



Annual Report 2002

Incorporating Financial Statements to December 2001



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Mission Statement

**To protect and improve public health,
by fostering and maintaining confidence
in the food supply on the island of Ireland,
in partnership with others.**

Advisory Board Message from Chairman



safefood – the Food Safety Promotion Board is emerging as a strong, authoritative, voice that is both vigilant and responsive in its commitment to public health. Through the determination of a dedicated and committed staff and a solidly backed scientific programme, the organisation is building all-island credibility. It is to **safefood**'s credit that this credibility extends across a wide number of audiences not least of which is the consumer.

Ultimately, it is the consumer who creates the demand and if they cannot have confidence in the food supply chain then the product demand will diminish and with it a central pillar of our economy.

An integrated process to involve all stakeholders, inter organisation co-operation and a commitment by all those in the food chain is essential to inspiring consumer confidence. In this **safefood**, as a co-ordinator and forger of alliances between stakeholders and the consumer, is to the fore.

safefood has undertaken unprecedented work on the island of Ireland, co-ordinating and facilitating linkages between many organisations. The result of this is a shared and extended knowledge base that is to everyone's benefit.

The work of the Board has been supported by both the expertise of the Scientific Advisory Committee and also by the broader science community to whom we are most grateful. A sound scientific base has given credibility to **safefood** and to its communications.

safefood has a challenging remit to restore public confidence in food safety and to win industry wide support for a food safety culture that goes beyond compliance. Even at such an early stage there is nevertheless tangible evidence of good progress across its remit.

safefood has demonstrated real commitment to the process and in doing so has gained the commitment of its peers. We have a long way to go but have come some way already. I am honoured to be part of this organisation and to work with such dedicated professionals. I commend the individuals in **safefood** on the wholehearted commitment they have given and on their determination and vision.

*Councillor Bertie Kerr
Chairman, Advisory Board*

Chief Executive's Statement



Our ultimate aim is to maintain and improve public health so that we create 'an environment where consumers have confidence in the food they eat'. In this the second annual report of the Food Safety Promotion Board, since it was set up in December 1999, we report on the progress made, our plans for the future and the challenges going forward. In order to provide a clear reference point for consumers and others, we operate under the brand identifier, **safefood**.

Food safety is a responsibility shared by those involved in the entire food chain. However, a series of crises has left consumers distrustful of the industry. BSE/CJD, Salmonella and E. coli O157, genetically modified food and irradiation have all had an impact. Commercially motivated agendas, employing multiple marketing techniques and exploiting nutritional information, add to the confusion.

Against this backdrop we are working to regain consumer confidence and "to protect and improve public health, by fostering and maintaining confidence in the food supply on the island of Ireland, in partnership with others". A sound scientific programme underpins our public health focus. We provide information that is accurate, clear, relevant, timely and

accessible. **safefood** stands apart. We have no vested interest except the wellbeing of the population.

The core values, central to the credibility of the organisation and the **safefood** mission are clearly set out in the corporate strategy 2002–2004. We have defined targets to achieve, we know our target audiences; we know what we have to do and we have the structures in place to deliver. We have completed baseline research to measure our progress towards long-term goals which are quantifiable for achievement over the next three years. One year into the strategy, we can already demonstrate real and measurable results.

The organisation has three directorates: Scientific and Technical; Marketing and Communications and Planning and Resources. We have made excellent progress across each directorate. Through the work of the three directorates our credibility as a source of independent, science-based assessment is growing.

Each directorate makes a strong contribution to **safefood** in determining how we interact with the public. They provide the necessary supports and structures to ensure that we are both effective and efficient in our mission. Although distinct to each other,

a cross-directorate approach is essential to achieving our long-term goals.

The Scientific and Technical Directorate's expert team provides the independent scientific evidence that flows into all our communications. This empowers the Marketing and Communications Directorate to promote the **safefood** messages across the three categories of food safety, food hygiene and the nutritional aspects of various foods. The Planning and Resources Directorate ensures that adequate resourcing is in place to deliver the programmes set out and that mainstreaming equality is part of that process.

The Scientific and Technical Directorate is making great strides. We have prioritised research, education and training requirements. Peer-led initiatives are in place to promote food safety to public health professionals, the industry and scientific communities, which in turn inform the general public.

Initiatives, under the 'Surveillance Of Foodborne Diseases' remit, have improved database co-ordination and research, to provide for a more vigilant and responsive approach.

Horizon scanning to identify emerging threats, led by the Scientific Advisory Committee, is assisting the prioritisation of the research programme.

The laboratory linkages programme is working well. The staff training and mobility programmes are established. The launch of the first ever all island Directory of Laboratory Services is a major step to encouraging greater interaction between laboratories and inter-laboratory collaboration. Robust IT linkages now in

place provide for the rapid exchange of information.

We now facilitate exchanges for health board, marine, agriculture and local authority laboratories. A series of seminars for laboratories within the same service is facilitating information exchanges and adding to the knowledge base.

We are also funding a number of joint laboratory collaborative actions, which may result in new methodologies and improved protocols. Research fellowships have been awarded in the area of microbiology, nutrition and toxicology. Research networks have also been established across different sectors.

