

New Zealand Food Safety

Haumaru Kai Aotearoa



A Strategy for New Zealand Food Safety 2019-2024





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Foreword

Tēna koutou, tēna koutou, tēna koutou katoa

Each day, almost all New Zealanders interact with our food system, usually more than once. We grow food, we produce it, we prepare it, we share it and we eat it. It is what brings us together, nourishes us, sustains us and is the backbone of our economy.



New Zealand food also plays an important role in the lives of overseas consumers, with many millions enjoying our food either as whole products or as ingredients in a myriad of composite foods. We export food to over 200 countries. Importing countries often re-export foods that have gained in value from New Zealand ingredients that are safe and of high quality.

It is crucial, both within New Zealand and overseas, that we have a dynamic and forward-thinking strategy that will maintain and grow our reputation as a provider of trusted and safe food. As we developed the strategy, we tested it with Māori (our Treaty partners), consumers, customers, co-regulators and industry representatives to see if we had focused on the right things. I was pleased to see that the vision and direction in the strategy were largely supported – that means we share common goals with the partners we need to make the strategy a success.

This strategy enables us to be very clear about positioning New Zealand Food Safety/Haumarū Kai Aotearoa for the future. We must be adaptable and innovative in a world where food supply chains and consumer expectations are rapidly and often unpredictably changing. The five priorities underpinning our strategy out to 2024 will pave the way for us to minimise foodborne risks to consumers and meet their expectations in other ways, for example informing them about the origin and authenticity of their food. It will also pave the way for us to achieve the best deployment of our resources as well as respond rapidly to emerging risks and threats to trade that undoubtedly will continue to appear on the horizon.

The action plan supporting this strategy will enable New Zealand Food Safety/Haumarū Kai Aotearoa to play its full part in ensuring that food imported, produced domestically or exported from New Zealand is trusted and recognised – by everyone, everywhere – and we will be actively monitoring and reviewing progress year by year.

Our future is exciting and we will be working hard to uphold the trust and confidence of all our partners, consumers and industry alike, whatever part they play as food travels from the farm to the plate.

Ngā manaakitanga

Bryan Wilson

Deputy Director-General New Zealand Food Safety/Haumarū Kai Aotearoa

Strategy on a page

New Zealand Food Safety 2019-2024

WHAKATAUKI

Ko tāu rourou, Ko tāku rourou, Ka ora ai te iwi

By sharing your food basket with my food basket the people will thrive

OUR VISION

New Zealand food: trusted and recognised by everyone, everywhere

OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Manaaki – caring for others

Whanaungatanga – collaboration and relationships

Ngā Manukura – visible leadership

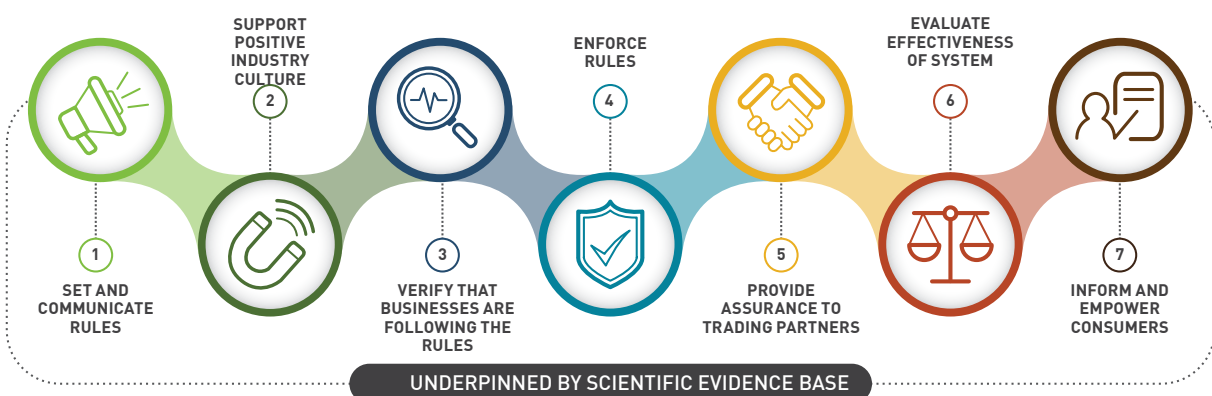
Mana – integrity/authority

Kaitiakitanga – guardianship of the food system

OUR PRIORITIES

1. We will ensure New Zealand's world class food safety system remains robust
2. We will proactively support consumers to make informed food choices
3. We will actively contribute to new thinking in international forums
4. We will work in genuine partnership with Māori
5. We will be innovative and forward-looking in meeting new challenges

