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Artisan food technologist support to the dairy and meat sectors

ARTISAN/SPECIALITY DAIRY PRODUCER
NEWSLETTER
BY SARA MCSWEENEY, ARTISAN FOOD TECHNOLOGIST
MOOREPARK FOOD RESEARCH CENTRE

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Food Safety Authority of Ireland consultation on labelling

New proposals have been published which will affect all producers, particularly those who sell at retail level. The proposed regulation will apply to all stages of the food chain and aims to consolidate and update the current EU labelling legislation, providing accurate and comprehensive information that is clearly presented on packaging. A number of proposals for food labels are covered which seek public comment. They include:

Key external stakeholders:

Cáis, artisan food producers, LEADER, FSAI, local authority veterinary inspectors, dairy produce inspectorate (DAFF), principal environmental health officers, Bord Bia

Practical implications for stakeholders:

The deployment by Teagasc of 2 food technologists in a government-funded initiative for a 2-year period (2008-9) to support emerging food safety and regulatory compliance needs by artisan food producers proved to be highly successful in terms of adopting new knowledge necessary to ensure compliance, survival and potential development of their business. Examples of practical outcomes included:

1. Food safety workbook for farmhouse cheesemakers

- (i) In conjunction with FSAI and representatives of Cáis, a workbook for the implementation of HACCP by Farmhouse Cheese Producers was developed. The workbook was piloted onsite with a farmhouse cheese producer and was well received with minor adjustments needed. At the time of project termination, the workbook was being scrutinised by DAFF's Dairy Product Inspectorate ahead of a tentative roll-out date in early 2010.

2. Technical needs survey of artisan and speciality food producers selling at farmer's markets

- (i) The results of this survey reinforced that technical matters, food legislation and training continue to be issues of importance to the producers. Sales / selling / costing issues were also highlighted by stallholders as being difficult areas for them and confirmed the usefulness of workshops and accredited courses (such as the Artisan Food Business and Direct Selling courses) which had been developed by Teagasc. Links were also strengthened with Bord Bia and LEADER to enhance the delivery of this type of training and advice. Gaps in the types of foodstuffs being offered and opportunities for adding new products were noted. These included organic foods, farm produced bottled milk and buttermilk, value added seafood and novel bakery products. Networking with stallholders, producers and market managers led to an increase in the numbers of businesses who availed of one to one mentoring from the technologists or further help from other Teagasc staff.

Main results:

A national survey of farmer's markets was undertaken to profile the types of food products offered as well as the technical needs of producers and traders engaged in such activities

Opportunity / Benefit:

Direct engagement between the Artisan Technologists and end-users i.e. artisan food businesses, throughout the 2-year project addressed numerous regulatory information needs, and increased skill levels via workshops and training courses

Collaborating Institutions:

N/A

Teagasc project team: Dr. Phil Kelly
Mr. Pat Daly
Ms Sara McSweeney
Ms. Carol Griffin
Mr. G. Scully

External collaborators: N/A

1. Project background:

This project was initiated at the behest of Minister E. O’Caoimh, then Minister for Community, Gaeltacht and Rural Affairs and subsequently launched as a Teagasc project jointly-administered by DAFF/DCGRA. The overall objective was to intensify technical support for artisan food producers. In a letter dated 9th March 2007 addressed by Ms. Marion Byrne, DAFF to the then Acting Director of Teagasc, it was requested that the focus of the project should be on “technical support in the area of food safety, management systems, compliance with food law, and food safety incident management”. The project was delivered during 2008-9 following recruitment of 2 contract specialist food technologists, one dairy specialist (Sara McSweeney) based at Moorepark, and a meat specialist (Carol Griffin) located in Ashtown.

Previously, Teagasc had provided artisan support with funding aid from the EU’s Operational Programme for Rural Development (OPRD) during the 1990’s, during which Teagasc Moorepark and Ashtown staff were redeployed to support a Teagasc Rural Development-led programme. Also, the Farmhouse Cheese sector (CAIS) co-funded along with FSAI, EI and DAFF a technical support position at Moorepark for a 2-year period during 2000.