We are facilitating the co-ordination of an all-island nutritional strategy through the Nutrition Forum. The Forum will, we hope, provide partnership opportunities for food and nutrition action plans and will liaise with the World Health Organisation and the Food and Nutrition Committee of Europe.

Following a consultation process, we are preparing cost effective proposals for an all island enteric reference service, which will be submitted to the North South Ministerial Council.

To effectively improve public health we need to achieve a change in consumer behaviour. To do this effectively we need to be on the consumer's radar. In this regard, the Scientific and Technical Directorate provides the foundations that give the Marketing and Communications Directorate its impetus.

We have a clearly focused communications strategy, built on a co-ordinated, evidence-based approach that recognizes the differing needs of the population subsets. In determining this strategy, we undertook focus group and baseline research. This research confirms that targeted mass communication is ineffective in influencing some groupings, notably those with most needs.

This has helped focus the communications programme, both in terms of how we communicate and to whom. We have adopted a multi-level communications approach that targets different consumer groupings with specific messages for their needs through relevant channels.

By combining a mix of advertising, public relations, events and educational initiatives we have a highly focused communications programme that targets school children, the elderly, parents and twenty to thirty year olds.

We continue to provide information using a variety of broadcast and press media, we have a sustained flow of information about the key hygiene, health and safety messages. We look forward to building on the communications outputs in the coming year.

The Planning and Resources Directorate is the third pillar of our structure. Its role is to oversee the performance management structures and to ensure that access to our services, particularly for the vulnerable and disadvantaged, is developed and maintained through a community liaison network.

As Chief Executive, I am indebted to the Chair and members of the Advisory Board who have invested tremendous energy and enthusiasm in helping us to develop the organisation in this critical period. I wish also to acknowledge the expertise so generously shared by the members of our Scientific Advisory Committee and those who have participated in various expert working groups.

We are in negotiation with sponsoring departments to achieve a base staffing level and budget allocations are in place. We have integrated mainstreaming equality into our processes. The most disadvantaged will have access to the information they need.

With the completion of the initial phase of the three-year strategy, it is rewarding to see so much progress at such an early stage. The structures are in place, foundations laid and all-island programmes activated. **safefood** is still a young and emerging organisation but, nevertheless, very determined and goal driven. Challenges such as the harmonisation of all island messages, the political situation in Northern Ireland, as well as those referred to earlier, are being met. We are focussed on delivery and real results, on restoring consumer confidence in food safety and on building a food safety culture that goes beyond compliance. We know we have a lot of work to do, we have the resources and we are going to succeed.

Martin Higgins
Chief Executive

Organisational Overview

safefood – the Food Safety Promotion Board (Appendix (i)) comprises three directorates; Scientific and Technical, Marketing and Communications and Planning and Resources, each with a distinct yet complementary role. The triad structure ensures that **safefood** is adequately resourced and the necessary supports are in place to develop and implement the programmes that support its remit and the realisation of its mission.

Scientific and Technical Directorate

The Scientific and Technical Directorate provides the sound science upon which the Board's hygiene, safety and nutritional initiatives and responses are built. The Directorate works closely with the scientific advisory structures and promotes food safety at the professional and technical levels. The Directorate undertakes risk assessments and manages the research function, surveillance of foodborne disease; the promotion of scientific co-operating and linkages between laboratory and specialist laboratory services.

Food Safety Research

Through comprehensive research **safefood** promotes high quality multidisciplinary science of acknowledged international status. This research informs much of the Board's work providing the impartial scientific evidence, which underpins our work and the **safefood** messages. The food safety research specifically addresses gaps in scientific knowledge and helps in anticipating emerging problems.

The Board's role is to identify priorities for research, to commission and fund the

research and to establish a database of research activities through links with other bodies. **safefood** also disseminates research findings and recommends action arising from these findings. A critical success factor in ensuring that research funding is effectively applied, is the development of a competitive funding programme with international evaluation. Sixteen projects have already been commissioned.

Communication of Food Alerts

Rapid dissemination of accurate information is key to the management of food alerts. Responses to emergencies require action most often from a variety of enforcement agencies, health boards, government departments and industry as well as the public. **safefood** has the responsibility to ensure prompt and accurate dissemination of food alerts. The Board encourages rapid and reasonable disclosure of food problems and is working with enforcement agencies, health boards and industry to develop a coordinated approach to product recall and emergency response and communication. **safefood** is liaising closely with the enforcement agencies to develop response protocols, particularly in relation to cross-border measures, and to promote appropriate training for personnel involved in managing alerts.

Surveillance of Foodborne Diseases

The surveillance of foodborne disease is an essential element of the **safefood** strategy. Existing agencies north and south are already involved in the surveillance of a range of communicable diseases, however the systems differ and a move towards

integration would assist greater harmonisation. **safefood** co-operates with these agencies and accesses and analyses the relevant data held by them. The Board acts as a forum for the exchange of information between relevant interests and it will publish all island data. **safefood** is well placed to promote intersectoral collaboration and co-ordination and one of the key objectives is to linked databases of pathogens found in humans, foods and animals on the island.

