This edition of the eNews features:

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Why is food safety important?

Food safety is important for all consumers and businesses. It refers to the safe handling, preparation, and storage of foods to minimise or prevent foodborne illnesses. These illnesses are caused by microbes or pathogens including bacteria, viruses, mould, fungi and parasites that can be present in prepared foods. Pathogens that commonly cause illnesses are Norovirus, E.coli, Campylobacter and Salmonella, all of which may occur naturally in meat, seafood, eggs, dairy foods, fruits and vegetables. The type and severity of foodborne illnesses can range from mild symptoms of fever, nausea and diarrhoea to more serious disease conditions and possibly even cause death.

Food poisoning is a form of foodborne illness and, on average, 4.1 million cases are reported each year in Australia. Despite affecting 1 in 6 people, there has been a steady decline in foodborne illnesses in Australia from 4.3 million reported cases in 2000 to 4.1 million reported in 2010 (WHO Statistics). The cost of food poisoning in Australia results in 31,920 hospitalisations, 86 deaths and 1 million visits to doctors each year (Food Safety Information Council).

When two or more cases of the same illness are reported from consumption of food from a common source it is known as a food-borne disease outbreak. During disease outbreaks consumers lose confidence, businesses struggle and typically 30-50% of sales for the sector disappear. Businesses may temporarily absorb the costs but eventually some close down.

Trends – foodborne illnesses and recalls

In Australia, despite the decrease in the number of foodborne illness cases reported, those caused by *Salmonella* continued to increase from 2001 to 2016 as shown in Figure 1.

Of the total Salmonella outbreaks reported from 2001 to 2016, 79% were suspected or confirmed to have been transmitted through contaminated food. Most of the food outbreaks were caused by *Salmonella enterica* (serovar typhimurium) and came from eggs and egg products. Outbreaks due to poultry meat, beef and pork decreased from 2001 to 2016.

Microbial contamination is one reason why food businesses and government departments recall food. Food recalls can cause immediate losses to your business as well as longer-term reputational loss to your business and to the wider industry. Food recalls for microbial contamination from 2010 to 2018 for meat and seafood is shown in Figure 2.

It is up to every licensee to follow their food safety program to ensure the red meat, poultry and/or seafood they produce is safe for human consumption.

You can read more about food recalls including food businesses' responsibilities on the FSANZ website.
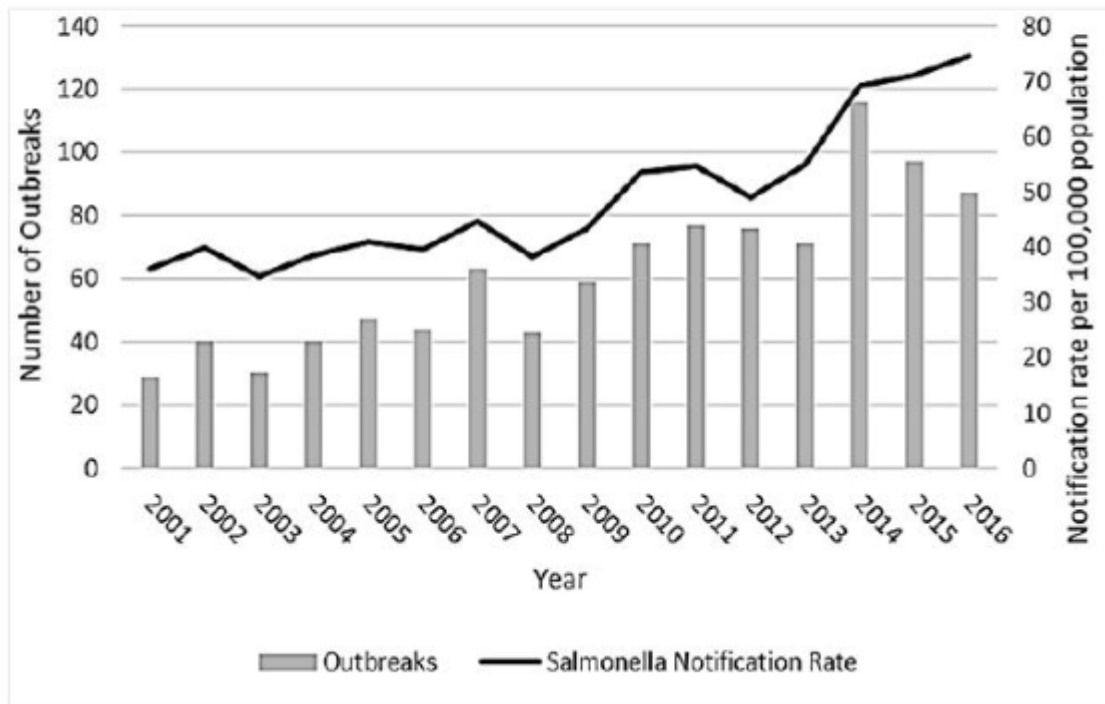

