



## Allergy conference calls for 'honesty about uncertainty'

This month, as part of National Science and Engineering Week, the Food Standards Agency and the Anaphylaxis Campaign organised a joint national conference on communicating the science of food allergy

Scientists need to be honest about allergy, and if they do not know all of the answers they should explain why there is uncertainty. That was one of the key messages that came out of an event held earlier this month on 'Communicating the Science of Food Allergy'.

Another key theme that arose was that there is no 'one-message-fits-all' on allergy.

'The audience made clear that there is not a single "public" that needs to be communicated to,' said Sue

Hattersley, Head of Food Allergy at the FSA.

'Some people are content to be told the headline message. Others, perhaps more directly affected, want an explanation of the evidence on which advice is based.'

About 100 delegates attended the conference, held in London at the Royal Society of Chemistry, ranging from academics and food industry representatives to people who have allergies or who care for those who do.

Two keynote speakers, Professor Ian Kimber from the

University of Manchester, and Professor Gideon Lack from King's College London, addressed current areas of uncertainty on how we understand the mechanisms involved in the development of food allergy. More specifically, they looked at the critical role played by the timing and route of first exposure to food allergens in early life.

Professor Kimber said there were six key areas of uncertainty in allergy research:

- ◆ Does allergenic sensitisation to food proteins necessarily result from dietary exposure?
- ◆ Does early exposure to allergenic food proteins promote or inhibit the development of sensitization and allergy?
- ◆ Why is it possible to tolerate exposure to food allergens, despite having significant levels of specific antibodies?

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The event was held at the Royal College of Chemistry

“We need to know more about what affects people’s behaviour. Life skills need to be taught much earlier in schools”



Communicating the science of food allergy: from right, FSA Communications Director Terrence Collis, Science Media Centre Director and chair of the panel Fiona Fox, Professor Ian Kimber, Professor Gideon Lack, Dr Gene Rowe and Hazel Gowland

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- ◆ What factors influence the severity of food allergic reactions?
- ◆ Why are some food proteins allergenic when others aren't?
- ◆ Is it possible to identify thresholds of exposure to allergenic foods that are required for sensitisation and allergic reaction?

Professor Lack said the fundamental question we had to address was: ‘When do you start to introduce allergenic foods into a baby’s diet?’

Based on some initial

groundbreaking research carried out in London and Israel, he said: ‘We hypothesise that early exposure to peanut and other food proteins through an enflamed, impaired skin barrier causes food allergies. On the other hand... the introduction into the diet of potentially allergenic foods in the early stages of infancy will help prevent food allergies.

‘Whether you acquire tolerance or food allergy depends on these two

exposures and we require further evidence to substantiate our thought and guidelines for infant feeding. We are currently involved in this through research programmes funded by the Food Standards Agency, the MRC and others.’

The keynote speeches were followed by a panel debate in which the two presenters were joined by Hazel Gowland from the Anaphylaxis Campaign, Dr Gene Rowe, an independent research consultant interested in risk communication, and the

Agency’s Communications Director Terrence Collis. The wide-ranging debate that followed, and which included questions from the floor, was chaired by Fiona Fox, Director of the Science Media Centre.

It addressed broad science communication issues, such as the role of the media and building trust, and more specific questions relating to current advice on food allergy. These ranged from how best to introduce allergenic foods into the weaning diet, through to how to communicate possible cross-contamination risks on food labelling.

Drawing the event to a close, FSA Director of Communications Terrence Collis stressed the importance of communicating well to young people, especially those groups most at risk.

‘We need to know much more about what actually affects people’s behaviour,’ he said. ‘Life skills need to be taught much earlier in schools, so that young people can take responsibility for their own wellbeing.’



## Restrictions on older cattle

The FSA has been working with the Department for Environment, Food And Rural Affairs, the devolved administrations and other agencies in an ongoing investigation into allegations of an illegal trade in cattle born and reared in the UK before August 1996.

It is illegal for such cattle to be slaughtered for food as they have a higher risk of infection with BSE than younger animals. This is because they were born before the feed controls introduced to combat the spread of BSE were fully effective.

The FSA has been letting consumers know that there is a very low food safety risk from eating meat or meat products from any such older cattle.

### FURTHER INFORMATION

The story in full is at: [food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2011/mar/fraud](http://food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2011/mar/fraud)



The funding will be given for activities that will be key to a successful launch locally of the scheme



FSA Chair Jeff Rooker with Suffolk businesses awarded '5' ratings

## There's still time to get an FHRs grant

There's still time for local authorities in England and Northern Ireland to apply for grants to help them get up and running with the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS) in 2011/12. The grants are being awarded by the Food Standards Agency.

