



Australian Chicken Meat
Federation (ACMF) Inc

ACMF Statement on Product Traceability and Recall

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Industry statement on product traceability and recall

Policy

The operations and documentation involved in producing chicken meat and further processed products must be such that at any point in time, at any point along the production chain, and for any product, it is possible to know where the product came from and where it is going next.

This is essential so that any potentially unsafe food product can be recalled. Standard 3.2.2 – Food Safety Practices and General Requirements within the *Food Standards Code*, requires wholesale suppliers, manufacturers and importers to have a recall system that will ensure the recall of unsafe food. It also helps in rectifying any problems in production and processing that may be the source of a failure to meet acceptable quality and/or safety standards.

Background – food safety, traceability and product recall

The chicken meat industry aims to provide safe and nutritious food at an attractive price. Food safety is of utmost importance and the industry acknowledges the trust consumers put in it.

Quality assurance systems cover all aspects of the supply of chicken meat including farming, feed, transport, processing and the many intermediate steps. These systems cover human health/food safety as well as animal health and welfare and employees' occupational health and safety. The main standard dealing with food safety is the *Australian Standard for Construction of Premises and Hygienic Production of Poultry Meat for Human Consumption (AS 4465:2005)* which sets out the minimum requirements to be followed to ensure the safe production of chicken meat.

The industry's ability to trace the product along the chain of production, processing and distribution is integral to safe food production. This is generally referred to as traceability, with **up-stream tracing** referring to the ability to identify where the product came from, while **down-stream tracing** refers to the ability to establish where products went to. Tracing is essential if it is found that a food product is unsafe for consumption.

It is important to be able to rapidly trace products **down-stream** to identify and recall product that may be contaminated and not have to recall product that is safe. It is equally important to rapidly establish where the system failed to maintain food safety in order to rectify the problem, prevent further occurrences and resume production – and for these investigations, tracing **up-stream** is essential.

Any failure to meet the required standards sets in motion a vast number of tests and investigations to ensure that no unsafe food reaches the consumer, to establish the origin of the breakdown in the food safety system and to rectify the problem. Every incident will be different depending on the nature and severity of the hazard, the step at which it was discovered, the type of food product involved and its distribution. Traceability is essential for the industry to operate and react efficiently and effectively to a production and/or processing problem.

Level of Traceability

Traceability up and down the chain is extremely robust in the chicken meat industry. This is helped by the close vertical integration of all the steps and operations in the industry, from breeder farms and hatcheries to feedmills, grow-out farms and primary and further processing plants.

Major retailers of chicken meat require processors to conduct regular food recall simulations to demonstrate to the retailers and the processors satisfaction that the industry maintains adequate records of its systems and products so that if necessary, product could be traced and recalled in the event that it reached the consumer.

Ideally, tracing would be undertaken at the level of individual birds. However, this would bring with it insurmountable practical and technical difficulties. This is because a typical farm has well over a hundred thousand birds and a processing plant deals with several hundred thousand birds every day. So unlike the beef industry, which traces individual animals from the farm to the products derived from it, the chicken meat industry traces whole flocks of birds up to the processing plant. From there, up-stream tracing is generally based on a whole day's production. In other words, once the chicken is processed, its origins can be traced to the few farms that provided birds on the day the meat was processed.

Tracing flocks of birds instead of individual birds increases the potential economic risk to the processor, as they may have to recall and possibly destroy[♦] many more birds than would be necessary if individual tracing was possible. Importantly however, tracing flocks rather than individual birds does not reduce food safety and consumer protection; on the contrary, any food recall will have a greater safety margin attached to it as many more birds than may be affected may be removed from sale / distribution.

Responsibilities

Ensuring food safety is the most important responsibility for all those involved in the production of food. Responsibility for ensuring traceability resides at many levels, with processors devising and implementing the systems and documentation requirements. Food recalls would generally be undertaken by the brand owner of the finished product. However, the brand owner may also pass this responsibility back to the processor or manufacturer. Food recalls are conducted in conjunction with the relevant State or Territory food enforcement agency (e.g. NSW Food Authority, Queensland Health, etc) and Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ). FSANZ needs to be notified of food recalls because it is responsible for coordinating recalls nationally. States, Territories and the Commonwealth have mandatory recall powers, although most food recalls are undertaken voluntarily by industry. It is a legal requirement under Chapter 3 of the *Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code* for manufacturers, wholesalers, distributors and importers of food to have in place a written recall plan and comply with this plan when recalling unsafe food.

[♦] It may be possible that potentially unsafe food can be removed from the market place, followed by rectification of the problem and returned to the market. This process is done in conjunction with the relevant State or Territory food enforcement agency.