

## ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL SAFETY OF FOOD

### HORIZON SCANNING

#### Background

1. Members will recall that the Committee held a preliminary discussion on horizon scanning in March 2002, on the basis of ACM/559. During the course of that preliminary discussion, Members suggested a range of topics for consideration by the Committee, to decide whether or not they were likely to pose future problems. Members were asked to develop their thinking further and to suggest priority topics for discussion at the Committee's June 2002 meeting. These are detailed in ACM/581.
2. It was agreed at the June 2002 meeting that the next step should be for the Chairman and Secretariat to select and prioritise a small number of topics from ACM/581 which Members could consider for further action.

#### Criteria for selecting topics for further attention

3. The criteria used in selecting the first topics for more detailed attention were that :-
  - the topics had attracted interest or concern from a number of Members;
  - it seemed important that the ACMSF should inform itself of the current situation with regard to these topics;
  - the topics seemed amenable to some form of practical action.
4. It is not intended that those topics listed in ACM/581 not short-listed for more detailed attention immediately should be abandoned. Rather, the intention would be to revisit these at a future date when the ACMSF embarks upon a further round of horizon scanning.

### **Topics recommended for further study**

5. The first tranche of topics recommended for more detailed attention initially are listed at Annex A. Members views on these, and the action proposed, are invited.

**Secretariat  
September 2002**

## HORIZON SCANNING : TOPICS FOR MORE DETAILED ACMSF ATTENTION INITIALLY

### Imported foods

1. In earlier discussion of topics, Members identified this as an important area. It was felt that EU enlargement, and the increasing globalisation of markets, could potentially result in the UK population being exposed to new pathogenic challenges. Members suggested that a chart of potential pathogens and their survivability in a range of food matrices would be a useful reference document.
2. **It is proposed** that an ACMSF *Ad Hoc* Group should be set up to define the extent of the issue. It is recommended that the Group should, amongst other things, seek to identify the imported foods of concern (or potential concern), the principal countries of origin, and the key foodborne pathogens in terms of public health.

### Opportunistic pathogens, including carriage in food animals

3. In earlier discussion, Members expressed mixed views on the need for the ACMSF to consider opportunistic pathogens. On the one hand, it was felt that the Committee should concentrate on those microorganisms which were known to be of importance in food safety terms. On the other, Members recognised that microorganisms not traditionally regarded as important in relation to infectious intestinal disease might pose a risk to humans, particularly in specific food matrices. Members felt that there was a need for objective evidence to justify action, and a surveillance system capable of identifying newly-emerging potential threats was seen as valuable. Members were agreed that any interdiction should be proportionate to the risk involved.
4. **It is proposed** that an ACMSF *Ad Hoc* Group should be set up to take matters forward. As a first step, the Group might review the literature and consider the adequacy of existing UK national alerting systems.

### Overseas travel and other changes in eating habits

5. Members have drawn attention to a number of potential risks associated with travel abroad. These include health risks from hepatitis, typhoid and tuberculosis; and the importation of foods for personal consumption on return from overseas trips. Members also drew attention to the need for better detection methods for meat and other illegal imports at sea and air ports.

6. **It is proposed** that, as a first step, an ACMSF *Ad Hoc* Group should be set up to assemble information on the extent of human foodborne illness associated with travel abroad. The Group should also consider the need for comprehensive ACMSF advice on the food-related risks to which people are exposed through foreign travel or whether this already exists in readily-accessible form elsewhere. Consideration might usefully be extended to eating out generally, and the impact of changing eating habits on food safety.