The FHRS helps consumers choose where to eat out or shop for food by giving them information about the hygiene standards in restaurants, cafés, takeaways, hotels and food shops.

The funding, which is

primarily for local authorities that have not received grants in previous rounds, will be given for activities that will be key to a successful launch locally of the scheme.

Bids from authorities that are involved with the 2012 Olympic Games or Paralympic Games are being particularly encouraged, but consideration will also be given to awarding a local authority a second grant for new or different activities where this is justified.

If applications are submitted by Wednesday 6 April 2011,

the Agency will aim to inform local authorities by Thursday 28 April if they have been successful, so that projects can begin in early May 2011. Otherwise, the final closing date for applications is Wednesday 4 May 2011.

Hygiene ratings published by local authorities that are already participating in the scheme can be found at the link below. ■

### FURTHER INFORMATION

Published ratings can be found at: [food.gov.uk/ratings](http://food.gov.uk/ratings)

A grant application form can be found at: FHRs grant funding



## Good food hygiene highlighted in Wales

Consumers in Wales should be finding it easier to find catering establishments with good food hygiene when they eat out, following the launch of a bilingual advertising campaign designed to promote awareness of the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS).

The consumer advertising campaign, launched by the Food Standards Agency in Wales, will continue until the

end of this month.

The advertising shows the FHRS scheme's bright green and black rating sticker and the web address where the food hygiene ratings can be found (see the link below).

In Wales, all 22 local authorities are implementing the scheme. ■

### FURTHER INFORMATION

Food hygiene ratings can be found at: [food.gov.uk/ratings](http://food.gov.uk/ratings)



Food safety in two languages

## Review looks at gluten in infants' diet

The FSA is reminding parents to feed babies exclusively on breast milk for about six months and not to introduce solid food until after this time. This is following an in-depth review by experts who looked at the best time to introduce gluten into infants' diets. Gluten is a protein found in cereals such as wheat, rye and barley.

The Committee on Toxicity (COT) and Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) examined the available evidence to see whether the time that gluten is introduced into an infant diet affects the chance of them developing coeliac disease

and type 1 diabetes. This was following the scientific opinion given by the European Food Safety Authority, which reported that the introduction of gluten into an infant's diet by six months of age, while still breastfeeding, might reduce the risk of them developing coeliac disease (an intolerance to gluten) and diabetes.

The COT and SACN concluded that:

- ♦ introducing gluten-containing foods before three months (13 weeks) might be linked to an increased risk of coeliac disease
- ♦ the evidence currently available is not strong enough to make specific recommendations about when



The evidence is not strong enough to make specific recommendations about when gluten should be introduced into infants' diets beyond three months of age

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- ♦ the evidence is not strong enough to support a recommendation to introduce gluten before six months of age
- ♦ there might be an increased chance of infants developing coeliac disease if they are not being breastfed when gluten is introduced into the diet.

These findings do not change current Government advice, but will be used to inform a wider SACN review of existing recommendations on infant and young child feeding. ■

### FURTHER INFORMATION

More details can be found in a **COT joint statement on the timing of introduction of gluten into the infant diet**

## Revised infant formula guide

The Department of Health and the Food Standards Agency have issued revised guidance for parents on the safe preparation and storage of powdered infant formula milk. Powdered infant and follow-on formulas are not sterile, which means they can contain harmful bacteria.

The guidance will make it easier for parents to prepare and store infant formula safely. The guidance can be found below.

### FURTHER INFORMATION

The guidance can be found on the Department of Health website at: [Guide to bottle feeding](#)



## How to spot food allergies in children

The Food Standards Agency has welcomed new guidelines on the diagnosis and assessment of food allergy in children and young people. The guidelines

have been published by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence.

Sue Hattersley, Head of Food Allergy at the FSA, said: 'The guidelines are an important

step forward in improving the consistency and quality of care provided by health professionals.

'Food allergy is a serious health problem, which appears to be increasing, so it's

important that these people have effective clinical support.' It is hoped that the guidelines will lead to better diagnosis of allergies in children.

More about the Agency's work on food allergies can be found in **Further information.** ■

### FURTHER INFORMATION

More on the FSA's work allergies can be found at: [food.gov.uk/safereating/allergyintol/](#) The NICE guidelines can be found at: [www.nice.org.uk/newsroom/news/](#)

# First meeting for Northern Ireland Catering Forum

**T**en major catering companies, some UK-wide and others based in Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland, took part in the FSA in Northern Ireland's (FSANI's) first Catering Forum held in Belfast last month.

FSANI organised the forum because it recognised that large contract caterers and catering suppliers can play a key role in improving people's health – due to the amount of meals they serve each day.

FSANI continues to have diet and nutrition as part of its remit.