Scientific Co-operation and Laboratory Linkages

safefood has a general remit to promote scientific co-operation and linkages between laboratories on the island. Linkages to laboratories and scientific co-operation provides an infrastructure to acquire the necessary and relevant knowledge for the general public, public health professionals. Industry and scientific community. In particular, the organisation is developing a strategy for co-operation covering matters such as a rapid reporting, network development and appropriate IT solutions. **safefood** acts as a forum for sharing knowledge and experience on testing and surveillance methods.

Specialised Laboratory Services

Specialist laboratories undertake detailed testing and specialised testing for rare infections and complex food hazards. The Board's role is to develop and implement a strategy for delivery of specialised laboratory services. Based on a cost-effectiveness study of a range of available options, it will make recommendations to the North South Ministerial Council on a

specialised reference service for foodborne infectious organisms for the whole island.

Scientific Risk Assessment

safefood provides independent scientific assessment and advice on the safety and hygiene of the food on the island. To assist the Board to undertake this work, a Scientific Advisory Committee (Appendix (ii)) of eighteen experts was formally established in January 2002. The Committee has a specifically assigned in-house scientific advisor to assist it with its work. The Committee is representative of the key disciplines involved in food safety and nutrition and includes senior technical personnel from the Food Safety Authority of Ireland and the Food Standards Agency, Northern Ireland. Meeting three times per annum the SAC provides expert advice, on "horizon-scanning" and provides strategic direction and support for the scientific advisory structure.

INFORMED

Through its communications programme, *safefood* ensures that the public are fully informed of the three target messages of food hygiene, food safety and nutrition.

Marketing and Communications Directorate

Through its communications programme, **safefood** ensures that the public are fully informed of the three target messages of food hygiene, food safety and the nutritional aspects of various foods.

safefood is the interface with the public.

safefood marketing communications interacts at a number of levels with the consumer through the media, stakeholders, education system, events, sponsorship and endorsement. Through its communications strategy, it drives targeted public awareness information campaigns to promote food safety among consumers.

Its remit also covers promotion to industry, and to professionals with responsibility for, or an interest in, food safety matters. In addition to their role as channels to the consumer, **safefood** sees that co-operation beyond compliance is essential to engendering food safety. This is particularly important given the length of the modern food chain where primary producers are often far removed from the end user.

While good food hygiene and food safety practices are prerequisites to food safety, inappropriate diet is one of the biggest obstacles and challenges to an all-island **safefood** environment. Strategies aimed at promoting and facilitating access to a healthy diet are a major focus of **safefood** activities.

safefood is working to effectively improve public health through changes in consumer behaviour. It can only be accomplished by first raising awareness and then by changing attitudes. This requires a clearly focused communications strategy, based on the differing needs of the population subsets.

safefood has adopted a multi-level communications approach to disseminating food safety and nutritional information based on solid scientific data to the:

- parents of young children
- children and young adults
- older people, particularly the frail elderly
- people with chronic illnesses
- people with disability
- people who are economically or socially disadvantaged.

Planning and Resources Directorate

To meet these demands of a modern public sector organisation **safefood's** Planning and Resource Directorate is required to operate effectively and processes need to be put in place to:

- manage and account for the finances entrusted to the organisation
- support the advisory board
- comply with legal requirements and responsibilities
- provide and manage facilities to support service delivery
- formulate human resource policies and procedures

The role of the Directorate includes managing the financial resources granted by the Exchequer and Treasury. This requires developing and operating policies and procedures for ordering and paying for goods and services, paying payroll, budgetary management and control, cost accounting and reporting, banking and treasury management, recording and valuing of assets. **safefood** operates in an environment of dual reporting and accountability.

Delivery of our human resources requires formulating and operating policies and procedures that ensure legislative obligations are complied with, that staff are consulted and that equality and consistency are promoted throughout the organisation.

safefood has invested in an Information Systems network that is flexible and robust to meet the business needs of the organisation including internal management control and integration with external systems. **safefood's**

responsibilities relating to promoting harmonisation in the development of IT systems for surveillance, establishing and maintaining a database of research programmes and electronic linking of laboratories requires particularly robust hardware and software and strong management of network and information.

The organisation must meet obligations in relation to equality and social inclusion. As an employer, we must ensure that any policies relating to staff and recruitment of staff comply with employment legislation and regulations. We must also comply with obligations under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, with regard to all of its functions.

The Planning and Resources Directorate also has a general remit to ensure issues of equality, promoting good relations and targeting social need are maintained into all of **safefood's** activities.

Activities review - Scientific and Technical

Research

safefood has a general remit to promote research to fill knowledge gaps and identify emerging issues. The research programme involves: directly commissioning research in urgent areas, focused research calls on specific issues, open calls for research to assist in horizon scanning and competitive research studentships. There are currently sixteen **safefood** funded projects in progress (Appendix (iv))

A call for food safety communications research was issued in February 2002. Applications were sought by public advertisement for research projects to enable a better understanding of the factors that affect consumer behaviour and to develop the most effective ways of communicating food safety issues and information.

Eighteen proposals were submitted, which involve collaboration with researchers in Great Britain as well as north south co-operation. Submissions were also made from commercial marketing companies.

