

## **Dairy Australia's Submission to FSANZ Proposal P1022: Primary Production and Processing Requirements for Raw Milk Products**

Dairy Australia is the dairy industry owned service organisation, whose members are farmers and industry bodies.

Dairy Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide comments on the FSANZ P1022: Primary Production and Processing Requirements for Raw Milk Products, noting that Dairy Australia is a member of the FSANZ Standards Development Committee and has had the opportunity to provide comments during the development of the Proposal.

Dairy Australia supports Option 1 of the FSANZ proposal. However, we also note that some dairy companies have concerns about allowing the production and sale of unpasteurised dairy products made from raw milk that fall into Category 2 products – ie products where pathogens may be present in the raw milk but the products do not support the growth of pathogens. Dairy Australia has been supportive of the category approach as it allows regulation of different raw milk products to be considered proportionate to their risk. Ensuring the safety of Category 2 products made from raw milk will always be problematic – in previous submissions, we have noted that defining what are Category 1, Category 2 and Category 3 products – especially at the boundaries, is very difficult. Clear Standards and Guidelines are critical – as is strong enforcement. It is imperative that the State Regulators take a consistent national approach to enforcement – and that the Standards and Guidelines are written to ensure there is no ability for individuals to interpret them differently.

The industry's excellent reputation as a producer of safe, quality dairy products is of paramount importance, and Dairy Australia believes that the provision for raw milk products must protect this reputation. We believe, given the right checks and balances, that Option 1 of FSANZ P1022, should provide this protection, while still enabling some raw milk products to be produced, to satisfy the pressures being applied for these products, provided that the appropriate mix of Standards and Guidelines, and enforcement, is implemented consistently and products not meeting the Standards are prohibited.

We make the following specific comments.

1. Further consideration of the exemption in Standard 4.2.4 for raw drinking milk that allows States and Territory laws to provide for the sale of unpasteurised milk is required.

We note that FSANZ has decided not to assess the exemption at this stage and therefore allow States and Territory law to either allow or disallow the sale of unpasteurised milk. The dairy industry is a national industry and we believe it is important to have consistent national outcomes. FSANZ's risk assessment has concluded to date that raw drinking milk poses too great a threat to allow its sale. We believe that FSANZ should reassess this exemption and promote nationally consistent requirements – especially in view of the comment made in the FSANZ Call for Submissions document, page 5 "The severity of illness that results from EHEC infection is a significant contributor to the high level of risk associated with category 3 products, in particular raw drinking milk". The dairy industry believes that raw drinking milk does pose very significant risks to public health – especially if not handled appropriately. Most food illness relating to dairy products are associated with raw drinking milk or category 3 type products. We would like to see this risk consistently managed across Australia, with raw drinking milk not allowed to be sold for consumption. It is also important to ensure that the Standards and Guidelines do not present loopholes that can be used to get round a prohibition on the sale of raw milk – eg Cow Shares.

2. We note the Supporting documents and believe they are appropriate. The Guide for the primary production of milk for raw milk products is supported. The recognition of the importance of carrier status regarding animal health is vital – and we look forward to seeing the section foreshadowed

to be developed to cover an appropriate herd monitoring program to confirm carrier status, specifically for EHEC/STEC. However, this may need to include some microbiological criteria. We also question the status of the recommended monitoring criteria in the Guide –these criteria are critical to ensuring safe raw milk product production and wonder if only having them in the Guide as recommended criteria is sufficient. Should they be part of the Standard?

3. We believe that it may also be prudent to develop guidelines for the purchasing of raw milk products. Even if the whole chain approach is taken and all measures met to ensure safe products, if they are mishandled by consumers during purchasing and storage, this may present potential food safety risks, especially for vulnerable populations.
4. Imported products – we note that FSANZ has advised it “will work closely with the Department of Agriculture to inform the risk management approach to be applied to imported products “ and that this approach will be outlined in the 2<sup>nd</sup> call for submissions report. We believe that imported products must comply with the same requirements as domestically produced products and will be looking to ensure there is a robust system in place to verify this. All the risk assessment and management work for raw milk products and the category approach will be negated if imported products are not verified as meeting equivalent management criteria. The past arrangements of only using a testing regime of a sample of imported products against microbiological criteria will not be satisfactory for Category 2 products under the proposed standard. Evidence of the whole chain management system will also be required.
5. Imported raw milk products coming to Australia via New Zealand under the TTMRA are addressed through the agreement on Risk Foods which includes raw milk cheeses. However, provisions for these products may need to be reviewed because NZ import requirements are different from the proposed through chain FSANZ Primary Production and Processing Requirements for Raw Milk Products.
6. One key factor in ensuring safe products made from raw milk is the competency of the people making the products, across the chain – some level of expertise should be required – especially with regards to the validation of the production process.

Dairy Australia looks forward to continuing to work with FSANZ in finalising a standard for Category 2 products with appropriate and effective control measures to ensure the overall food safety reputation of the dairy industry is maintained. The difficulty of establishing that a product is eligible for Category 2 is recognised and verification will be required that these products continue to meet Category 2 criteria throughout the whole life cycle of the products – prefarm, farm, manufacturing, transport, retail and consumers.

With regard to Category 3 products, Dairy Australia agrees with FSANZ’s assessment that the production and sale of these products (including raw drinking milk) would present an unacceptably high risk for public health, and as such would put at risk the reputation of the industry for producing safe, quality products.

Being a natural product, raw milk is susceptible to contamination with bacterial pathogens, but is made safe by a combination of modern on-farm hygiene and milk handling and storage practices and pasteurisation.

Because of the increasing interest in ‘natural’ foods and minimal processing, alternatives to traditional pasteurisation are always being examined: however, any change has to be balanced with the need to ensure that food safety is not compromised. The dairy industry supports continued research into possible alternative technologies.

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