

## General Secretary's Report



Hello to you all,

I'm sure I don't need to inform exactly which has been the main topic of conversation since the last issue, but there have been some one or two interesting matters that have arisen on the back of the horsemeat scandal.

The first is the sheer scale of the thing; it would appear to have been truly international, and apparently very easy for the more unscrupulous in the meat industry to substitute horse flesh for beef. I have not heard any indication as to exactly how long this kind of fraud has been going on but the fact that it has now been discovered has highlighted that consumer confidence can be so easily lost. The brunt of the fallout seems to be directed towards the large manufacturers and the major retailers, with consumers failing to understand how the suppliers have lost control of the provenance of the meat used in their products. Apparently, consumers "just want to know what's in their food" and are directing the bulk of their ire towards mislabelled products,

though I feel pretty confident in saying that if it had been labelled as horsemeat on the package then it would, in the UK at least, have remained unsold on the shelves.

One thing that I have been gratified not to hear is any criticism levelled at the inspectors or the work that they actually do. I have heard plenty of reference to the cuts in numbers over recent years, and on the face of it, it would seem that the general public would like to see more inspectors/inspections to prevent similar situations recurring. Diversification and expansion of the MHI role into cutting plants, manufacturers and cold stores perhaps? I get the impression that the general public would be prepared to pay for any such increase in inspections too. The message I've been hearing is twofold;

- 1) don't mess with our food.
- 2) let us know what we are buying so that we can make an informed choice.

I have heard some criticism levelled at the enforcement agencies, unfairly in my opinion. Some have demanded to know why routine testing for such adulterations is not far more prevalent? But there is no real safeguard against those that are hell bent on breaking the law. This just happened to be horsemeat, but should the relevant authorities be routinely testing for catmeat, dogmeat or octopus for that matter? Where would you draw that line? That said, I think that it has been largely overlooked by the national

press that it was testing by the FSA Ireland that first brought this particular scandal to light.

Hopefully there will be some good for the industry to come out of all this. The message to buy British should never be lost. Shorter supply chains can only be a good thing and the supermarkets chains can have a big hand in all this. Traceability, labelling, provenance are all words that we have heard so much about for such a long time, but I hope now that all these things will be looked at with a real purpose rather than just for the sake of legal compliance or in the perceived notion that it is "what the customer wants".

#### Lactic Acid Washing of Beef Carcasses

The proposal to allow lactic acid washing of beef carcasses, sides or quarters has been passed. The main parameters are that it must be of a concentration of not more than 5% in potable water, at a temperature of not more than 55 degrees Celsius, and must be incorporated into the plants HACCP plan and monitored in accordance with that plan. Application will not be permitted to carcasses with visible faecal contamination. I rather suspect that these parameters will limit implementation in anything other than the very large plants and, at the time of writing, I have not heard of any plants that are looking to adopt lactic acid washing. The concern of many members is that having been adopted for beef, it might only be a small step rather than a giant leap to see this adopted in the processing of other meat species. The thin end of the wedge perhaps?

#### Trainee MHI's

I sincerely hope that, by the time of the next issue, that a new intake of TMHI's will be in place and seriously into the course. I would encourage all members to make these TMHI's welcome if they happen to be training in your plant, and please be forthcoming in disseminating the wealth of knowledge that we all collectively hold.

#### AGM

The Association's AGM will be held on the thirteenth of April, at the Kings Manor Hotel, Edinburgh. Among the usual business of AGM, we hope to sign up the first Registered Meat Hygiene Inspectors, the Officers of the Association and any member attending who will voluntarily sign the register and agree to abide by the code of conduct. These Officers will then be authorised to take the declaration of future applicants at events such as divisional meetings, Seminar etc. I hope to see some of you there.

I would like to thank Peter Watson for his contribution to this part of your Meat Hygienist and I would echo his thoughts in that, at this time of change within the AMI, that we think back to the past work of the Association and the sterling efforts done by so many good Inspectors in the years gone by. They have influenced and helped shape the way inspection is carried out today, and we do indeed owe them a debt of gratitude.

Keep up the good work.

Regards,

*Ian Robinson*