The proposals underwent peer evaluation and offers were made in December 2002.

Under the research studentship programme **safefood** has awarded five three year postgraduate research fellowships at approximately Stg£70,000. The approved projects fall into three different categories: microbiology, nutrition and toxicology. The awards have been offered to researchers in University College Cork, University of Ulster, Coleraine and Queens University Belfast. The PhD students took up their positions at the start of this academic year.

In a further initiative research networks have been established. An E. coli O157 and other VTEC research networks were established in November 2001. Twelve research groups on the island presented their research on VTEC. The guest presentation was by Prof. Bill Reily, Scottish Centre for Infection and Environmental Health. In total, forty six researchers participated. Further meetings will take place on an annual basis.

A Cryptosporidium network was also established. The first workshop took place on 29 July 2002 at the University of Ulster, Jordanstown. Guest presentations were by Dr. Lihua Xiao of the Centre of Disease Control, Atlanta, USA and Dr. Una Morton, Australia.

A **safefood** research seminar on Campylobacter took place at UCD in September 2002 to facilitate the development of preventative programmes. Researchers outlined their current activities with many demonstrating how these will be applied to food chain monitoring and management. **safefood** is also funding research aimed at determining the source of the bug. In a major project, a team of researchers from the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University College Dublin, are tracing Campylobacter from the clinical isolate through the food chain i.e. the specimen from the sick person to its source.

Enteric Reference Service Consultation

safefood is required to develop a strategy for the delivery of specialised laboratory services. An expert group on enteric reference services chaired by Dr. Tim Wyatt, Mater Hospital, Belfast, has

developed options for the delivery of reference services for foodborne pathogens and has consulted widely on these. Two open meetings were held; one in Belfast in September and the other in Cork in October 2002. The open meetings were facilitated by Mr Dick Mackenze, former North South Ministerial Council Joint Secretary. The Scientific Advisory Committee has also been consulted and is of the view that "a reference service for the island of Ireland should be uniform, equally accessible and of high quality." The next stage in preparing recommendations is to review the outcomes of the consultation and to undertake an economic appraisal.

Scientific Co-operation and Laboratory Linkages

As good, accurate and timely scientific information underscores food safety policy, it is important to encourage scientific partnerships and collaboration between various food control laboratories thus providing the links and networks that are necessary to build a co-ordinated and cohesive framework for enhanced food safety actions. **safefood** has created a Lablink Unit. The Unit is developing a number of co-operative programmes to promote scientific cooperation and laboratory linkages. The purpose of these programmes is to identify priorities and gaps in routine laboratory food control operations and to promote co-operation and technology transfer. The programmes currently in operation include a directory of laboratory services, staff mobility programmes, a road show and collaborative action programmes.

The purpose of the Directory is to provide an overview of the current available food safety analytical service offered by official agencies, non-departmental public bodies/state agencies and authorised approved private laboratories on the island of Ireland.

The Directory was published in April 2002 and details nearly sixty laboratories. It was compiled on the basis of a comprehensive questionnaire that was circulated to laboratories. A second edition will hopefully be published in October 2003 and will include those third level establishments that carry out food safety research. The first edition was circulated to all relevant agencies and will be available to navigate on the **safefood** website in due course.

Laboratory Staff Training and Mobility Programmes

The organisation has established programmes to facilitate laboratory staff participation in exchange visits or training at other food control laboratories, food safety research establishments, food safety agencies, third level establishments or centres of excellence.

In May 2002, **safefood** piloted a mobility programme for health board laboratories. Under the pilot scheme, four programmes in which seven laboratories participated took place. Participants spent up to a week working in other laboratories. In August 2002, the full scheme was launched and extended to include agriculture, marine and local authority laboratories. Fourteen laboratories are participating in the current programme which runs until February 2003. A further

ACCURATE

As good, accurate and timely scientific information underscores food safety policy, it is important to encourage scientific partnerships and collaboration.

call for participation is planned during 2003. A workshop for existing participants is also envisaged.

Laboratory Road Show

Lablink Unit staff visited all public analyst and food microbiology laboratories in addition to many agriculture and marine laboratories on the island. All senior staff were briefed on the various initiatives and consulted on possible areas of development. The Road Show also provided an opportunity to inform as many stakeholders as possible of the wider activities of **safefood**.

Joint Laboratory Collaborative Actions

safefood provides funding for collaboration between scientists, laboratories and institutes. The programme encourages information and technology transfer and facilitates the sharing of knowledge and experiences on testing methodologies and surveillance. A pilot scheme was launched in September 2002, inviting applications from health board laboratories to participate in short joint laboratory collaborative actions.

The purpose of these programmes is two-fold, firstly for laboratories to identify priorities and gaps in routine operations and/or the food control system and secondly to promote scientific co-operation and laboratory linkage between food control laboratories. The results of these collaborative food safety survey/work initiatives will be made available and disseminated to all stakeholders.

This initiative is not aimed at current regulatory operations but at new possible projects, the results of which may be subsequently incorporated into a laboratory's routine activities. Only applications involving a minimum of two laboratories were considered. There are currently four participating laboratories of which three are north/south collaborations.