In 2009, a Northern Ireland Assembly Health Committee inquiry into obesity made a number of recommendations it thought should be taken up by the food industry.

The recommendations included:

- ◆ regulating the levels of salt and saturated fat in manufactured foods
- ◆ developing a clear and simple nutrition labelling

system at non-retail outlets, such as restaurants and catering establishments

◆ examining how issues, such as food promotion and pricing, impact on portion sizes and how they might be influenced.

The Catering Forum, chaired by Sharon Gilmore from FSANI's Dietary Health Team, focused on obesity, which is increasingly becoming an issue of concern in Northern Ireland.

The forum heard presentations from the FSA and from some of the industry representatives.

Wan Mak, from Sodexo, provided an update on the work being undertaken by the company to improve the nutritional content of the food it serves.

Eileen Steinbock from Brakes provided an insight into Brakes' partnership with O'Kane's Foodservice and its supply chain into schools,

Large contract caterers and suppliers can play a key role in improving health, due to the amount of meals they serve



Pictured above: Round the table. Pictured below left: (from left) Eileen Steinbock (Brakes), FSANI Director Gerry McCurdy, Wan Mak (Sodexo), Sharon Gilmore (FSANI)

hospitals and cafés. She also described how Brakes tailors its products to meet market trends.

Catriona Lennox from Mount Charles Catering – Northern Ireland's biggest caterer – explained how the company developed a voluntary catering commitment to improve its customers' diet.

Speaking after the forum meeting, Sharon Gilmore said: 'We are really pleased with the attendance at the meeting as many people travelled a great distance to participate.

'This demonstrates their commitment to engaging with

the FSA on the nutritional content and providing healthier choices in the food they serve to Northern Irish consumers.

'The session was very interactive, allowing for lengthy discussion on the challenges that these companies face in taking forward nutrition-based initiatives in Northern Ireland.'

Those attending the forum agreed that they would re-convene this autumn to report on progress made and to keep nutrition on their agendas. ■



# Linking thinking on food and health

**A**lmost 80 delegates, including community diet workers, and council officials, and industry representatives, attended a Food and Health Alliance conference held in Dundee.

The conference was on 'Promoting food and health in Scotland – linking thinking in a time of change'.

Presentations were made by Scottish Government Deputy Director for Food and Drink David Thompson, by practitioners working in

healthy weight communities and child healthy weight



Heather Peace, from the FSA in Scotland, hosting a workshop at the conference

programmes, and by Stephen Brown, the Development and Distribution Director of David Sands Ltd, a convenience store/supermarket chain.

The FSA in Scotland (FSAS) hosted workshops covering three topics:

- ◆ How can we persuade individuals that starchy carbohydrates are an important part of a healthy balanced diet?
- ◆ What role can the healthy balanced diet play in the prevention of overweight and obesity?
- ◆ How can we avoid the 'everything in moderation' message?

FSAS will be feeding back the outcomes of the sessions to attendees and other interested parties.

The Food & Health Alliance is a Scottish network that engages people from different sectors who are involved with food and health. ■■■■■



From left: Towerbank Primary Head Joyce Gilmour, Tilly Brown, and Elspeth Macdonald from the FSA in Scotland

## Tilly is poster girl

**T**illy Brown, from Towerbank Primary in Edinburgh, was last month presented with a commemorative framed print for scooping first prize in the FSA in Scotland's calendar competition.

Tilly was also awarded £300 and her school £1000, to spend on FSA approved projects. Her school was also rewarded with a cookery demonstration by Scottish chef Douglas Lisi.

Eleven 'highly commended' winners, whose posters were used in the calendar, were awarded £50, and their schools received £250. ■

## Launch of Food Standards Training Manual

**T**he FSA in Scotland (FSAS) is launching a Food Standards Training Manual that will act as a reference document for food standards legislation in force in Scotland and provide associated codes of practice and relevant guidance notes.

FSAS will launch the manual and provide training to local authority enforcement officers

from across Scotland on 28 March at the FSAS offices in Aberdeen and on 29 March at Stirling University.

The Food Standards Training Manual was first issued by the FSA in Northern Ireland, to help keep local authority enforcement staff there up to date in the challenging area of food standards. The Northern Ireland manual is now in its

third successful year.

In 2007, the Food Standards Agency's Sector-Specific Simplification Project considered the potential for expanding the use of this manual (see Further Information).

A decision was then taken to develop a version suitable for use in Scotland in partnership with local authority authorised officers, and a working group

including members of the Scottish Food Enforcement Liaison Committee helped bring it to fruition.

