

ANGUS COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENTAL AND CONSUMER PROTECTION COMMITTEE – 13 AUGUST 2002

REGULATIONS TO PREVENT THE DIVERSION OF UNFIT MEAT INTO THE HUMAN FOOD CHAIN

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

Abstract

The Environmental and Consumer Protection Department recently received notification relating to the amendment regulations to the Animal By-Products (Identification) Regulations 1995 from the Food Standards Agency (Scotland).

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee:

- a) Note the contents of this report, and,
- b) Instruct the Director to inform the Food Standards Agency of its concern at the failure to include the requirement to stain Low Risk meat by-products in the Amendment Regulations.

2. BACKGROUND

Members will remember the cases discovered in Rotherham and Derby where large quantities of unfit poultry meat was being sold for human consumption. Report No 609/01 contains the details of these cases.

The subject of Report No 609/01 was the Food Standards Agency's reaction to those fraudulent and dangerous cases. The Agency consulted on three possible options to strengthen the legislation to prevent this type of fraud recurring in the future.

In the conclusion to the Report it clearly indicated that the approach to resolving this food safety problem would be the staining of all unfit meat by-products and that the legislation should be amended accordingly.

A copy of this Report was sent to the Food Standards Agency (Scotland) in response to the Consultation exercise.

3. CHANGES TO THE ANIMAL BY-PRODUCTS (IDENTIFICATION) REGULATIONS 1995

The new amendment regulations the Animal By-products (Identification) (Amendment) (Scotland) Regulations 2002 became law on 1 July. These new Regulations amend the 1995 Regulations. The main features of the new Regulations will require the staining or sterilisation of:-

- High risk poultry meat by-products.
- High risk red meat and poultry meat in licensed cutting plants and in licensed cold stores.

The Regulations will also require clear separation and labelling of "high risk" and "low risk" by-products.

4. JUSTIFICATION FOR THIS APPROACH

The Food Standards Agency (Scotland) recognises that there is support for the extension of the requirements for staining to low risk meat by-products. This was the view taken by the Committee in May 2001 (see Report No 609/01).

However, the Food Standards Agency's justification for not extending the requirement to stain etc to low risk meat by-products is that the action in their opinion, would be disproportionate to the risk. The reasoning behind this opinion is that high risk meat by-products such as birds which are dead on arrival at the slaughterhouse or meat which has become spoiled after being passed as fit for human consumption pose the most risk to public health. The staining or sterilising of these products will significantly reduce the risk of meat which may cause harm to human health from entering the food chain.

However, low risk meat by-products eg those by-products which are used for consumption by animals in zoos, circuses and hunt kennels only pose a risk to the public if they are mixed with high risk meat by-products or are not handled properly there by posing a risk to human or animal health.

5. CONCLUSION

From the previous report which was the basis of the Council's response to the consultation on this legislative change it was evident that the Committee had a very real concern that the exemption of low-risk meat by-products from the staining requirements would afford the opportunity to fraudulent meat traders to introduce this group of by-products into the human food chain.

As the former head of litigation at Rotherham MDC David Armstrong speaking at a Food Seminar in June explained to delegates that "the laundering of condemned poultry meat could be as profitable as the drugs trade".

With this type of potential for monetary gain the trade in both high risk and low risk meat by-products must be adequately controlled through staining. The legal requirement to stain these by-products would facilitate the Council's food safety role in protecting the health of the consumer.

However, by exempting Low Risk meat by-products from the requirement of staining these amendment Regulations will afford the unscrupulous meat trader the potential opportunity to introduce unfit meat by-products into the human food chain.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications to the Council as a result of this report.

7. HUMAN RIGHTS

There are no human rights implications as a result of this report.

8. CONSULTATION

The Chief Executive, the Director of Law and Administration and the Director of Finance have been consulted on the contents of this report.

S R Heggie
Director of Environmental and Consumer Protection

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing this report.

JB/FMCI
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