Laboratory Service Support Measures

safefood has organised and facilitated various working group meetings for laboratory groups that provide the same service with the aim of increasing interaction and to discuss issues of common interest. Meetings of pesticide groups, public analysts and food microbiology have taken place.

The public analyst group met in November 2002 in Dublin and were briefed on the activities of **safefood** and in particular on some of the programmes that were being offered. Official food microbiology laboratories have held two meetings to discuss issues of common interest.

In addition, the **safefood** meeting of the agriculture laboratories in the Republic of Ireland took place in the Department of Agriculture and Food in Dublin in February 2002. As these laboratories have never met collectively before, it provided a mechanism for reviewing and developing various partnerships.

The pesticide laboratory services from both north and south of the island met in Dundalk at a **safefood** Plant Protection Symposium. Dr. Thomas Quigley, Scientific and Technical Director was a guest speaker while Dr. Gary Kearney,

Senior Scientific Officer chaired the final session.

In the course of discussions with laboratories it was identified that a priority issue of concern is laboratory accreditation. **safefood**, therefore facilitated an introductory and advanced accreditation workshop for health and agriculture laboratories. This included measurement uncertainty and auditing. A workshop/seminar on harmonisation and collation of data was also held for Department of Agriculture and Food approved laboratories in June 2002. A further north south seminar took place in October 2002 for food control accredited laboratories.

In November 2002, the Department of Health and Children requested **safefood** to act as secretariat for a strategic review of health board laboratories to assist them in their planning of future food control activities. A report is due for completion in June 2003.

Information Technology

IT linkages are a vital part of the programme to encourage exchanges of information. In 2002 **safefood** began developing a web based laboratory resource centre which laboratory staff will access through the **safefood** website. The centre is still undergoing development and will have an information repository for laboratory methods and protocols. An education and training service with an online discussion forum will be established in mid 2003.

Food and Nutrition Forum

In October 2001, **safefood** initiated the co-ordination of an all island food and nutrition strategy through the establishment of an inter-sectoral and cross-jurisdictional Nutrition Forum. The Forum will operate on a two-tier structure consisting of (Level 1) a management or steering group and (Level 2) key stakeholders.

The Forum provides an opportunity to bring key stakeholders in nutrition together on a regular basis in order to facilitate an exchange of views and provide a more focused and effective dissemination of information on nutrition to the public. The Nutrition Forum has two key objectives to assist policy makers/relevant agencies in the development of nutrition and diet activities, targeting both the general population and specific sub groups and to contribute towards co-ordinated strategies to improve public health through a healthy diet.

Nutrition Placement Student

safefood through its links with the Northern Ireland Centre for Diet and Health at Coleraine, secured an undergraduate nutrition fellow who joined the organisation on a one year contract effective from 1 July 2002. The role of the student, while undergoing training, will be to collate diet related health statistics for the island and to develop the nutrition section of the web site which will include an 'Ask the Nutritionist' facility and relevant consumer information.

Food Safety Education Consultation

A review of the primary and post primary curricula relating to food safety and nutrition education and practises in schools was undertaken and widely consulted upon. The aim of the review and consultation process is to identify the needs in terms of curricular development and resource requirements. The consultation was initiated in October 2002. The Scientific Advisory Committee will examine the outcomes of the consultation and recommend actions to increase awareness of food safety and nutrition in schools.

Surveillance Reports

safefood in its responsibility to promote cross-border surveillance facilitated an expert group to review the surveillance of foodborne diseases. A consultation paper, 'Towards the Enhancement of Foodborne Disease Surveillance' and a report 'Microbial Food Safety Surveillance on the Island of Ireland' were published in 2002 and distributed to public health professionals and agencies across the island of Ireland. Comments arising from the consultation are currently being reviewed by the Scientific Advisory Committee.

Scientific Advisory Committee

The Scientific Advisory Committee was formally established in January 2002 and has met on three occasions. Besides horizon scanning to identify new and emerging threats, the issues discussed by the Committee include Mycobacterium avium paratuberculosis, foodborne viral diseases, nutrition, surveillance studies,

the control of water, the harmonisation of cooking temperatures and food safety education. The Committee advised **safefood** to undertake research on the communication of risk to consumers and on effective means of changing consumer behaviour in relation to diet and food hygiene.

Risk Assessment of Stimulant Drinks

In March 2002, **safefood** published a report "A Review of the Health Effects of Stimulant Drinks". The study was undertaken following a request by the Department of Health and Children in November 2000 to review the potential health effects on the population from the consumption of stimulant drinks, to assess knowledge gaps and consider any steps which would be needed to provide appropriate protection for public health. A sub committee on Stimulant Drinks was formed from a panel of independent experts and a study was undertaken into the health effects of stimulant drinks. The report made the following recommendations:

- stimulant drinks should be labelled with an indication that they are unsuitable for children (under sixteen years of age), pregnant women and individuals sensitive to caffeine
- they should be classified with other beverages of high caffeine content
- the consumption of stimulant drinks by children under 16 years should be discouraged
- caution should be exercised in the consumption of stimulant drinks with alcohol

- they should not be consumed in association with sport and exercise as a thirst quencher and they are unsuitable as rehydration agents.

