The Australia and New Zealand Ministerial Forum on Food Regulation met in Canberra today and considered a range of food regulation matters. The Forum comprises all Australian and New Zealand Ministers responsible for food regulation, and the Australian Local Government Association. It is chaired by the Australian Government Minister for Rural Health, Senator the Hon. Fiona Nash.

Health Star Rating system update
Members welcomed the news that in Australia at least 55 companies have adopted the voluntary Health Star Rating (HSR) system, and that there are now over 1,500 products displaying the HSR graphic. Members noted that a number of major companies have reformulated some of their most popular products to make them healthier, achieving a higher star rating. Reformulation includes reducing salt, sugar and saturated fat and in some cases, increases the content of ingredients with nutritional benefits such as fibre.

Members considered the second phase of the Australian consumer and industry education campaign which concluded in August 2015. The evaluation of that campaign found that awareness of the HSR system has increased from 33% in April 2015 to 42% in September 2015. Approximately 1 in 6 people are changing their shopping behaviour based on the HSR system. The third phase of the consumer and industry education campaign is likely to commence in the first half of 2016.

Members also welcomed the news that in New Zealand, the HSR system is well supported with over 600 products currently on shelves and strong industry support for its implementation. Major social marketing activities are planned for early 2016 to coincide with increased products in the market. New Zealand is working closely with thought leaders and the media to improve their understanding of the HSR system. The HSR system has been identified as an important tool in the New Zealand Government’s Childhood Obesity Strategy.

Members noted that a progress review on the implementation of the HSR system will be undertaken after 2 years (June 2016) before a formal review after 5 years (June 2019).

Members agreed to the proposed changes to the HSR Advisory Committee Terms of Reference, including absorbing the work of the Front-of-Pack Labelling Steering Committee into the Food Regulation Standing Committee and extending the tenure of the HSR Advisory Committee to 5 years to coincide with the extended implementation period.

Update on investigation on information gaps in relation to low THC hemp as a food
Members noted the progress update on work to investigate information gaps identified in relation to the adoption of low-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) hemp as a food.
Members reconfirmed that they will consider a report in March 2016 on the cannabinoid levels, legal and treaty issues, and concerns that the marketing of hemp in food may send a confused message to consumers about the acceptability and safety of cannabis.

Law enforcement agencies in jurisdictions require a robust study on the impacts for roadside testing. To meet these requirements Members will be unable to consider the matter again until the study is completed, expected to be later in 2016.

In view of this, Members will also consider asking Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) to commence work on a proposal to allow low THC hemp as a food in March 2016 as a means to ensure that all reports are considered without any unnecessary delay.

**Update on unpasteurised milk not for human consumption**

Australian Members noted that jurisdictions have agreed to achieve the consistent outcome of preventing the supply of raw cow’s milk for human consumption through the supply chain, however the means to achieve this will vary between jurisdictions.

Australian Members remain concerned about consumption of unpasteurised (raw) cow’s milk that is sold as ‘bath milk’, a cosmetic product labelled ‘not for human consumption’. People who consume raw milk are at an increased risk of infection causing severe illness and potentially death.

**Fortification of food with vitamins and minerals – clarification**

The majority of Members agreed to the statement clarifying the original intent of the Policy Guideline for the Fortification of Food with Vitamins and Minerals, and for this statement to be provided to FSANZ to assist its review of the draft variation to Standard 1.3.2 - Vitamins and Minerals of the Australia New Zealand Food Standard Code (the Code). The majority of Members agreed that this was not a change to policy.

The clarification statement is:

>The intent of the Policy Guideline for the Fortification of Food with Vitamins and Minerals is to not permit voluntary fortification of a food category, or products within a food category, that are high in salt, sugar or fat, or foods with little or no nutritional value. FSANZ should use recognised nutrition profiling tools and initiatives that are capable of identifying foods that are high in salt, sugar or fat, or little or no nutritional value, to determine which foods are appropriate for fortification.

The above statement will be published on the FSANZ and Food Regulation websites.

**P1016 - Hydrocyanic Acid in Apricot Kernels & Other Foods**

Members considered and supported the work undertaken by FSANZ in relation to Hydrocyanic Acid in Apricot Kernels and other foods.

FSANZ’s risk assessment indicated that consumption of raw apricot kernels poses an acute public health and safety risk for consumers. Apricot kernels contain cyanogenic glycosides that can cause cyanide poisoning.

The public health and safety of consumers is of utmost importance to Members and the variations to a number of Standards in the Code will support this by prohibiting the retail
sale of raw apricot kernels to consumers. This change will also mean that kernels which are added to food as an ingredient must be rendered safe through processing or treatment.

**Australian reforms to Country of Origin Labelling Framework**
Australian Members welcomed the Australian Government’s commitment to improving the Country of Origin Labelling Framework for food. While the proposed changes include developing a mandatory information standard under the Australian Consumer Law, Australian Members agreed to request FSANZ to commence work to revoke the Country of Origin Labelling Standard in the Code.

Members noted the work underway on the Regulation Impact Statement and that public consultation is imminent. Members agreed to receive an update on progress in March 2016.

Members noted that New Zealand abstained from the vote to introduce the mandatory Country of Origin Labelling Food Standard in 2005 and opted out of the Standard. New Zealand has therefore abstained from this Forum vote to commence work to revoke the Standard.

**New Zealand provided the following statement to the Forum:**
*New Zealand has concerns about the impact that the proposed changes to CoOL will have on New Zealand food producers which import food into Australia and supply ingredients to Australian food manufacturers. New Zealand is the largest supplier of imported food to Australia and the changes will therefore have a significant effect on our food producers. The proposed changes to Australian CoOL run counter to the long ambition of both countries for closer economic relations and a single economic market between Australia and New Zealand. We will continue to raise these concerns with the Australian Government.*

**Next Meeting**
The next meeting of the Forum will be held in June 2016 in Darwin.

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