

QUESTION ON NOTICE
No. 1652
Asked on Tuesday, 11 November 2008

MR LAWLOR asked the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries (MR MULHERIN)-

QUESTION:

Will he advise if the community can be confident that risks with regards to contaminants and diseases associated with food are minimised?

ANSWER:

The community can have confidence in the safety of the food supply. This confidence is achieved through having an understanding of the range of factors that interact and ultimately deliver a safe food supply.

Key factors that influence the supply of safe food are:

- the activities of professional food industry businesses that embrace knowledge, technology and management practices to consistently produce and source safe food;
- the existence of a multiple tiered food regulatory framework that sets the requirements for standards; and
- the activity of food regulatory agencies that undertake surveillance, monitoring and compliance action toward food safety.

Both industry and government work toward a common goal of achieving food safety by support for an effective food regulation system. Food regulatory agencies apply risk assessment and adopt risk management principles to deliver high levels of assurance in food safety to the community.

Food standards are developed and approved by the Australian and New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council. These standards set the levels for contaminants and chemical residues permitted in food. The food supply chain to the community is complex, arising from food produced both within Australia and internationally. Imported product is screened under the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service's Imported Foods Program and in each state various departments and agencies administer vital legislation to ensure that food risks are minimised and the incidence of food borne illness is very low.

In Queensland, the responsibility of oversight along the food chain is shared between the co-regulatory partners, Queensland Health, Safe Food Production Queensland and the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (DPI&F).

These agencies have a range of responsibilities to ensure food safety risks are minimised.

Since the introduction of the *Food Production (Safety) Act 2000*, primary producers and processors have been required to meet national standards and implement risk based documented food safety programs through food safety schemes for meat, dairy and eggs. A scheme for seafood is under development.

Complementary actions arise from within DPI&F in Biosecurity Queensland that governs the use of agricultural and veterinary (agvet) chemicals and also any animal diseases that could impact on the food supply.

In addition to these regulatory approaches, the fruit and vegetable industries have adopted quality assurance programs that deliver a degree of self regulation such as the FreshTest and Freshcare programs.

FreshTest is an industry program that performs regular sampling at central fresh produce markets of fresh produce for contamination or agvet chemical residues.

Freshcare is an industry owned, on-farm quality assurance program established to minimise food safety risks.

DPI&F operates a Chemical Residue Laboratory to test animal and plant products as part of a targeted monitoring program.

Queensland food agencies co-operate together to share information and interact with a number of national agencies involved in protecting the food supply and the community.

OZFoodNet is a national system that monitors food borne illness and provides an understanding of the causes of food related illness. OZFoodNet is supported by technical assistance from the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, Food Standards Australia New Zealand and the Public Health Laboratory Network.