The sub committee expressed a number of concerns about the marketing and promotion of stimulant drinks and recommended that the industry, regulators and relevant authorities should address such practices as:

- misleading claims
- suggestion that stimulant drinks reduce the requirement for sleep
- lack of recommended upper consumption limits
- ambiguous information on the consumption of stimulant drinks with alcohol
- promotion of stimulant drinks consumption in association with sport.

The sub committee recommended that further research be carried out to:

- monitor patterns of stimulant drink consumption
- establish an upper safe level for daily intake of glucuronolactone and taurine in humans, and investigate possible adverse effects of interactions between stimulant drink ingredients such as caffeine and taurine, and between such ingredients and alcohol, particularly under conditions of exercise and consequent dehydration through sweating.

Activities review - Marketing and Communications

Confidence in **safefood** as the independent authoritative, all island, source of food safety information is gaining momentum with consumers. Themed information campaigns, focus group research, alliances, exhibitions, educational initiatives, sponsorship, advertising, the **safefood** Helpline and the dissemination of scientific evidence, are part of an extensive communications programme aimed at the long-term reassurance of the public.

The **safefood** research programme, informed by the scientific and technical directorate, provides impartial scientific evidence to reinforce the **safefood** message. The research identified important knowledge gaps and information needs among the different consumer sub groupings; such as parents of young children, the elderly, especially the frail and teenagers. This is enabling **safefood** to develop and implement a timely, relevant and focussed communications strategy.

A series of themed **safefood** campaigns for consumers were run at regular intervals. Christmas, Summer and Halloween all provided seasonal opportunities to underpin the hygiene, safety and healthy diet messages. Promotional literature, press and TV advertising supported these. This was in turn reinforced through newspaper editorials, photography and radio interviews. In addition, other campaigns such as Safe Recycling of Plastic Bags, Eating at the World Cup in Japan, prevention of Food Poisoning, as well as Probiotic (good bacteria) and School Lunch Boxes, further highlighted the core messages.

As part of the Food Safety Week in Northern Ireland, we undertook the "Germ Warfare" summer campaign in conjunction with the Food Standards Agency, Northern Ireland. A 'Calamity Kitchen' full of common hazards, which encourage bacterial growth and cross contamination of food, visited twenty five venues during the week. Supported by twenty six district councils, the format delivered educational and hygiene messages in a fun way, that actively engaged the public.

A major advertising campaign co-funded in Northern Ireland by **safefood** and the Food Standards Agency, Northern Ireland to significantly increase awareness and reduce the risk of food poisoning in restaurants and other food outlets, was undertaken in Northern Ireland. Initially targeting the catering trade, the campaign ran on television, radio and newspapers and trade magazines. The **safefood** Helpline was used as backup for this campaign.

In keeping with our flexibility to respond to immediate threats and to facilitate public health interventions, we ran an additional awareness campaign for expectant mothers. The risk to pregnant women campaign emerged out of an ongoing survey, which showed that up to 80% of household fridges contain pathogenic bacteria such as Staphylococcus, but 40% contain a potentially more deadly pathogen, Listeria. Drawing on the research, we were able to provide an immediate and effective response, grounded in solid scientific information.

We undertook focus group research to provide baseline information on how and

where the public obtain nutritional and food safety information. This also helped determine the target audience groupings and the best approach to communicating with individual groupings.

During the year, **safefood** strengthened its stakeholder alliances and linkages. Our overall aim is to reinforce the **safefood** message to consumers. However, we also need to encourage a real industry commitment to a food safety culture that goes beyond simple compliance. In this way **safefood** worked with organisations such as the British Dietetic Association, the Irish Nutritional and Dietetics Institutes, retailer groups, manufacturers, caterers, government bodies, education and representative bodies.

In the 'Germ Warfare' summer campaign, we leveraged linkages with supermarkets, hardware and DIY retail outlets that distributed leaflets and were listed in the advertising campaign.

Working with the HAZ Group, (Health Action Zone) in Armagh and Dungannon, Northern Ireland, **safefood**, is supporting the "Food Desert" pilot scheme. An important project, it aims to establish how communities and those who are economically disadvantaged can be best supported and the measures required to do so. The outcomes of the 3-year project will ultimately provide the blueprint for best practice approach in different circumstances.

Alliances through education initiatives also worked well. Funded by the European Union and in partnership with Environmental Health Officers Association, Excellence Ireland, the Food Safety Authority of Ireland, the European

Consumer Centre and the Transition year Curriculum Support Service, the '**safefood** for life' initiative reinforced new and existing linkages. '**safefood** for life' is a course designed to educate transition year students in the general principles and simple practicalities of food safety. At a time in their lives when many will be applying for their first part-time jobs or planning a life away from home while attending college, this course delivers practical information that will significantly reduce the risks taken by young people when working with food. Students who participate are certified to work in catering. Currently 350 schools are taking part in the programme which is now being extended to Northern Ireland.

In addition to the '**safefood** for life' programme, a review was undertaken of all primary and post primary schools curricula to ascertain where and how food safety fitted into the curriculum and at what levels. This research provided **safefood** with baseline information to determine schools' needs and how best these can be integrated into the educational system.

