



FOOD SAFETY

Food-related illness

Food can carry infectious organisms which cause food poisoning, and potentially also chemical poisons. Hygienic procedures at every stage of food production, transport, storage and sale are critical. 3227 cases of food-related illness were notified in SA in 2009. Of this total, 7 cases were confirmed as food-borne. The remainder were person-to-person or unknown source.

Food imports

Additional hazards now exist because free trade and globalisation have changed the sources of food. In 2008 the Department of Trade recorded Australia's total food imports value of more than \$10.6 billion. The ABC program *Background Briefing* 15 February 2009 provided significant information and some is quoted here.

Regulations are being weakened or disregarded in the pursuit of low prices and more choice. The global food system makes it difficult for a consumer to make decisions. Things like 'product of origin' labelling, for example, has been watered down generally over the last decade or more, and if you want to buy Australian, what constitutes Australian product and Australian-made is very difficult to work through.

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) was established to remove tariffs and protectionism so as to further the cause of free trade around the world. The WTO says many national quarantine or food regulations are really what are known as 'non-tariff trade barriers'. The Australian quarantine laws are constantly being pulled back for this reason and a number of countries whose food would previously have been identified as 'risky' have had their food allowed into Australia without a review by Australian Quarantine, AQIS.

Food standards

In Australia, the agency responsible for food regulation is Food Standards Australia New Zealand, FSANZ. FSANZ has many critics, mostly to do with the fact that many of its key decision makers are from agricultural industries or multinational food companies.

Junk food marketing has been linked to the growing rates of obesity and diabetes around the world.

The SA Health Department website has information on food safety including food standards and labelling, and fact sheets on a range of subjects including food safety in the home. See www.health.sa.gov.au/pehs and find the food safety publications.

What can we do

- Observe the rules for food hygiene: cleanliness of food preparation surfaces, equipment and utensils; handwashing and excluding someone who is sick or has infected skin lesions from preparing food for others to eat
- Buy local food rather than imported
- Read the labels
- Grow your own food
- Choose organic food
- Become informed about nutritional values
- Watch your weight, get adequate physical exercise and moderate your food intake