ACM/1230

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL SAFETY OF FOOD

INFORMATION PAPER

Review of the FSA guidance on the safety and shelf-life of vacuum and modified atmosphere packed chilled foods with respect to non-proteolytic *Clostridium botulinum*

Issue

The purpose of this information paper is to make the Committee aware that:

- the FSA guidance document above has undergone a routine review and has been updated accordingly
- a public consultation on the reviewed guidance will be launched shortly.

Background

1. The guidance is intended for all interested parties and use by manufacturers and retailers of chilled vacuum and modified atmosphere packed (VP/MAP) foods and to assist in the practical development of HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point) plans for these foods. It is designed to meet the needs of all levels of expertise, from technical managers in large enterprises to small businesses and individuals. The guidance is also designed to help Food Law Enforcement Officers carrying out their enforcement duties.

2. The changes are largely for the purposes of updating references and clarification of advice. For this reason, the FSA has not identified any major impacts for industry and consequently it has not produced an impact assessment. The main changes are:

    a. Clarifiying that the scope of the guidance covers all chilled VP/MAP foods. Whilst raw meat has always been within the scope of the guidance this is now reflected in the Q&A in response to stakeholder queries on whether the guidance applies to all VP/MAP chilled raw and ready-to-eat food, including raw meat.

    b. Clarifying the advice that heat treatment of food should ideally be in a sealed pack including changes to the relevant flow diagram to make this clearer.

    c. A new section on “Risks from other pathogens”. There had previously been no mention of *Listeria monocytogenes* as the VP/MAP guidance applies to non-proteolytic *C. botulinum* only. Whilst this is still the case, it has caused confusion with separate guidance for the control of *Listeria*

monocytogenes. It has been clarified in the guidance that all pathogens should be considered in the production of a safe food.

d. Changes to links and legislation (updated where necessary including where there have been changes or updates to legislation).

e. Clarification on the use of, and interpretation of results of, challenge testing when VP/MAP foods with a shelf-life greater than 10 days do not fulfil any of the controlling factors specified in the guidance.

f. Clarification on the use of nitrites as a controlling factor.

3. The Committee members are invited to provide any comments they may wish to make on the proposed guidance document prior to the final version being published on the FSA website. The consultation will be available under the "Help shape our policies" section (http://www.food.gov.uk/news-updates/help-shape-our-policies) on the FSA website. It will be launched in the week commencing 27 June and will run for 8 weeks. Any comments should be sent to the consultation mailbox within this period (address to be confirmed).

4. As explained in paragraph 2, the main purpose of the current review is increasing clarity of advice rather than re-assessing the advice itself. However, the FSA intends to undertake a more in-depth review of the guidance in the future, at which time the Committee's advice will be sought.

Secretariat
June 2016