During the year, **safefood** participated at four major exhibitions each with their own distinct audiences: The Esat Young Scientist of the Year, The Balmoral Show, The National Ploughing Championships and The Over 50's Show.

At the Esat Young Scientist of the Year, **safefood** sponsored the nutrition and food safety award. Limerick's Laurel School won the **safefood** award for its survey of teenage diets. **safefood** also took a stand to encourage greater awareness among teenagers of food safety and the dangers of cross contamination.

ACCESSIBLE

safefood communications are diverse and targeted. Our primary focus is to intervene in a focussed, timely and accessible way, providing appropriate expert support and advice.

safefood's 'Calamity Kitchen' provided a focal point for participation both at the Balmoral Show and the National Ploughing Championships. Comedienne June Rodgers brought her own distinct brand of humour to food safety at the National Ploughing Championships. For the Over 50's Show the focus was on nutrition, dietary messages and diabetes healthy eating tips.

The exhibitions provided an important platform to extend the awareness reach across the agreed target groupings. The interactive approach to the exhibitions ensured a highly visible presence that attracted and engaged with visitors, in a way relevant to the individual groupings.

Our proactive media relations programme provides added support to the dissemination of the scientific evidence and targeted messaging. The programme includes syndicated press articles written by the in-house nutritionist, advisory columns, press release schedule, feature articles, media briefings and creative photocalls. The **safefood** nutritionist also acts as a media commentator on food safety and nutrition issues.

In this way, over twenty **safefood** initiatives were covered in radio, press and television during 2002. Coverage extended across the island at local level, through daily papers as well as the television and radio.

We also published a number of reports and among the highlights was the **safefood** review on the health effects of stimulant drinks. This was well received by the media, who covered the findings extensively.

The **safefood** media relations programme stands apart as an independent, impartial source of editorial and media information in which readers and viewers and listeners can have confidence.

The media relations programme and the advertising campaigns work in tandem. Targeted communications are reinforced through press, radio and television advertising and vice versa. A series of television advertisements around the themed campaigns ran at relevant times for maximum impact. They also established a clear link with **safefood** as the source of authoritative food safety information and publicised the **safefood** Helpline numbers. As a measure of its impact, the **safefood** Helpline currently receives 400 calls per month. Every opportunity is used to highlight the Helpline as a source of trusted information to the public through advertising, editorial and promotional materials.

safefood aims to position itself with the media and the public as the authoritative source of food safety and information. Our programme is designed to interact with food industry professionals and the public. Our communications are therefore diverse and targeted. Our primary focus is however, to intervene in a focussed, timely and accessible way, providing appropriate expert support and advice.

Activities review – Planning and Resources

A modern public sector organisation must meet high standards of corporate and financial governance. Human resource strategy must reflect evolving business strategy and promote a safe, positive and participative environment for all staff. Accommodation and information and communications technology must provide facilities that allow the organisation to function efficiently and effectively.

The governing legislation provides that **safefood** shall keep proper books of account, shall produce annual accounts and comply with the provisions of the financial memorandum and any account direction issued by Departments of Finance. **safefood** is funded by grants issued through the Department of Health and Children and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

In 2002, we produced annual financial statements for audit while at the same time producing current management accounts for internal purpose. Internal control and tendering of contracts have been on-going activities this year, as required by best practice and the Financial Memorandum.

A staff training needs survey was carried out by managers and staff, to determine the training and development requirements for 2003. A policy procedure handbook and staff manual is presently at the final stages of being signed off.

An Equality Scheme has been drafted and is awaiting formal sign off at Ministerial level. A work plan has been agreed and training for all staff has taken place as well as the drafting of a five year equal opportunities programme. A screening process that produced a consultative screening paper has also taken place.

The Board's new Targeting Social Needs Action Plan defines what actions are required, who will fulfil the tasks and when action should be taken. The ultimate ability to achieve the Plan's targets depends critically upon the Board working in partnership with other public agencies, local government and voluntary and community organisations. Divisions consult with relevant interests on the implementation of individual targets/actions with the Plan and action points in the Plan will be reviewed as new information is acquired, ideas tested and progress achieved.

Staff briefings take place for each Directorate and staff are encouraged to develop and ensure that **safefood** has a customer focussed environment.

Recruitment has been on-going with all positions being filled from open competitions. The last three permanent staff positions of the interim approved complement were filled in December 2002.

The Information Systems Unit is also part of the Directorate, developing and managing the communications network and databases. Towards the end of 2002 much of the IT activity focussed on the feasibility of developing laboratory linkages.

EVOLVING

A modern public sector organisation must meet high standards of corporate and financial governance. Human resource strategy must reflect evolving business strategy and promote a safe, positive and participative environment for all staff.

