

# Food Safety Update Newsletter

30 August 2022



United Fresh  
Technical Advisory Group

In this update we will provide an overview on Food Safety activities within the New Zealand Food Safety Science Research Centre (NZFSSRC). We report on the development of an overarching Food Safety Science Plan for Aotearoa New Zealand, the Emerging Risk Identification system (ERIS) and the activities of the horticulture advisory group in advancing the risk ranking project completed in 2021. We also report on the Food Standards Australia New Zealand Proposal P1052 – PPP Requirements for Horticulture (Berries, Leafy Vegetables and Melons).

## A Food Safety Science Plan for Aotearoa New Zealand

The need for an overall food production sector plan to prioritise food safety research, manage risk and position New Zealand strategically for the future, was identified by MPI and MBIE in 2021.

The plan aims to align food safety science investment from the entire food industry with that from government, creating efficiencies and opportunities for collaboration and the development of more strategic outcomes. Stakeholders across the food sector contributed to the plan development with Anne-Marie Arts representing United Fresh in the leadership group workshop in 2021.

The purpose is to increase the efficiency and impact of food safety science for New Zealand. The plan includes short, medium and long-term priorities and guidance on the level of funding needed to support the research identified. The following four overarching science themes and research priorities were identified.

**Improving consumer and food servers' food safety practices:** Improving the food safety practices of those involved in customary and recreational harvesting of food, preparation of meals at home, on marae and in food service businesses. Proposed investment \$5-6 million per annum.

**Cost effective, faster, smarter detection of food safety hazards:** The development, validation and application of new methods and technologies and new ways to manage, analyse and visualise the data generated to gain insight and predict future food safety outcomes. Proposed investment \$5-6 million per annum.

**Understanding and reducing known food safety risks:** Focuses on formal scientific appraisal of risks from all types of hazards (biological, chemical, physical and allergens) in foods and beverages and validation of new practices for reducing risks across the food chain. Proposed investment \$8-9 million per annum.

**Identifying emerging food safety risks focusing on the identification of new risks:** New risks are emerging more frequently, in part due to social and environmental changes such as climate change, population increase, changing consumer preferences, water scarcity and the move to more sustainable practices. Proposed investment \$5-6 million.

The full plan can be found below: <https://www.nzfssrc.org.nz/assets/news-folder/Food-Safety-National-Plan-Final-21.7.22.pdf>

## **Emerging Risk Identification System (ERIS)**

The ERIS forum was established in 2021 and recently held its sixth meeting. United Fresh contributed funding to the establishment of the risk identification system and is involved in the industry action forum. Horticulture is well represented with United Fresh, Horticulture New Zealand, Zespri and New Zealand Apples and Pears supporting the project.

The main function of the ERIS is to focus scientific research to avoid or reduce the impact of future risks. It is hoped that the information on potential future risks will allow industry and government to consider whether current risk management practices are adequate for these emerging threats.

Every three to four months the researchers present their findings on emerging risks identified. Industry representatives from across all food sectors contribute and vigorously debate the potential risks identified. Where specific emerging issues are identified and are considered of potential concern, the relevant sector group will receive the briefing note provided.

Being present on this group has provided an insight into challenges common to many industries, including the emerging risks that climate change presents. A potential climate change example is cyanobacteria toxins identified as an emerging risk in irrigation water taken from surface water such as dams, lakes, rivers, etc. as water temperatures rise. Symptoms of exposure to cyanobacteria include skin irritation, stomach cramps, vomiting, nausea, diarrhoea, fever, sore throat, headache, muscle and joint pain, blisters of the mouth and liver damage.

The ERIS reports can be found here: <https://nzfssrc.org.nz/resources/eris/#/>

## **NZFRSSC Horticulture Task Force Activities**

This task force provides the opportunities to increase cooperation across the horticulture industry and to focus on the outcomes of the 2021 risk ranking project. An example is Zespri building on the risk ranking work by using the methodologies developed to look at kiwifruit specific food safety issues. Similarly, New Zealand Apples & Pears has shared their learnings in a recently completed SFFF food safety project. The benefits of the risk ranking project are becoming apparent and will help the industry to focus on specific issues and cooperation across sectors.

Members include Horticulture NZ, Zespri, New Zealand Apple & Pears, Countdown Supermarkets, NZFRSSC and members of the science community, with Anne-Marie chairing the taskforce.

Work underway includes a workshop looking at research needs for water, which Anna Rathe from Horticulture New Zealand is championing. Water was identified as an overarching theme.

Two other overarching themes were identified, Workers (hygiene) and Waste (in its broadest sense). We are suggesting developing an inventory of initiatives underway may be a good start in developing whole of industry resources.

## **Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) Proposal P1052 – PPP Requirements for Horticulture (Berries, Leafy Vegetables and Melons)**

FSANZ has reviewed food safety measures for primary production and processing of berries, leafy vegetables, and melons under Proposal P1052. This proposal considered strengthening food safety management on-farm and during initial processing by introducing nationally consistent, baseline food safety standards for the three sectors.

The FSANZ Board also recommended that the three standards, be supported by non-regulatory tools, such as guidance documents and materials, to increase awareness of the standards and their requirements.

Whilst these standards will not legally apply in New Zealand, the differentiation of crops by food safety risk is significant and we consider, a step towards addressing food safety concerns for specific crops of concern. United Fresh presented a submission supporting the FSANZ proposal earlier this year. The reason for presenting a submission was because the Food Safety Risk Ranking Project, identified, bean sprouts, berries, leafy greens and melons as presenting increased food borne illness risks. We note bean sprouts have had a production standard for many years.

Once the final standards and guidance documents are available, we suggest this will become a good resource for producers of these crops.

The FSANZ proposal and supporting documents are available:

<https://www.foodstandards.gov.au/code/proposals/Pages/P1052.aspx>