



United Fresh
Technical Advisory Group

United Fresh Technical Advisory Group Update

May 2021

Welcome to our quarterly Food Safety and Traceability Update. We aim to provide you with a snapshot of information on topical and relevant food safety issues and, where applicable, the links to allow you to take your knowledge further.

We welcome your feedback on this update, as well as any questions and comments on the topics included.

This edition provides updates on: COVID-19, Industry Traceability Guidelines; Food Risk Ranking; and Packaging Material Recycling.

COVID-19 Food & Environmental Test Kits

The New Zealand Food Safety Science & Research Centre (NZFSSRC) was approached by an industry member to collate information on commercially available testing options currently available through New Zealand suppliers and science providers to test for Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2/COVID-19) on food and food packaging surfaces.

Current risk management measures in New Zealand are world-leading, sufficient to provide assurances that New Zealand food and food packaging is safe with respect to COVID-19, and that food safety outcomes are equivalent to those required by our export markets. It is highly unlikely that New Zealand food or food packaging will be contaminated by COVID-19, particularly as there is no current community transmission in New Zealand.

This is a dynamic area of Food Safety in the current situation. New Zealand Food Safety (a Business Unit of MPI) have been providing regular guidance for industry on this topic. United Fresh strongly recommends that any company considering environmental or food testing for COVID-19 contact their Product Group and/or MPI, for updates on market access requirements and government policy.

There is, however, a need to better understand the landscape for commercial testing of food and packaging should testing be required at some point in the future.

A recent ESR report covers several areas relating to COVID-19 testing options, including:

- Test kits available in New Zealand
- Test kit performance characteristics
- Time taken to obtain test results
- Testing costs
- Laboratory Accreditation status
- Operator training requirements
- Test availability
- Any concerns regarding test kits

There are currently four commercial New Zealand-based laboratories offering a commercial COVID-19 environmental swab testing service. Only one has International Accreditation New Zealand (IANZ) accreditation for this type of testing (with another one having accreditation pending).

Kits optimised for testing for COVID-19 in food matrices are also being developed, but are not yet commercially available. Internationally, there is very limited guidance regarding how a food premise or foods should be swabbed/sampled or how positive results should be confirmed, particularly for low detection levels that may be false positive results.

This paper is not publicly available. Please contact Anne-Marie Arts amarts@agrchain-centre.com if you require further information at this stage.

The Sustainable Food & Fibre Futures (SFFF) Traceability Project

In June 2020, following initial supply chain pilot studies in 2018 and 2019, United Fresh released a set of Draft Traceability Guidelines for industry feedback and consultation. Feedback received was incorporated into the final version of the industry **Traceability Guidelines**, which are now being prepared for publication.

The Guidelines consist of three sections; laying out the case for Traceability, the Guidelines themselves, and Work Instructions assisting businesses in following a Traceability process to a common standard.

A printed copy of the Traceability Guidelines will be sent to United Fresh Members. The Guidelines will also be available in pdf format on www.unitedfresh.co.nz under the 'Technical' drop-down menu. Some copies will be available from the United Fresh stand at the Horticulture New Zealand Conference in August.

Traceability is a rapidly developing area, and we anticipate the Traceability Guidelines will evolve into a "go to document" that helps the industry understand and manage Traceability. The online version of the Guidelines will become a living document that changes as further Traceability learnings occur.

The Risk Ranking Project

This project aims to collate the most recent research into Fresh Produce Food Safety Risks in New Zealand, to support the wider industry and sector groups in focusing on relevant food safety risks. This project is jointly funded by NZFSSRC, MPI, and United Fresh.

The first stage was the completion of a substantial literature review prepared by the Institute of Environmental Science and Research (ESR). We will provide a summary of the findings in due course.

A group of invited industry technical experts will meet in late May to consider the project findings and over three meetings, from May-July, develop a risk ranking of food safety hazards directly relevant to the New Zealand fresh produce industry.

The project team are consulting with significant operators along the entire supply chain from seed to plate on how they rank food safety risks in their organisation. Our thanks to those organisations that shared testing data in an anonymised manner for this project.

Several issues have already been identified that the industry needs to work on, including the relative lack of data across industry. We will provide an update on this at the Hort NZ conference.

This project will be completed in October 2021.

Challenges And Opportunities Related To Recycled Non-Permanent Packing Materials

Every food industry is grappling with the balance between sustainability and potential food safety risks associated with recycled packaging materials. Recycled materials risk being contaminated with other materials during the recycling process, which can pose severe risks to health.

NZFSSRC has championed this project, which is jointly funded by Zespri, AsureQuality, the Dairy & Meat industries and United Fresh. The project aims to gain a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with the use of recycled non-permanent materials (such as cardboard) in the New Zealand food supply chain.

This project has just begun, with the objective of developing industry sector specific checklists & guidelines, for companies to follow when investigating the feasibility of using recycled packaging. This will enable informed decision making on the use of recycled material for packing and packaging.