### FURTHER INFORMATION

For details contact Jacqui Angus, email: jacqui.angus@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk or telephone: 01224 285175. The Sector Specific Simplification Report ■■■■■

The toolkit identifies outputs, outcomes and impacts. It helps identify clearly the activities to be assessed

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## FSA regional teams tool-up for training

The FSA's regional teams in England have been helping local authority staff analyse the impacts and outcomes of their work, in order to improve the food safety services they provide

Local authorities are responsible for ensuring that food manufactured, sold and consumed within their council boundaries satisfies all legal requirements and is safe to eat. This is achieved through enforcement, education, advice and regulatory controls

(see below).

Towards the end of last year, FSA staff – and officers from partner organisations such as Trading Standards – were trained by the Local Better Regulation Office (LBRO) in how to use an impacts and outcomes toolkit to assess the efficiency of service provision.

They in turn have been training local authority staff to use the toolkit to assess how they currently work and the potential impact of working in different ways.

The toolkit identifies outputs, outcomes and impacts by going through a number of stages. It helps identify clearly the activities to be assessed, for example by grouping them into areas such as intelligence, analysis, support, education and enforcement.

It identifies inputs, for example what is/was needed



Toni Smith: 'The toolkit has helped local authority staff question how they work'

to do the work in terms of staff, information and resources; partners, by assessing who else influences the impacts and outcomes of the proposed activity; and outputs, the products of the activity.

This ultimately enables an assessment to be made of the actual outcomes – what is being achieved intentionally or unintentionally from the work that has been done or is planned – and the impacts, including the long-term benefits.

'Working through the toolkit has helped the local authority

staff question why they work in certain ways,' explained Toni Smith, co-ordinator for the FSA's South West and West Midlands regions in England, who has so far helped provide two training sessions.

'Feedback from the training days suggests that many of the attendees have been able to find out more effective ways of delivering their work in an increasingly cash-strapped world. The training will also help us get best value from the work we do in the regions.'



### Local authority food services include:

- ♦ ensuring that suitable measures are in place to protect the public's health through licensing and approvals of potentially hazardous food handling activities
- ♦ investigating and taking appropriate action in respect of communicable disease where it is found to be associated with food premises
- ♦ investigating and taking appropriate action in respect to any complaint or enquiry from the public on food safety issues
- ♦ ensuring effective Health and Safety procedures are in place in food premises
- ♦ ensuring all food handling practices and procedures meet legal requirements
- ♦ working with businesses to ensure the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme is adopted by all appropriate food businesses

## Mix and match approach to combination effects

**T01045: The assessment of joint endocrine effects of multi-component mixtures of food contaminants and additives**

**A**pproaches to risk assessment of mixtures of compounds have limitations and do not necessarily address the complexity of mixtures of chemicals that may occur in the diet, many of which are present at very low levels.

This study investigated whether the combined effects of multiple chemicals could be predicted by knowing the effects of the individual chemicals alone.

The chemicals studied in this

project were selected from groups of chemicals found in food that are known to be potential endocrine disruptors, a class of chemicals that may affect the endocrine system of humans. All the chemicals tested had, individually, documented occurrence in food items and available data on their levels in humans. In vitro testing and mathematical modelling of more than 50 mixtures were used to establish whether an increase

or decrease in toxicity resulted when individual chemicals were combined (a combination effect).

The study produced good evidence that chemicals that work by targeting or binding to a specific molecular target, such as an enzyme or receptor (a common specific mode of action), work together to produce combination effects that are larger than the effects of each mixture component applied singly.

The results of the study support the use of an approach that assumes that one compound can be substituted for another in proportion to their relative potencies (the



concentration addition approach) to predict the effects of mixtures, when the chemicals in the mixture have similar structures and/or act via similar mechanisms.

The outcomes from this

project support the methodology the Food Standards Agency currently uses when conducting risk assessments of mixtures of chemicals acting on the same receptor. ■

## Animal feed committee seeks new members

**W**ould you like to help improve food safety and standards in the UK? Do you work in toxicology, animal nutrition, or the animal feed industry?

Three new committee members are needed for the Advisory Committee on Animal

Feedingstuffs (ACAF). This independent committee advises the FSA on the safety and use of animal feeds, with particular emphasis on protecting human health.

Candidates must be strong team workers, able to demonstrate effective written

and verbal communication skills and sound judgement, and have strong analytical and problem solving skills.

As ACAF members they must be able to work in a committee structure and be able to weigh issues outside of their own specialist area. An

interest in/or understanding of GM technology is desirable but not essential.

The appointment is normally for three years. ACAF meets four times a year, usually in London. Members are not salaried, but receive a fee for attendance at meetings and reimbursement of reasonable expenses.

The closing date for receipt of completed applications is 4 April 2011. ■

### FURTHER INFORMATION

To obtain an information pack and application form contact Raj Pal, tel: 020 7276 8083, email: [acaf@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:acaf@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk) ■■■■





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