ACM/886

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL SAFETY OF FOOD

INFORMATION PAPER

Review of the impact of the FSA's Foodborne Disease Strategy on the epidemiology of UK foodborne disease

Introduction

1. Food Standards Agency has held a workshop to review the impact of its Foodborne Disease Strategy (FDS) on UK foodborne disease. Proceedings will be published by March 2008. This paper provides an overview of the workshop and outlines some of the preliminary outcomes.

Background

2. As a part of its programme to improve food safety, the Food Standards Agency set itself a target to reduce foodborne disease in the UK by 20% by April 2006. A strategy for achieving this, together with details of the mechanism by which trends in food poisoning levels would be monitored and the baseline figure for laboratory cases of food poisoning in the UK, were agreed by the Agency's Board in July 2001[1,2].

3. A wide-ranging programme of work was carried out over a five-year period to:

   - Reduce microbial contamination of foods;
   - Promote better food safety management and practice;
   - Promote hygienic preparation of food commercially and in the home

4. In October 2006, it was reported to the FSA Board that cases of food poisoning in the UK population, as monitored by the Agency, had decreased by 19.2% between 2000 and 2005[3].

Preliminary Foodborne Disease Strategy evaluation, 2006.

5. A preliminary evaluation of the activities of the FDS was published in May 2006[4]. The report highlighted successes in some areas of the Strategy but also recognised that initiatives in some other areas were still in progress. Therefore at the time it was not possible to identify

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1 http://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/fdscg-strategy-revised.pdf
2 http://www.food.gov.uk/news/pressreleases/poisoningreduction
3 http://www.food.gov.uk/aboutus/ourboard/boardmeetings/boardmeetings2006/boardmeeting121006/boardagenda061012, Paper PRO 06/10/01
4 http://www.food.gov.uk/safereating/microbiology/fdscg/fdsevaluation.

whether the activities of the FDS had impacted upon the level of foodborne disease in the UK

Expert FDS workshop, October 2007

6. In October 2007 the Food Standards Agency carried out a more extensive review of the FDS. A total of 65 invited experts and stakeholders were brought together via an expert workshop to evaluate the outcome of interventions and impact of the FDS on reducing burden of disease. Participants included microbiologists, epidemiologists, consumers and representatives from across the food chain and key FSA officials responsible for the delivery of the Strategy.

7. The workshop format included presentations on:

   - The background and rationale for the FDS
   - Background on UK surveillance data, and
   - Analysis and modelling of foodborne disease data and external factors that might also have affected foodborne disease

8. Participants subsequently broke into 4 groups for detailed discussions relating to (i) each of the key foodborne pathogens, and (ii) food groups across the food chain. In both cases, participants considered measures available for their control and points at which control could be most effective. The outputs from each group were fed back to and discussed in plenary session.

9. Issues arising from these discussions included the following:

   - The introduction of HACCP across the food chain had been highly effective and provided a focus for action and responsibility across the food chain;
   - Successful application of the Clean Livestock Policy and biosecurity measures on farms had produced marked improvements in practise and standards;
   - Publicity and marketing campaigns for food hygiene messages had been successful in raising awareness of the need for good food hygiene;
   - Statistical modelling had demonstrated a marked reduction in cases of *Campylobacter* reported following one campaign phase of media publicity and proved to have a positive cost: benefit (i.e. the cost of cases saved exceeded the campaign cost);
   - The requirements placed on suppliers by major retailers, suppliers and catering organisations provided a driver to improving the quality of food in the supply chain, including microbiological quality;

- Surveillance data for foodborne disease data was recognised as imperfect but considerably better than in some other countries. Surveillance would need to take account of changes in healthcare systems, reporting and detection methods over time, e.g. through the second IID study that is currently underway;

- There have been important and valuable trends in mechanisms for food processing and supply, including the trend towards skinless poultry portions and improvements in the availability of sealed and leak-proof packaging now available;

- The consumption of chicken, shellfish, take-aways and meals eaten outside the home have increased over recent years. The number of occurrences of *ad hoc* catering, e.g. parties catered for in inappropriate facilities has also increased;

- Better guidance could be provided to improve cleaning and disinfection of commercial settings for foodborne viruses;

- Better arrangements are needed to ensure that ill food handlers avoid the workplace to recover fully rather than return too early and risk spreading infections;

- More information is required about the pathogenicity and control of *Campylobacter* including how it infects poultry flocks;

- Greater use could be made of testing data held by industry to inform our understanding of the real status of the food chain and what effects any future interventions may have on it;

- Guidance to 'vulnerable' groups should consider inclusion of a wider range of foods than at present. Guidance for the elderly is needed to ensure safe management of foods, proper understanding of labels and to avoid keeping food beyond its safe limits.

10. Proceedings from the workshop are currently being drafted and it is expected that these will be published by March 2008.

Secretariat
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