OUR FUNCTIONS ACROSS THE FOOD PROCESS



Who we are and what we do

The food safety system

Food and the primary industries have long been the backbone of New Zealand's economy and an important contributor to who we are as a nation. At home, food is an important part of manaakitanga (caring for others) and as an exporting country we share our food with the rest of the world. In the year to June 2018 the value of New Zealand's food imports reached \$6.9 billion, with 80 percent of the food we make exported and contributing \$32.7 billion to the economy.

A well-functioning food safety system is an essential part of the production and sale of food. The complexities of the food supply chain and expectations of different stakeholders mean that the food safety system must cover all foods and beverages as well as pet food, animal feed, and agricultural compounds and veterinary medicines. Everyone involved in producing, transporting, making, storing and selling food contributes to the performance of the food safety system.

To ensure food is safe and meets consumer expectations (such as its suitability and distinct origin), the food safety system must be actively engaged with a wide range of stakeholders throughout the food supply chain. Industry has the primary responsibility for the safety of imported food, food produced domestically and exported food. Robust regulatory processes must be in place to verify that standards and guidelines are being met. Consumers also play an important role in food safety. How consumers handle and prepare food can have a significant influence in minimising foodborne illness. Further, consumers want to be well-informed about the nature of food so that they can make the choices important to them about the food they purchase.

Unlike many other countries, a very high proportion of the food we produce is destined for export and this places a special responsibility on New Zealand Food Safety/Haumarū Kai Aotearoa. We need to ensure that our food is safe and suitable for all consumers and we also want our exporters to benefit from the unique provenance of our foods. We work closely with our trading partners to ensure that the food safety standards we implement in New Zealand are acceptable to overseas governments. We are also actively involved with international standard-setting agencies, such as Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex), in working towards harmonised international standards that remove undue barriers to trade.





Our role

New Zealand Food Safety/Haumarū Kai Aotearoa is a business unit of the Ministry for Primary Industries. Under New Zealand law, the food industry is responsible for producing safe and suitable food and demonstrating compliance with standards. New Zealand Food Safety/Haumarū Kai Aotearoa oversees the functioning of the food safety system as a whole. We set the regulatory standards relevant to each part of the food supply system and verify that they are being met on a continuous basis. We also actively work with industry to develop food safety guidance, promote food safety culture within industry and monitor food safety and suitability outcomes.

Territorial authorities (known as local councils) are a key partner in the domestic food safety system. As co-regulators with New Zealand Food Safety/Haumarū Kai Aotearoa under the Food Act 2014, territorial authorities provide the permission for local food businesses to operate, and ensure compliance. In the New Zealand food safety system, a number of private companies assist with verification and laboratory services.

Our key functions are to:

- Apply science and risk assessment to the greatest extent possible in all of our work.
- Set the rules and standards and supporting all stakeholders to understand them.
- Work closely with industry to develop guidance on achieving food safety and suitability.
- Promote a strong industry food safety culture.
- Verify that food businesses are in compliance with rules and standards.
- Enforce rules and standards.
- Provide assurances to trading partners that exported food meets their rules and standards.
- Monitor and evaluate the performance of the regulatory system.
- Inform and support consumers to make the choices that are important to them.

The benefits of these functions are that food is safe and suitable, consumers can make informed choices, food businesses can thrive and innovate without undue regulatory burden, and overseas governments can have a high level of confidence and trust in our export assurances. Along with these direct benefits, the food safety system strongly contributes to our country's broader social and economic outcomes, better outcomes for Māori, sustainable development, and regional growth.

The challenges ahead

New Zealand Food Safety/Haumarū Kai Aotearoa is currently faced with significant challenges and opportunities throughout the food supply chain. Industry throughout the world continues to innovate in the way food is produced, manufactured, transported and sold. International trading partners are regulating food safety and suitability in different ways. Global considerations such as climate change, food security and sustainability are resulting in new challenges for regulatory systems. Closer to home, economic and social changes demand a proactive response by New Zealand Food Safety/Haumarū Kai Aotearoa.