2. Questions addressed by the project:

Could the development and delivery of technical support primarily for artisan food businesses in the dairy and meat sectors by 2 food technologists contracted to work for a 2-year period (2008-9)?

Could the technologists provide a package of technical supports including food safety, management systems, compliance with food law, and food safety incident management to enable these food businesses compete in a more demanding regulatory environment, and in markets with exacting consumer needs?

Could these posts strengthen linkage with food researchers and advisors in Teagasc and other institutes to ensure best knowledge, skills and technology to be made available through training, advice and technical support to these food businesses?

3. The experimental studies:

This project was not research-based, but instead required the setting up of a national framework within Teagasc so that the contracted Food Technologies could leverage organisational resources in the course of delivering their expertise and supports to artisan food producers

Organisation / Administrative Structure

A coordination committee comprising of representatives from Moorepark (Phil Kelly, Chairman), Ashtown (Pat Daly) and Teagasc Rural Development Advisory Service (the late Gerry Scully) was set up.

A number of meetings aimed at promoting the new Teagasc service with other agencies were held and networking took place with those who are stakeholders in artisan food production. These stakeholders included FSAI, Local Authority Veterinary Inspectors, Dairy Produce Inspectorate, Principal Environmental Health Officers, Bord Bia, LEADER and Cáis. Meetings were held during 2008 with representatives of DAFF Dairy Produce Inspectorate in order to streamline the interpretation and understanding of relevant regulation applicable to artisan producers of dairy products, and also with Local Authority Veterinary Inspectorate who regulate meat-processing premises

Strong links were developed with 6 newly appointed regional Teagasc rural food and tourism advisors based throughout the country. The artisan food technologists provided technical back-up to their clients and also participated in training courses arranged by the advisors in their area. Many of these courses were run in conjunction with local LEADER groups.

Promotion of Teagasc artisan programme

As this was a new service, a number of promotional activities took place during 2008, which included website features, national newspapers, posters at Teagasc Farm Fest in Athenry (June), SHOP Retail Exhibition (September) and the Terra Madre Slow Food event in Waterford (September).

4. Main results:

- (i) The technologists became the first point of contact for small producers and potential start ups, many of whom in the past needed to contact different agencies to source the information they required.
- (ii) The dedicated meat and dairy technologists' roles brought to the fore issues of particular relevance to the meat and dairy sectors. These included specific labelling requirements, legislation, processes, equipment and test methods.
- (iii) Over the project duration approximately 400 artisan / speciality producers received technical, food safety, marketing and general business supports. This was achieved through training programmes and one to one advice.
- (iv) A Food Safety workbook addressing HACCP requirements for Farmhouse cheesemakers was developed.
- (v) Working relationships with the regulatory authorities were strengthened and the technologists highlighted any areas where producers perceived inconsistencies in enforcement of legislation.
- (vi) Co-ordination with external stakeholders led to improvements in delivery of services to small businesses.
- (vii) The farmer's market survey carried out over the spring and summer of 2009 gave valuable information on the requirements of artisan and speciality producers and alerted the businesses to the services available to them.
- (viii) The training needs of each sector were identified and relevant courses / workshops were developed and delivered.
- (ix) Operating from within Teagasc Food Research Centres, the two artisan technologists were well placed to leverage the expertise of many experts in Teagasc for the benefit and support of small businesses.

