

In Confidence

Office of the Minister for Food Safety
Chair, Cabinet Economic Development Committee

Draft New Zealand Food Safety Strategy for public consultation

Proposal

1. This paper informs Cabinet that the Ministry for Primary Industries' business unit, New Zealand Food Safety, will release the attached draft New Zealand Food Safety Strategy (Appendix 1) for public consultation. The Strategy outlines how New Zealand Food Safety intends to maintain a trusted food safety system in the future.

Executive Summary

2. New Zealand's food safety system is currently performing well. There are however many changing factors affecting the future of food, so New Zealand Food Safety needs to proactively position itself to maintain New Zealand's world class food safety system.
3. New Zealand Food Safety needs a strategy in order to:
 - a. be future-focused and anticipate upcoming challenges and seize opportunities. It needs to be well positioned to respond to pressures on production, new innovation and changes in consumer expectations;
 - b. be transparent about how it intends to work with consumers, industry and Māori to better deliver for them and perform its role more effectively;
 - c. contribute to broader social, economic and wellbeing outcomes.
4. The attached draft New Zealand Food Safety Strategy identifies the following priorities:
 - a. ensuring the food safety system remains robust and fit-for-purpose;
 - b. supporting New Zealanders to make informed decisions about food;
 - c. leading and shaping international food standards and facilitating trade;
 - d. proactively horizon scanning to identify new opportunities.
5. The needs of consumers and industry are pivotal to the development of this Strategy. New Zealand Food Safety conducted informal early engagement with them to ensure their voices were reflected.
6. New Zealand Food Safety intends to begin public consultation on the draft Strategy on 2 September. This will provide an opportunity to test the Strategy's priorities and seek feedback on what matters to consumers, industry and other stakeholders. The finalised Strategy will be launched at a New Zealand Food Safety Summit in December.

Background

Role in the food system

7. New Zealand's food safety system is the backbone of our economy. This system keeps consumers safe and empowers them to make informed choices. It is trusted by trading partners and supports New Zealand food exporters to sell their products to the world. More than 80% of New Zealand's total export revenue comes from food products, which are consumed by over 40 million people each month in more than 200 export markets.
8. New Zealand Food Safety is a business unit within the Ministry for Primary Industries. It ensures systems are in place to support businesses to make safe and suitable food – for New Zealand and our export markets.
9. Consumers, the food industry, overseas governments, regulators, and verifiers all play an important role in the food system. New Zealand Food Safety's core functions across the food system are to:
 - set and communicate rules and standards;
 - promote and monitor compliance with rules and standards;
 - help industry build a positive food safety culture;
 - monitor and support the work done by verifiers;
 - enforce the rules when required;
 - inform, educate and empower consumers to make safe and healthy food choices; and
 - monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the system.

Why we need a strategy for New Zealand Food Safety

10. The global context in which the food system sits is changing rapidly. Around the world, there are emerging pressures on production, such as climate change, population growth, complex supply chains, and increasingly sophisticated food fraud. There are also significant opportunities, such as new technology and innovation and advances in hazard detection and risk prevention. In addition, there are changes in consumption, with people taking an increasing interest in the food they eat, and consuming new foods in new ways.
11. The Strategy is not a broad government strategy covering all aspects of food (for example, agricultural production is out of scope). Rather, it will give New Zealand Food Safety the focus on how it uses its resources, its people and its budget to deliver better outcomes, alongside continuing its important core work. The Strategy could be a key building block towards a broader food system strategy for New Zealand.

12. This draft Strategy has been developed so that New Zealand Food Safety can be sure the food system continues to deliver safety and prosperity for New Zealand and New Zealanders. Being future-focused will help New Zealand Food Safety understand what matters most to consumers and other stakeholders, resulting in better outcomes for all New Zealanders.
13. The Strategy will contribute to broader social and economic outcomes. It supports the government's strategic wellbeing framework for New Zealanders, specifically the Human and Natural Capital measures. It also supports the growth of sustainable primary production and helps Māori agribusinesses to develop and prosper. It focuses effort on maintaining our world-class food safety system, facilitating trade and encouraging the development of high-value exports.