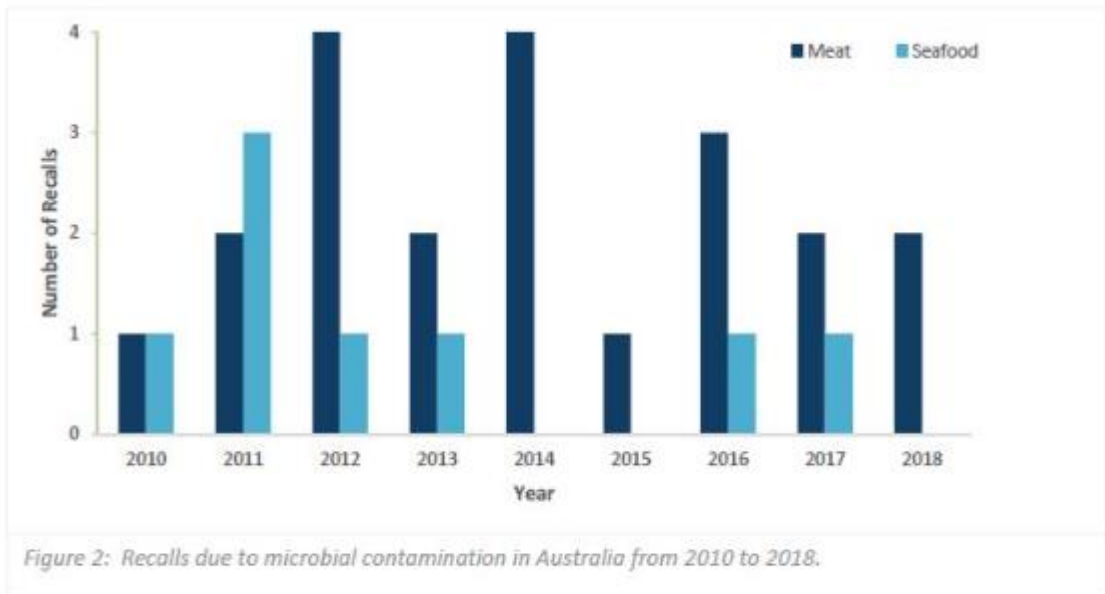Figure 1: Epidemiology of Salmonella Enterica Outbreaks in Australia (2001-2016).

Figure 2: Recalls due to microbial contamination in Australia from 2010 to 2018.

What is a Food Safety Program?

All PrimeSafe licensees require a Food Safety Program as a condition of their licence.

A Food Safety Program is a document that describes how a food business controls food safety hazards. It includes a risk assessment of every step of food production and documented procedures to manage the critical hazards. These elements ensure that food produced is wholesome and safe for human consumption. A fully maintained Food Safety Program is like insurance for complaints and recalls. Businesses can demonstrate their due-diligence through a Food Safety Program that must:

1. Systematically identify the potential hazard that may be reasonably expected to occur in all food handling operations of the food business;
2. Identify where in the food handling operation each identified hazard can be controlled and the means of control;
3. Provide monitoring of those controls;
4. Provide corrective actions when a hazard is not under control;
5. Provide regular review of the program by the business itself to ensure its adequacy; and
6. Provide appropriate records to be made and kept by the business demonstrating compliance with the food safety program.