Changes in our population, land use, water supply and soil management are creating new challenges and opportunities. Improvements in on-farm inputs (such as seeds, fertilisers and veterinary medicines) support increased production but can also result in adverse impacts, such as microbial resistance to commonly used antibiotics. Increasingly complex global supply chains, more sophisticated “food fraud” and the rise of e-commerce are some of the external factors also putting pressure on how we produce and export our food.

The renaissance of Māori culture in New Zealand is leading to significant growth of Māori leadership in business and workplaces. With Treaty of Waitangi settlements and increasing capability, Māori leadership and mātauranga (knowledge) are having a much stronger overall influence in the food economy. The voice of Māori in food is vital to the wellbeing of tangata whenua and the cultural integrity of this unique aspect of our country. We need to keep pace with this renaissance and understand how best to meet the Crown’s obligations in relation to Māori rights and interests.

Consumers are becoming much more selective about food, particularly in high-value markets, and are highly responsive to new products and food trends. Many consumers around the world want to understand the provenance of their food, its environmental footprint and its likely nutritional impact. Consumers are also increasingly aware of the importance of the choices they make in reducing lifestyle-related illnesses and avoiding food-related allergies. These expectations put renewed pressure on the regulator in terms of effective consumer education on food safety and nutrition, making sure that food reflects what is on the label, and verifying health claims made by industry.

Changes in food technology and processing systems, and the development of new foods, inevitably impact on control of hazards throughout the food chain. In some cases this may lead to the introduction of new hazards. New food technologies now commonly result in single food products being composed of both local and imported ingredients manufactured by very different businesses. Here the regulatory challenge is to facilitate the implementation of new technology and innovative processes, while ensuring that food remains safe, suitable, and true to its label.





How this strategy will guide our work

Our vision is that New Zealand food can be trusted and recognised by everyone, everywhere. It is essential both within New Zealand and overseas that we have a dynamic and forward-thinking food safety strategy that will continue to maintain and grow our reputation as a provider of trusted and safe food.

This strategy outlines five priorities that will better position New Zealand Food Safety/Haumaru Kai Aotearoa for the future, enabling us to keep a sharp focus on the safety and suitability of imported and domestically produced food while retaining the trust and confidence of our trading partners throughout our export food supply chains.

We aim to strike an even balance between delivering good results today and acting on opportunities that will deliver better results tomorrow. Our new strategic priorities will enable us to mobilise and upskill our people to greatest advantage and mitigate future threats to our food safety system. We will do this by looking for new solutions to old problems and develop new technical capabilities for tackling emerging issues. We will work with all our partners, including the food industry, Māori and iwi, consumers, territorial authorities, scientists and overseas governments, to maximise our opportunity to make a difference.

Our Priorities





Ma te tika o muri, ka tika a mua

It's through the efforts of those who work out the back, will the front flourish

1. We will ensure New Zealand's world class food safety system remains robust

To maintain a robust food safety system in the face of the challenges ahead, we will ensure the regulatory system has effective controls in place to reduce known risks and actively respond to emerging risks. New Zealand Food Safety/Haumarū Kai Aotearoa will ensure our legislation, regulations, standards and ways of operating are informed by evidence and are fit for purpose. The standards and solutions we need to reduce risk require us to work across the Ministry for Primary Industries and with our co-regulators, other agencies, industry and our overseas counterparts.

In taking this action, we will be mindful of the balance needed between new rules and regulations and the flexibility industry needs to innovate and grow. We will also strive to make well-informed regulatory decisions when broad considerations such as food fraud and defence against the intentional tampering of food, sustainability of the food-producing environment, and cultural and economic impacts come into play. New Zealand Food Safety/Haumarū Kai Aotearoa will prioritise engagement with key partners in the food safety system as we move forward.

Shared standards for composition and labelling, developed under the Joint Food Standards System between New Zealand and Australia (known as the Food Treaty), have a significant impact on our regulatory efficiency and food control outcomes. It is important that New Zealand Food Safety/Haumarū Kai Aotearoa continues to provide strong technical input into the setting of shared standards by Food Standards Australia New Zealand, as well as influencing the effectiveness of the trans-Tasman regulatory machinery itself.

