

# The New Meat Food Safety Scheme



Government of South Australia  
Primary Industries and Resources SA

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## Primary Produce (Food Safety Schemes) Act 2004

The *Primary Produce (Food Safety Schemes) Act 2004* came into effect in August 2005 with the gazettal of the regulations for the dairy food safety scheme.

The new Act brings together existing primary industry food safety legislation into one piece of legislation so that sector specific Food Safety Schemes can be established as regulations. Each scheme defines the food safety requirements and administrative arrangements for an industry sector and can be tailored to the sector and specific risks involved. A Dairy Scheme has already been created. Along with Meat, Citrus and Seafood (bivalve molluscs) Food Safety Schemes have recently been developed.

If they have not already done so, each of these sectors is to implement food safety arrangements similar to those that have been operating in the meat processing industry under the *Meat Hygiene Act 1994*.

## The New Meat Food Safety Scheme

The *Primary Produce (Food Safety Schemes) (Meat Industry) Regulations 2006* were gazetted in June 2006, to take effect from 1 July 2006. The Regulations establish the Meat Food Safety Scheme and are based on the *Meat Hygiene Act 1994* and *Meat Hygiene Regulations 1994* that are to be repealed.

The Meat Food Safety Scheme primarily carries over the food safety arrangements that industry has been operating under for over 10 years.

Meat processors still need to comply with the relevant Australian Standards, Codes and Guidelines, which specify minimum hygiene arrangements and require food safety programs for all meat processing businesses.

## Impact on Your Business

The new Regulations have not significantly changed the regulatory requirements for the meat industry. There should be no change to the requirements for meat businesses currently accredited under the *Meat Hygiene Act 1994*.

*continued page 2*

PIRSA's Meat Safety Officer, Craig Heard, conducting an audit.



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## Impact on Your Business

*continued from page 1.*

The current arrangements that carry over from the Meat Hygiene Act 1994 are:

- Accreditation of meat processors, transport and storage, which includes approval of food safety programs or quality assurance programs.
- Compliance with Australian Standards, which apply hygiene requirements and food safety programs for all businesses meat processing.
- Auditing of food safety programs by PIRSA and approved private audit companies.
- Recovery of costs through annual accreditation fees.

Although there have not been any significant changes, the process of drafting the *Primary Produce (Food Safety Schemes) (Meat Industry) Regulations* provided industry and other stakeholders with the opportunity to propose improvements over the *Meat Hygiene Act 1994*.

## Updating of the Regulations

The Regulations have been updated in language and format to meet current legislative requirements, to allow integration with the *Food Act 2001* and to conform with the requirements of the *Primary Produce (Food Safety Schemes) Act 2004*.

## Key Changes to the Regulations

Key changes include the following;

The new Act separates processing from other categories and so the definition of meat processing in the Regulations has been split into processing and handling.

The terms 'wholesale' and 'fit for purpose' have been replaced with 'safe' and 'suitable'. This is to conform to and be consistent with the terms used and defined in the Food Act.

The definition of meat has been amended to include cooked product made in the processing operations, eg packaged cooked chicken fillets for the wholesale market. Cooked product in retail outlets is still excluded.

The new Act creates an Accreditation Body to accredit specified businesses. The Accreditation Body for the

Scheme is the Minister (section 7), and in practice this will still be the Meat Hygiene Unit in PIRSA.

The Regulations (sections 9 and 13) clarify that separate accreditation is required for each discrete premise carrying on processing or handling of meat. Thus businesses operating from more than one location will need separate accreditation for each location.

The Regulations (section 14) require the accredited operator to notify the Meat Hygiene Unit of any change in the business name or address, or any alteration to buildings, or face a fine of \$250.

The new Act uses the term 'approved food safety arrangement'. This provides more flexibility for the accreditation body to approve different business systems, procedures and verification methods that meet the requirements of the Regulations, Australian Standards, Codes and Guidelines for each industry sector. This will not alter food safety arrangements for meat businesses that are currently being applied, eg. An approved Quality Assurance program.

Section 12 updates modifications to the Australian Standards to ensure there is no misunderstanding between the terminology in the Regulations and the Standards.

At the request of the Australian Meat Industry Council, the parts of the regulations specifying exactly where brands are to be applied to carcasses has been removed. Although the specifications in the current regulations will continue to apply as conditions of accreditation, industry may propose alternative methods of identification. If accepted by the Minister the conditions of accreditation can be amended without having to amend the regulations.

There has not been any increase in the annual fees. The application fee for small businesses (6 or fewer full time staff) has been reduced from \$267 to \$117. These businesses require significantly less work than larger businesses to assess whether their systems comply with the regulations.

The Codes referred to in Schedule 2 of the Regulations have been updated. The Australian Standard for the Hygienic Production of Pet Meat was not published by the time the regulations were gazetted. The Standard, which mandates pet food safety programs, will be included in the Regulations when published later this year. Until then existing arrangements will still apply.