A meat business's Food Safety Program must be based on HACCP Principles (Hazard Analysis of Critical Control Points). A useful reference to use is: A Guide to the Implementation and Auditing of HACCP.

A seafood business can use HACCP-based principles or an alternative risk-based approach demonstrating how the food safety risks will be managed. Guidelines to the Food Standards Code Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) can assist with development of a Food Safety Program.

The Food Safety Program must always remain on site where meat and seafood products are processed and/or stored. A Food Safety Program should be read and understood by every employee at a business who handles food.

Components of a Food Safety Program

There are four components of a Food Safety Program required by PrimeSafe:

1. Quality Policy
2. HACCP Plan (Hazard Analysis of Critical Control Points)
3. Standard Operating Procedures and Work Instructions
4. Pre-requisite Programs

1. Quality Policy
A business's declaration and commitment to produce safe wholesome food for human consumption at their premises.

2. HACCP Plan
HACCP Plan is a written plan to control food safety hazards at all stages of food processing and must include:

- A HACCP team
- Define the scope of the plan
- Product description and distribution methods
- Intended use of the product
- A detailed process flow diagram showing each processing step
- Verification on-site of the process flow diagram
- A list of all potential hazards and any control measures to control the identified hazards
- Determination of Critical Control Points (CCP)
- Establishing the Critical Limits (CL) for each CCP
- Establishing a monitoring system for each CCP
- Establishing corrective action plans for CCP deviations that may occur
- Establish verification procedures
- Establishing record keeping and documentation

Food safety hazards are categorized into 3 classes; biological, chemical and physical. It is important to identify all potential food safety hazards that may be present at each step of processing then evaluate their significance based on the severity and the likelihood of the hazard occurring. If the hazard can be prevented, eliminated or reduced to an acceptable level at a process step, then it becomes a critical step and the means of control at this step becomes a Critical Control Point.

Biological	Chemical	Physical
• Bacteria • Virus • Mould • Parasites	• Pesticides • Toxins • Allergens • Food additives	• Glass • Metal • Wood • Bones

3. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

SOPs are documented practices and procedures that are critical to producing safe food. These generally are part of food handling controls and related to receival, storage, processing, display, packaging, transportation, disposal and recall of food.

4. Pre-requisite Programs (PRPs)

PRPs are procedures that are necessary in a Food Safety Program to maintain a hygienic environment throughout the food supply chain. These procedures control the operational conditions within a food business but are not product or process specific. They promote environmental conditions that are favourable to the production of safe food.

Businesses must review the pre-requisite programs periodically or as required to ensure they are being implemented and are effective. There should be records to verify a business is following the pre-requisite programs procedures.

Pre-requisite Programs include:

- Good Manufacturing Practices
- Cleaning and Sanitation
- Pest Control
- Personnel Hygiene
- Maintenance Program
- Staff Training
- Control and prevention of physical and chemical contamination

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Free PrimeSafe Food Safety Program

PrimeSafe offers a free Food Safety Program to Retail Meat and Smallgoods licensees on request. The Programs can be used in the existing template or as an amended copy specifically tailored to cover the business's activities. Licensees wishing to make amendments to the free Food Safety Program can do so by contacting PrimeSafe and may be required to pay a fee for any complex amendments made to the existing templates.

To obtain a free PrimeSafe Food Safety Program or for more information, contact PrimeSafe on (03) 9685 7333 or info@primesafe.vic.gov.au.

PrimeSafe has a new website

PrimeSafe has developed a new website which now includes a new Information and Support Services section. Existing and prospective licensees can use this section to find information on a range of issues. Visit the new PrimeSafe website.

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