ACM/905

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL SAFETY OF FOOD

INFORMATION PAPER

Foodborne Disease Strategy (FDS) evaluation workshop and outcomes

Introduction

1. A preliminary evaluation of the FDS in 2005[1] highlighted some successes but recognised that some workstreams were still in progress and was unable to identify clearly how the FDS had impacted upon the level of foodborne disease in the UK.

2. To broaden our understanding of the impact of the FDS, a 2-day expert review workshop was held in Cambridge in October 2007. 65 invited experts and stakeholders, including key Agency officials, microbiologists, epidemiologists, consumers and representatives from across the food chain were brought together to evaluate the outcome of interventions and impact of the FDS on reducing the burden of foodborne disease.

Workshop format

3. A series of presentations took place on the background and rationale of the FDS, UK surveillance data, analysis and modelling of disease data and external factors. The workshop delegates discussed the role in foodborne disease of each of the key foodborne pathogens, and food groups across the food chain, in terms of measures for their control and points at which control could be most effective.

Outcomes

4. The workshop identified several important outcomes and suggestions for the Agency's future activity to reduce foodborne disease. These were:

    - 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 to avoid food poisoning.

[1] http://www.food.gov.uk/safereating/microbiology/fdscg/fdsevaluation.

- Data modelling had demonstrated a reduction in reported cases of *Campylobacter* following phase three of the food hygiene campaign and a positive cost: benefit (i.e. the cost of cases saved exceeded the campaign cost).

- Requirements placed on suppliers by major retailers, suppliers and catering organisations provide a driver to improving the quality of food in the supply chain, including microbiological quality.

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

- There have been important and valuable trends in changes in food processing and supply which have impacted on microbiological food safety, e.g. the trend towards skinless poultry portions and improvements in sealed and leak-proof packaging now available.

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

- Better guidance could be provided to improve cleaning and disinfection of commercial settings subject to contamination by foodborne viruses.

- Improved paid sick absence in catering would ensure that food handlers stayed off work to recover fully rather than return too early and risk spreading infections.

- More information is still required on the pathogenicity and control of *Campylobacter* including how it infects poultry flocks.

- Greater use might 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.

5. Proceedings from the workshop are currently being finalised and will be published in March 2008. The outcomes of the workshop are being used to inform the development of future work to reduce foodborne disease.