What is the strategy?

14. New Zealand Food Safety is seeking to achieve the vision that New Zealand food can be trusted by everyone, everywhere, by contributing to the following outcomes:
 - a. Māori have trust and confidence in the food safety system because we work in partnership.
 - b. Consumers are confident that food is safe and suitable, and they can make informed choices.
 - c. Overseas governments have trust and confidence in our food safety system.
 - d. Producers have trust and confidence in the food safety system and it supports their growth.
15. New Zealand Food Safety is progressing to work towards the following strategic priorities:
 - a. We will ensure New Zealand's world class food system remains robust in responding to future challenges, which includes ensuring our legislation and regulatory systems are fit-for-purpose, promoting compliance with the food safety rules, and deterring and detecting fraud.
 - b. We will proactively support New Zealanders to feel confident making choices about food, which requires us to engage more proactively with consumers about food-related risks, to provide tools and information that promote safe food handling practices, and develop more effective methods to promote informed consumer choices.
We will lead new thinking in international forums to expand our international influence, we will do more to shape international standards, to enable the best possible access to global markets for New Zealand primary products, and develop more robust and innovative assurances to facilitate trade.
 - d. We will be an intelligence-led business that proactively prepares for the future, which includes constantly scanning the international and local environment for emerging opportunities and risks.

Indicative action plan

Strategic priority 1: We will ensure New Zealand's world class food system remains robust in responding to future challenges.	
<i>Strategic initiatives</i>	<i>Some indicative early actions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with industry to identify rules and requirements that are overly difficult to comply with, or that inhibit innovation, and look for ways to address these issues without compromising safety. Build a clear picture of the performance of the food safety system and what influences it so that New Zealand Food Safety can target its effort towards the areas that will have the greatest impact on the system. Actively provide examples of food-safety best practice and work with industry to enhance a culture of shared learning. Ensure the co-regulatory model with councils and interfaces with other departments are working as well as they can for all involved. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update templates and tools with a focus on helping smaller food businesses operate without the need for external assistance. Explore how New Zealand Food Safety can provide more support to operators entering the food industry and a new business in order to ensure compliance. Strategically contribute to the trans-Tasman food standards system so that New Zealand priorities are advanced. Pilot food safety initiatives with commercial Marae-based businesses to understand how New Zealand Food Safety can better support their unique needs. Explore ways New Zealand Food Safety can make its data more publicly accessible.
Strategic priority 2: We will proactively support New Zealanders to feel confident making choices about food.	
<i>Strategic initiatives</i>	<i>Some indicative early actions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore user-friendly approaches for communicating information about what is in consumers' food to complement existing information on labels. Ensure consumers have access to factual and reliable information about food safety risks to enable them to make good decisions. Ensure there is a consumer-friendly online presence for New Zealand Food Safety containing easy to understand information for consumers. Establish a continuous outreach programme to help consumers manage their own food safety. Ensure that New Zealand Food Safety is a recognised brand that consumers and customers can trust. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage more proactively with information about ad-hoc food safety consumer issues using channels that are likely to reach the target audience. Leverage off opportunities with others to engage in public conversations about food safety.

Strategic priority 3: We will lead new thinking in international forums to expand our international influence.	
<i>Strategic initiatives</i>	<i>Some indicative early actions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build technical and institutional knowledge across New Zealand Food Safety to enable succession planning for key positions. • Build our science expertise and networks to support and enhance our international reputation. • Work with industry to showcase food safety success stories and practices to global regulators. • Identify ways New Zealand Food Safety can actively participate in international science communities. 	
Strategic priority 4: We will be an intelligence-led business that proactively prepares for the future.	
<i>Strategic initiatives</i>	<i>Some indicative early actions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish the technical capability and capacity to undertake long term horizon scanning. • Develop an approach to prioritise and plan New Zealand Food Safety's long term work based on insights from its horizon scanning. • Understand and respond appropriately to stakeholder needs, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensuring New Zealand Food Safety has access to the capability required to engage directly with consumers. ○ Building New Zealand Food Safety capability to engage in a culturally appropriate way with Māori consumers and business owners. ○ Identifying opportunities when New Zealand Food Safety can co-design initiatives with industry. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish better monitoring of social media for emerging trends. • Collaborate with other countries' food safety regulators, to gain insights on key technology-related risks and opportunities. • Support the Food Safety Science and Research Centre as it shapes its future work programme. • Develop a channel strategy to effectively connect with consumers. • Invest in the analytical capabilities required to transform horizon scanning into informed decisions.