New Zealand Food Safety/Haumarū Kai Aotearoa also needs to provide the best support and advice to food businesses so that they can prosper. We already work closely with industry throughout the food chain and know that they want more assistance in understanding and implementing rules and standards. We will invest in regulatory support systems so that compliance is not an undue burden and guidelines on best practice are developed collaboratively between government and industry.



THE CHANGE WE'RE SEEKING

- To be able to demonstrate that New Zealand's official food controls for food safety remain among the world's best operational models for managing risk.
- To better target our regulatory activities so that the food safety system is fit-for-purpose, resilient and proactively encompasses new technology and innovation.
- To increase engagement with food businesses throughout the food chain to make sure the regulatory controls are understood and to improve compliance.
- To fully engage with priority stakeholders to ensure that shared interests in the food safety system are reflected in regulation to the greatest extent possible.



2. We will proactively support consumers to make informed food choices

Consumers are at the heart of the food system and have a significant role in food safety. As with the food industry, we need to put consumers at the centre of many things we do. This means we need to invest more in understanding consumer information needs and behaviour.

Consumer food safety practices can account for up to 50% of acute foodborne illnesses. The rapidly changing demographics of consumer populations and their sometimes limited awareness of food safety mean that good practice is increasingly under threat. We have been successful in reducing the rate of foodborne illness caused by *Campylobacter* from more than 200 notified cases per 100,000 people in 2007 to 78 notified cases per 100,000 in 2018 and some of this reduction has been due to improved food handling and preparation by consumers. However, we need to do much more in terms of encouraging good hygienic practice in the home if we are to further reduce foodborne campylobacteriosis significantly.

In addition to changes in food safety practice, consumer demands for more nutritious and sustainably produced food are presenting regulators with a new set of challenges. We are also seeing a dramatic increase in interest in the regional origins of food and novel food products, such as alternative proteins, meatless hamburgers, and tailored diets. Many consumers want more information about food – the ingredients, source, and means of production – often well beyond what can fit on a food label. Provision of regulatory information in this regard must be accurate and trusted.

New Zealand Food Safety/Haumaru Kai Aotearoa will actively promote consumer awareness of good food handling and cooking practices and enhance consumers' ability to make informed decisions about food choices. We will work with New Zealand health authorities to provide information on more healthy food choices. Critical for informed choices are labels that clearly communicate information on food safety (such as allergens) and nutrition. By increasing our focus on authoritative food safety and suitability information for New Zealanders – from individuals and whanau to communities and schools – we will empower people to act in ways that will better support their health and lifestyle preferences.

THE CHANGE WE'RE SEEKING

- To make authoritative information about food safety issues more accessible to consumers, in ways that suit their communication preferences.
- To foster stronger partnerships between central government agencies, local government, academia and industry which raise consumer awareness and help inform their choices.



3. We will actively contribute to new thinking in international forums

Food exports are a vital part of New Zealand's economy and New Zealanders enjoy a variety of foods imported from around the world. Our reliance on trade dictates that New Zealand Food Safety/Haumarū Kai Aotearoa must be actively involved in the setting of international standards that influence many of the conditions of that trade, including food safety.

Active participation in the international food safety science community provides cutting-edge inputs to multilateral (and bilateral) standard-setting activities. Close collaboration with counterpart regulators in our major trading countries also provides targeted and innovative input to international standard-setting activities that reflect New Zealand's regulatory priorities and food production interests.

New Zealand has a long history of involvement in international standard setting and hosts two important Codex commodity committees: meat hygiene and milk products. New Zealand Food Safety/Haumarū Kai Aotearoa is well placed to continue its influential role in Codex and other international standard-setting organisations and continue to harmonise our own regulatory frameworks and standards with those in global use.

Technical co-operation agreements with regulatory authorities in overseas countries provide an effective platform for exchange of knowledge on new trends in regulation and their eventual translation into international standards and guidelines for food in trade. Such agreements also provide the opportunity to enrich our scientific capability and experience.

THE CHANGE WE'RE SEEKING

- To enhance key international relationships and strengthen New Zealand's influence in the development of food safety standards, compliance and enforcement approaches at an international level.
- To ensure our domestic rules and standard setting are informed by learning from global best practice and leading edge scientific information.
- To lead and collaborate with scientific experts, regulatory professionals and competent authorities around the world on shared challenges and threats.
- To build enduring and productive relationships that benefit New Zealand trade and consumers of New Zealand food.



