

Advice 05-2014 of the Scientific Committee of the FASFC on the food safety of the short supply chain

In recent years, consumers show an increasing interest for direct sales of locally produced food. Foodstuff that is made available via this short supply chain have a positive image. Farmers and food companies from both the conventional chain and the short supply chain must comply with European and national legislation. In the European legislation, a certain flexibility is foreseen in terms of short supply chain, giving Member States the possibility to lay down certain own national rules for producers (both primary producers and processing companies) in the short supply chain. There are a number of initiatives in our country to assist farm producers in this, such as the 'Steunpunt Hoeveproducten', an initiative of the npo KVLV in Flanders and 'DiversiFerm', a project of the Walloon Region.

In this advice, an evaluation of some food safety aspects of the short supply chain was made, based on the results of inspections conducted by the FASFC and on the results of analyzes conducted by the 'Steunpunt Hoeveproducten' and 'DiversiFerm' in the short supply chain. The findings were already discussed at the symposium "Food safety of the short supply chain", which was organized by the Scientific Committee in 2012. Further, also results from the scientific literature and expert opinion were taken into account.

From the results of the microbiological analyzes of more than 1.000 samples taken in the short supply chain, it seems that *Listeria monocytogenes* was frequently detected (approximately in 19% of the samples) in raw milk dairy products (milk, butter, cheese, etc.) and meat (minced meat and cooked meat products). *Salmonella* was not isolated in this set of data. Furthermore, from the literature it seems that human pathogenic verocytotoxin-producing *E. coli* (VTEC) and *Campylobacter* could be found in products from the short supply chain and especially in products of animal origin that are not treated thermally. These results show that, just as in the conventional food production, also in the short supply chain sufficient attention must be drawn to the control of these food pathogens with *Listeria monocytogenes* being an important point of attention.

Regarding the general hygiene in the short supply chain, it appears from the analysis of the results of the hygienic indicator bacteria (*E. coli*, coagulase positive staphylococci) in dairy products, that there is room for improvement in quality and hygiene. Also, a greater variability between the results of the number of hygienic indicator bacteria present in products from the short supply chain compared to the conventional food production was observed.

The Scientific Committee draws the attention to the importance of the respect of good manufacturing and hygienic practices in businesses in the short supply chain as well as in the conventional chain.

Concerning the chemical contaminants, a significant higher proportion of non-conformities were detected in the short supply chain in comparison with the conventional chain for residues of coccidiostats in eggs (respectively 3 of the 28 samples were not conform in the short supply chain compared to 3 of the 202 samples in the conventional chain). As a consequence, the Scientific Committee recommends that also in the short supply chain sufficient attention must be paid to the limitation of the risks linked to the presence of residues of coccidiostats in eggs.

Well water that is used during the production of food products, could be a source of contamination of the product, and this is dependant of the location of the wells, the construction and the depth of the wells and the organization of the water distribution network. When carrying out a hazard analysis of the use of well water, the nature of the step in the production process (critical or non-critical activity) and the nature of the hazard (microbiological or chemical) should be taken into account.

The full text is available on this website in dutch and in french, respectively under the section "Wetenschappelijk Comité/Adviezen" and "Comité scientifique/Avis".