Dairy Technologist:

The dairy technologist interacted extensively with Food and Dairy Production researchers / technical staff based at Moorepark e.g. Dr Diarmuid Sheehan supported a number of cheese companies, and contributed to the development and delivery of the FETAC Farmhouse Cheesemaking course. Flavour and sensory topics were addressed by Dr. Kieran Kilcawley. Kieran Downey (SME Technologist) participated in several meetings with producers and assisted SME's who secured Enterprise Ireland Innovation Vouchers. Drs. Bernie O'Brien and Kieran Jordan provided expertise in milk quality and food safety, respectively. The expertise of technical staff in troubleshooting microbiological issues and sourcing equipment suitable for small scale production was invaluable during the project. Eddie O'Neill and the dairy technologist collaborated closely throughout the two years e.g. responding with technical advice to telephone enquiries from potential clients, site visits and mentoring for established businesses. A database of dairy artisan producers was created by updating the DAFF list of approved dairy manufacturing premises according as new artisan producers registered queries.

Meat Technologist:

The meat technologist worked closely with the technical, research, innovation and SME support staff at Ashtown Food Research Centre on many occasions to provide a full suite of expertise to the artisan and speciality food businesses requiring help. Paddy Ward, meat technologist provided essential product and process development mentoring. John Fagan, BIM product development technologist working in Ashtown assisted in troubleshooting packaging issues. Eugene Vesey, butcher, worked with several small meat producers to increase their butchery skills and also contributed to the development of the Butchery Skills Workshop in November 2009. Advice and laboratory testing of product was provided by Karen Hussey and Joan Carroll from the Food Industry Development Department. Bridin McIntyre and Maeve Henchion of the

Marketing Research Unit provided input to the design of the Farmer's Market Technical Survey and also in areas of supply chain management. A database of meat artisan producers was established as a result of the contacts made throughout the project.

5. Opportunity/Benefit:

A significant observation throughout the 2-year artisan meat and dairy project was the generous spirit with which a wide number of Teagasc staff collaborated with the 2 artisan food technologists and delivered an integrated package of supports to small and artisan food businesses. Knowledge transfer to start-ups and established speciality food businesses was strengthened by the reach of 6 rural food and tourism advisors along with Eddie O'Neill, Artisan Food Specialist. It was this synergy of this multi-disciplinary team which reinforced the role Teagasc as a quality service provider and agency of choice for food SME developmental support.

6. Dissemination:

Main publications:

A workbook for the implementation of HACCP by Farmhouse Cheese Producers was developed in conjunction with Dr Lisa O'Connor, FSAI and representatives of Cáis. The workbook was piloted with the cooperation of a farmhouse cheese producer and was well received with minor adjustments needed. This workbook was under review by the Senior Dairy Produce Inspectorate of DAFF.

Technical needs survey of artisan and speciality food producers selling at farmer's markets (Nov. 2009)

This survey reinforced the view that technical matters, food legislation and training continue to be issues of importance to food producers. Sales / selling / costing issues were also highlighted by stallholders as being challenging. Workshops and accredited courses (such as the Artisan Food Business and Direct Selling courses), developed by Teagasc were high priority. Links were also strengthened with Bord Bia and LEADER to enhance this type of training and advice.

FAQs on legal requirements (dairy & meat businesses)

A leaflet answering FAQs on legal obligations regarding milk quota and setting up a dairy processing facility was completed in February 2009 in conjunction with the Milk Policy Division of DAFF and was supplied to potential start up dairy processors as well as publication on the Cáis website.

Popular publications:

Liquid milk factsheet

In response to demand for information on pasteurisation and bottling of liquid milk on farm, a six page information document was completed in August 2009 summarising technical and legal requirements with regards to processing milk as well as addressing some of the business aspects involved

Artisan/speciality dairy producer newsletter – 3 issues (August 2008, January 2009, August 2009)

These newsletters included items of interest to the sector, updates on regulation and upcoming events of interest.

National guide to good practice for the dairy sector

Sara McSweeney organised and hosted a meeting with Cáis and the Irish Dairy Industries Association who were developing a National Guide to Good Hygiene Practice for the Dairy Sector. Discussions took place in October and November 2008 regarding incorporation of guidance for the artisan/speciality cheese sector into this guide. This guide is due for publication in early 2010

7. Compiled by: Dr Phil Kelly and Ms Carol Griffin