Food Standards Agency issues advice to public institutions on meat products after horse meat scandal

Monday 11 February, 2013

The Food Standards Agency is issuing interim advice to public institutions, such as schools and hospitals, caterers, and consumers purchasing from caterers, in the light of the developing horse meat issue.

The FSA is continuing to monitor the situation and will issue further advice as necessary.

Interim advice to public institutions

- Public institutions (schools, prisons, hospitals, armed forces) are within the scope of the UK-wide authenticity sampling programme being organised by the Food Standards Agency. Therefore, suppliers (such as caterers) of meat products to schools and hospitals are included within that surveillance programme.
In addition, suppliers – including caterers – to public institutions are part of the extensive testing regime the Food Standards Agency has established with the food industry, including food service businesses.

- This approach means we will now have an established industry testing plan, with the FSA undertaking additional verification and validation of authenticity while ensuring that industry takes responsibility for providing assurance to consumers, with the FSA providing appropriate oversight.
We are reminding public bodies (schools, prisons, hospitals, armed forces) of their responsibility for their own food contracts. We expect them to have rigorous procurement procedures in place, with reputable suppliers.

- We are keeping the appropriate Government departments in close touch with developments, making sure that they are aware of the above and that if any public authorities have any concerns they should seek assurances on authenticity from their suppliers. It remains the case that the issues identified so far suggest gross negligence and possibility criminality, but no food safety risks.

- If public institutions are not satisfied with assurance from suppliers, then they should take appropriate action depending on the circumstances. Where evidence of authenticity is not produced, that action may include requiring the supplier to conduct tests, and reject or temporarily withhold stock, while waiting for results.

Advice to caterers

- We expect caterers and suppliers to public institutions to have appropriate controls, including testing and sampling regimes, in place to ensure the authenticity of their products.

- If caterers have any doubts about the provenance of their product, they should seek assurance from their suppliers. Any recalled products should not be used or sold.

- Caterers are being included in the surveillance programme agreed between Ministers and industry on 9 February.

Advice to consumers purchasing food from catering outlets

- Caterers are responsible for ensuring the food they sell to consumers is safe.

- Consumers are entitled to ask where the food has been supplied from and can then make judgements based on that information.

- The evidence to date does not suggest there is a food safety risk. If further information indicates any health risk then the FSA will provide consumers with advice.

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