## Certificates and Conditions of Accreditation

New Certificates and Conditions of Accreditation will be issued to all operators accredited under the new Meat Food Safety Scheme to reflect the new legislation.

Existing operators applying for accreditation under the new meat food safety scheme will be issued with updated Certificates and Conditions of Accreditation within the first 6 months of the new scheme. Old certificates should not be destroyed until the new Certificates and Conditions of Accreditation are received.

Until you receive your new Certificate and Conditions of Accreditation, your current Certificate and Conditions of Accreditation issued under the *Meat Hygiene Act 1994* will be taken to apply under the new meat food safety scheme.

**Please ensure that your Certificate and Conditions of Accreditation are framed and displayed alongside your Certificate of Quality Assurance in a prominent place, highlighting to customers and clients your achievement in complying with the Australian Standards.**

## Auditing of Food Safety Programs

Meat processors that are accredited under the *Meat Hygiene Act 1994* will transfer over to the new Meat Food Safety Scheme, with their existing HACCP based Quality Assurance programs. The auditing of these programs will continue to be carried out by the Department of Primary Industries and Resources SA Meat Hygiene Unit, or by an approved auditing service.

There will not be any change to a business' Quality Assurance status. If you are on a full Quality Assurance program with the Meat Hygiene Unit under the *Meat Hygiene Act 1994*, your QA status will automatically transfer across to the new Meat Food Safety Scheme.



## Penalties

The Regulations have lower financial penalties than some corresponding penalties in the *Meat Hygiene Act 1994*. An Act sets an upper limit for penalties for regulations that is lower than the penalties in the Act. The upper limit for penalties in regulations under the new Act is \$5,000.

There are still key offences under the Act with significant penalties, e.g.

- operating without accreditation \$20,000
- contravening a condition of accreditation \$20,000
- contravening a compliance order \$20,000

The most significant penalty is unchanged, in that the accreditation body can suspend or revoke accreditation if satisfied that the accredited producer has committed an offence against the Act, eg contravening a condition of accreditation.

In addition there is a closer linkage between the Act and the *Food Act 2001*. As such there are very significant penalties that can be accessed under the Food Act, e.g.

- a person must not handle food intended for sale in a manner that the person ought to reasonably know is likely to render the food unsafe.
  - body corporate \$375,000
  - natural person \$75,000
- a person must not sell food that the person ought to reasonably know is unsafe.
  - body corporate \$375,000
  - natural person \$75,000

Compliance with the requirements of the Regulations will ensure members of the meat industry meet the food safety requirements of the Food Act.



## South Australian Meat Food Safety Advisory Committee

The *Primary Produce (Food Safety Schemes) (Meat Food Safety Advisory Committee) Regulations 2005* was gazetted in December 2005 to create the South Australian Meat Food Safety Advisory Committee. This committee replaces the Meat Hygiene Advisory Council that will cease to exist when the *Meat Hygiene Act 1994* is repealed.

The membership, functions and operation of the Committee are virtually the same as the former Meat Hygiene Advisory Council in providing advice to the Minister on meat safety in South Australia.

Your representative on the Meat Food Safety Advisory Committee is an important link between your sector of the meat industry and Government. The Committee is the forum for discussing any issues or concerns with respect to food safety facing the meat industry.

## Transitional Arrangements

The new Meat Food Safety Scheme comes into effect on 1 July 2006, at which time the *Meat Hygiene Act 1994* will be repealed. As mentioned, all operators accredited under the *Meat Hygiene Act 1994* will automatically receive temporary accreditation under the new Scheme. Your current Certificate and Conditions of Accreditation will remain in force for 6 months, by which time you should have applied for accreditation under the new Scheme.

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## Applying for Accreditation

The *Primary Produce (Food Safety Schemes) (Meat Industry) Regulations* provides temporary accreditation (6 months) to all meat processors currently accredited under the *Meat Hygiene Act 1994*. To maintain your accreditation with the Meat Hygiene Unit you will need to formally apply under the new Meat Food Safety Scheme.

All operators currently accredited under the *Meat Hygiene Act 1994* will need to apply for accreditation under the new Meat Food Safety Scheme. As a current accredited operator you will not have to pay the application fee when joining the new scheme, although, you will still need to pay the annual fee for 2006–07 calculated for your business.

The application for accreditation under the *Primary Produce (Food Safety Schemes) (Meat Industry) Regulations* that accompanies this brochure should be completed and returned to the Meat Hygiene Unit, Department of Primary Industries and Resources SA, together with the annual fee for 2006–07. The application for accreditation is to be completed instead of the annual return that is

## Need more Help?

If you need assistance in understanding the changes, or require more information, you can contact any of the following people.

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