Appendix (i) Advisory Board

Members

Chairman

Cllr. Bertie Kerr

Member of Fermanagh District Council

Vice Chairman

Prof. Charlie Daly

Dean of the Faculty of Food Science and Technology, University College Cork (UCC)

Don Anderson

Former Controller of ITN, Belfast
(Communications Consultant)

Leslie Craig

Past Chairman, Northern Ireland
Agricultural
Producers' Association

Carmel Foley

Director of Consumer Affairs, Dublin

Odran Flynn

Marketing Consultant

Prof Patrick Fottrell

Former President,
University College Galway

Patrick McColgan

Director and founder
of McColgan Quality Foods

Catherine Murphy

Health Promotion Manager,
Southern Health Board

Damien O'Dwyer

Agricultural Consultant

Anne Speed

Trade Union Official with SIPTU, Dublin

Prof. Seán Strain

Professor of Human Nutrition,
University of Ulster Coleraine

Appendix (ii) Scientific Advisory Committee

Members

Dr. Wayne Anderson

Chief Specialist in Food Science
Food Safety Authority of Ireland

Dr Ken Baird

Technical Director
Moy Park Ltd, Craigavon

Dr Micheál O Cinnéide

Director
Marine Institute

Dr John Egan

Senior Superintending Research Officer
Department of Agriculture and Food

Prof Gerald Fitzgerald

Director
National Food Biotechnology Centre, UCC

Catherine Foye

Principal Environmental Health Officer
South Western Area Health Board

Prof. Arthur Gilmour

Professor of Food Microbiology
Department of Food Science, QUB

Dr Derval Igoe

Public Health Specialist
National Disease Surveillance Centre
(NDSC)

Dr Fiona Kenny

Consultant Microbiologist
North Western Health Board,
Sligo General Hospital

Dr Bob Mc Cracken

Retired Chief Veterinary Officer NI

Gerry McCurdy

Head of Professional Services
Food Standards Agency NI

Prof. David McDowell

Professor of Food Studies
University of Ulster, Jordanstown

Genevieve McWilliams

Senior Environmental Health Officer
Derry City Council

Sam Miskelly

Retired Assistant Director General
Consumer Council NI

Dr Nora O'Brien

Senior Lecturer in Nutrition
Department of Food Science, Food
Technology and Nutrition, UCC

Dr Jacqueline Quinn

National Virus Reference Laboratory,
University College Dublin

Dr Brian Smyth

Director
Communicable Diseases Surveillance
Centre (CDSC)

Prof. Sean Strain

Professor of Human Nutrition
NI Centre for Diet & Health,
University of Ulster at Coleraine

*Dr Margaret Patterson, Department of Food Science, Queens University Belfast
acts as Scientific Advisor to **safefood***

Appendix (iii) Scientific Publications

*A Review of the Health Effects of
Stimulant Drinks*

Educating for Health – Shaping our Future

*Enteric Reference Services for the Island of
Ireland – A Consultation Paper*

*Microbial Surveillance on the Island of
Ireland*

safefood for life

*Towards the Enhancement of Foodborne
Disease Surveillance – A Consultation*

Appendix (iv) Research Projects

1. Detection and Molecular characterization of selected pathogenic organisms isolated in unpasteurised milk using milk filters. (Cork County Council, CIT and QUB).
2. A comparative study of thermophilic *Campylobacter* isolates of clinical and food origin using genotypic and antimicrobial characterisation techniques (UCD, UCG, QUB and Belfast City Hospital)
3. Development of rapid tests for the detection of *Mycobacterium* paratuberculosis and their use to determine survival in food matrices. (QUB, National Diagnostics Centre at UCG, UCC and Teagasc)
4. Use of high pressure to improve safety and quality of shellfish (UCC & QUB)
5. Development of a harmonized system for approval and monitoring private laboratories testing food-borne pathogens (DARDNI, DAFRD and UCD).
6. Gastrointestinal symptoms in Ireland - A survey of general practitioners (FSAI, NDSC, CDSC, FSA-NI)
7. Gastrointestinal symptoms in Ireland- A telephone Survey FSA, CDSC and DHSS & PS in the North, FSAI and NDSC in South
8. Poultry Meat: Improving Food Safety by improving chemical residue surveillance (QUB and Teagasc).
9. Rapid Azaspiracid Shellfish Toxin Analysis (RASTA) (QUB & Marine Institute)
10. Development of a screening system capable of detecting a broad range of toxic and illegal drugs in red meat (DCU and QUB)
11. Dietary strategies for achievement of nutritional goals for healthy eating: towards evidence based public health nutrition programmes (UCC & UU)
12. Assessing the effectiveness of HACCP implementation and maintenance in food production plants (Verner Wheelock)
13. A risk assessment and Hazard Analysis & Critical Control Point (HACCP) for the Irish Catering Industry. (Teagasc & UU).
14. Food Safety Challenges in Irish consumer Refrigeration Systems (Teagasc & UU)
15. Assessment of the standards of food hygiene observed in Irish household kitchens. The benefits of providing practical food hygiene instruction and practical food safety kits (DIT & NI Hotel and Catering College)
16. The development of a risk communication model based upon food safety behaviour in the home (QUB and UCD)

CONFIDENCE

safefood has a challenging remit to restore public confidence in food safety and to win industry wide support for a food safety culture that goes beyond compliance.



Food Safety

Promotion Board

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Eastgate, Little Island
Cork

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Cinn Sábháilteachta Bia

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