*Mā tō tātou whanaugatanga e whakataki I te ritenga tika
By our kinship we strive to meet our present and future needs*

4. We will work in genuine partnership with Māori

New Zealand Food Safety/Haumarū Kai Aotearoa seeks to actively build stronger relationships and partnerships with iwi/Māori to support economic, environmental, social and cultural aspirations. We will ensure that iwi/Māori – as kaitiaki (guardians), as hunters and gatherers of indigenous and wild food, as consumers and as food business owners – are properly involved in development of the regulatory systems that influence their broad span of food-associated activities. We will continue to improve our ability to communicate information on food standards and guidelines so that Māori food businesses and marae-based initiatives grow and prosper.

We will strive to create long lasting relationships with Māori, as Treaty partners and as tangata whenua. We will develop a better understanding of Māori rights and interests so we can ensure that our actions, as a Crown agency, honour the Crown's obligations under the Treaty of Waitangi.

Trust and mutual understanding will ensure important matters, such as science and mātauranga Māori, are properly discussed and pave the way forward. New Zealand Food Safety/Haumarū Kai Aotearoa is committed to being a visible leader, meeting “kanohi-ki-te-kanohi” to build trusting and enduring relationships with iwi/Māori on both domestic and international issues. We will actively strengthen our staff's understanding of the Crown's obligations and role, and the impact of the regulatory system on Māori rights and interests.

THE CHANGE WE'RE SEEKING

- To enhance our understanding of Māori rights and interests in relation to the food safety system, and the Crown's Treaty of Waitangi obligations.
- To build our experience and capability that leads to greater trust by and engagement with iwi/Māori.
- To seek out and include consideration of Māori mātauranga (knowledge), values and perspectives in New Zealand Food Safety/Haumarū Kai Aotearoa's decision-making.

Ki te kahore he whakakitenga ka ngaro te iwi
Without foresight or vision the people will be lost

5. We will be innovative and forward-looking in meeting new challenges

Food systems around the world are facing increasing pressures and challenges on many fronts, from new and emerging hazards in the food supply through to sophisticated cases of food fraud incentivised by the high value of niche foods. A core asset in responding to these challenges is sufficient knowledge and capability to meet demands for fit-for-purpose rules and standards, as well as the monitoring of regulatory performance.

New Zealand Food Safety/Haumarū Kai Aotearoa is a science and risk-based organisation and, wherever appropriate, rules and standards are developed from strong evidence, risk analysis and a transparent decision-making process. We need to continually build our science and risk assessment capability in this respect. The needs, expectations and motivations of the New Zealand workforce are rapidly changing and the consequence of this is a need for more targeted investment in specialist technical skills and food safety experience.

An emerging risks system and an intelligence and horizon-scanning system that predicts significant changes in food supply chains and evaluates the behaviour of stakeholders are other core assets in an innovative and forward-looking food safety system. We need to further evolve our ability to identify and rapidly respond to new and emerging risks in food chains, both in New Zealand and overseas, and increasingly link digitally with such systems in other countries. As is the case with many other countries, New Zealand Food Safety/Haumarū Kai Aotearoa is exploring new intelligence systems and the value of their early warning capability. This will be an important area for development in the future.

New and novel foods create future challenges and opportunities for New Zealand Food Safety/Haumarū Kai Aotearoa. Regulation of the composition and safety of these foods requires increasingly sophisticated regulatory capability and a rapid turnaround if commercial opportunities are to be maximised. In addition, new technologies may not be acceptable to some consumers and the role of the regulator is central to informing stakeholder discussions and working towards resolution.

THE CHANGE WE'RE SEEKING

- To secure sufficient specialist capability to meet the demands for high-quality and forward-looking rules and standards.
- To further invest in an emerging risks system and a horizon-scanning system that systematically identifies emerging threats and opportunities, and tackles those which are most significant.
- To anticipate innovations in the food supply and support industry with the timely development and validation of new regulatory requirements.
- To share insights about the challenges ahead and potential solutions with relevant stakeholders so as to galvanise collaboration and future action across the food safety system.



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