results showed that the levels in Australia were not dissimilar to those found in many other poultry producing countries.

Overall, the results indicate that a large percentage of the live chickens entering the processing plants are infected with Campylobacter (84%) and to a much lesser extent, Salmonella (13% with 7.5% positive for pathogenic types).

Chicken carcass samples taken at the end of the slaughtering process gave a similar prevalence for Campylobacter (84%). However, the samples tested were higher for the prevalence of *Salmonella* (37% with 22% positive for pathogenic types). The levels of *Campylobacter* on the carcass were reasonably high and for *Salmonella*, low.

This survey will be repeated after the implementation of the Primary Production and Processing Standard for Poultry Meat, to determine whether the requirements have been successful in lowering the amount of Salmonella and Campylobacter in raw chicken. It is anticipated that the new Standard for poultry will be implemented over the next two years.

Salmonella and Campylobacter are killed by cooking. To handle chicken safely:

- cook it thoroughly, until there is no pink visible and juices run clear
- after handling raw chicken, wash and dry hands thoroughly
- ensure all utensils that have been in contact with the raw chicken are also washed and dried thoroughly before being reused.

For further information and to view the survey report visit the FSANZ website <http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/scienceandeducation/factsheets/factsheets2010/rawchickenmeatmicrob4764.cfm>

### Table of events

Future Events	Location	Title	Dates	Topics Covered
Four Day Auditing Workshop	Tradewinds Hotel Fremantle	Food Safety Auditor course	17 – 20 May 2010	Covering all auditing competencies required for approval in WA as a regulatory food auditor under the <i>Food Act 2008</i> This is the final course that the Food Unit is proposing to facilitate.

For food enquires please contact the Food Unit on:

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*Thoughts, comments and topic suggestions are also welcomed.*