Consultation plan

17. In June, New Zealand Food Safety undertook an early engagement process to test the Strategy and reflect the voices of consumers, businesses and industry sectors.

18. New Zealand Food Safety intends to release the draft Strategy for public consultation on 2 September.
19. The consultation process will cover a four week period and include two weeks of public meetings in eight locations across New Zealand. Social media and other tools will be used to increase public awareness of New Zealand Food Safety's role in the food system and provide the opportunity to contribute to the strategy. This will involve targeting key groups such as Māori, industry representatives, the science community, health professionals and academics. We will also place a particular emphasis on engaging with consumers and encouraging them to express their views.
20. New Zealand Food Safety recognises the importance of engaging with Māori. Consultation material on how Māori can engage on the Strategy and how New Zealand Food Safety intends to work in partnership with Māori on food safety will be released as part of public consultation.
21. It is likely there will be some media attention, and an engagement plan is being prepared to address this.
22. As the Strategy contains draft actions, I will engage with Cabinet if this leads to any resulting policy decisions.
23. During public consultation, New Zealand Food Safety intends to host a series of lectures in September. There will be lectures across Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch exploring the key strategic priorities from the Strategy.
24. New Zealand Food Safety will consider all feedback received during the consultation and submission process and use it for input into the finalised Strategy.
25. The Strategy will be launched at a New Zealand Food Safety Summit in early December. The summit will be attended by key industry stakeholders, consumers, tertiary education providers, and domestic and international experts in the food safety field.

Consultation

26. The following departments and agencies have been consulted and their views are reflected within the Strategy: Ministry of Health, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Treasury, Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, Environmental Protection Authority, Te Arawhiti, Commerce Commission and Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.
27. Key bodies in the food system including Food Standards Australia New Zealand and Food Safety Assurance Advisory Council have been consulted.

- 28.** Local councils are co-regulators with New Zealand Food Safety under the Food Act 2014. As part of early engagement, New Zealand Food Safety engaged with the Co-regulators Priorities Panel to ensure council involvement in this Strategy. Wellington and Auckland council representatives were also present and contributed during road-testing with industry. An external engagement plan has been created to ensure councils continue to be actively involved in the Strategy.

Financial Implications

- 29.** There are no financial implications for the Crown associated with releasing the draft New Zealand Food Safety Strategy for public consultation. The action plan for the Strategy is likely to provide guidance for future investment in the food system. Any future Government investment will be considered as part of future budget processes.

Legislative Implications

- 30.** There are no legislative implications resulting from the release of the draft Strategy document.

Impact Analysis

- 31.** Release of the public Strategy will have no regulatory impacts or compliance cost implications, so a regulatory impact statement is not required at this time.

Proactive Release

- 32.** Following Cabinet consideration I intend to consider the release of this paper in full.

Recommendations

The Minister for Food Safety recommends that the Committee:

1. **Note** that New Zealand Food Safety intends to release the attached draft New Zealand Food Safety Strategy for public consultation, which sets out the vision New Zealand Food Safety is working towards, and how it will get there.
2. **Note** the public consultation process will commence 2 September and continue for four weeks. This will include public meetings around New Zealand.
3. **Note** that following public consultation, the finalised Strategy will be published and launched at a New Zealand Food Safety Summit in December

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Damien O'Connor
Minister for Food Safety