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November Industry Update – Food Safety recalls, developments and incidents

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In this article we welcome guest author and industry expert, Alec Kyriakides, to explore some of the food safety developments, recalls and incidents that have happened recently.

Food Safety Developments

The seasonal changes in weather are often a delight to behold but they bring with them some rather less welcome events such as increased rainfall and, in some cases, flooding. The compounding effect of [climate change](#) has made flooding more severe and frequent and this, in turn, has implications for the food system in terms of [food security](#) and also for food safety. Heavy rainfall and flooding can expose agricultural crops and fisheries to increased levels of pathogens from soil, wastewater and sewage and these can then present direct food safety risks if the food is not sufficiently processed to reduce the pathogen burden. Food safety advice in the event of flooding is provided for consumers and business by many organisations at national ([UK](#), [Australia – New Zealand](#)) and global level ([World Health Organisation](#)) with key messages being the need to increase risk assessment of raw materials and the food preparation environment and to remind those handling food of the key principles of food hygiene.

Avian influenza

The recent precautionary recall in the USA following the detection of avian influenza virus in a sample of [raw milk](#) in California has heightened concern about the spread of the virus in animal production systems. Avian influenza virus can infect a variety of animal species in addition to the primary avian hosts, and the outbreak of infections caused by H5N1 virus in dairy herds across [14 states in the USA](#) has prompted widespread testing of animal and animal products including raw and pasteurised milk. Humans can acquire avian influenza infections from animals, predominantly through close contact with the infected animal and, in California, since early October twenty nine confirmed human cases of bird flu have been reported with [28 having direct contact with infected dairy cows](#). Recently, the first confirmed H5N1 avian influenza infection in a [child](#) in the USA was reported in California. All of these human cases of bird flu have resulted in [mild illness, predominantly affecting eyes](#). The risk of acquiring bird flu through the consumption of products from infected animals is considered to be low and it is more likely that virus in products from infected animals would present a risk of infection via transfer to the upper respiratory system including the eyes where more [viral receptors](#) are present. A [rapid risk assessment](#) was conducted by the UKFSA on the risk to the UK population from avian influenza in US dairy products. The risk from the consumption of other infected animal products such as [poultry and eggs](#) were previously published by the UKFSA.

Food fraud

Adulteration of [alcoholic drinks](#) with methanol reportedly resulted in the death of six tourists in Laos. This highlights the potential serious consequences of food fraud and the need for constant vigilance in the supply chain regarding risks and preventive actions for such practices. It is therefore welcome to see a new [EU funded programme on food fraud](#) that has been launched to connect scientists, regulators, businesses and laboratories in the common goal of identifying and reducing adulteration and fraud.

Foodborne disease outbreaks

A number of microbiological foodborne outbreaks have been reported in November including a salmonellosis outbreak across 19 states in the USA caused by contaminated [cucumbers](#) affecting 68 cases with 18 people hospitalised. This resulted in a [nationwide recall](#) on Thanksgiving. Salmonella spp. was also responsible for an ongoing outbreak across 16 EU/EEA countries and the UK implicating [cherry tomatoes](#) from Sicily with 232 confirmed cases reported between January 2023 and November 2024. This follows another Europe wide salmonellosis outbreak between July and September affecting 200 people implicating [rocket salad and baby spinach](#). A listeriosis outbreak in Denmark affecting 7 people and resulting in one death led to the recall of [fish patties](#). A further listeriosis outbreak was reported in the USA caused by a variety of [ready-to-eat meat and poultry products](#) with 11 cases and 1 death. Shiga toxin-producing E. coli (STEC) caused outbreaks implicating [ground beef](#) prepared in restaurants (17 cases), retail [organic carrots](#) (39 cases, 1 death), [raw milk cheese](#) (1 case) and [minced beef](#) in a kindergarten (23 cases). Finally, botulism cases / outbreaks were reported in Italy caused by [artichoke soup](#) (8 cases, 1 death) and in France (1 case) from [pork terrine](#).

Food Recall Highlights

The data used for this food recall highlights review is sourced from open access recall databases covering different countries and continents including the USA (Food & Drug Administration and the United States Department of Agriculture), the UK (Food Standards Agency), Germany (Federal Office of Consumer Protection and Food Safety) and Australia (Food Standards Australia New Zealand).

Microbiological recalls were once again dominated by the top three pathogens including Listeria monocytogenes, Salmonella spp. and STEC although some less frequent pathogens also featured including Yersinia enterocolitica and Staphylococcus spp.

- Listeria monocytogenes: [chicken wings](#), [fish sprats](#), meat and poultry products (1, 2), [enoki mushrooms](#), soft, ripened cheese (1, 2), [turkey sandwiches](#), RTE fruit and vegetables
- Salmonella: [tzatziki dip](#), [onion sausage](#), [ice cream](#), [organic eggs](#), [cucumbers](#)
- Shiga toxin-producing coli: [ground beef](#), [falafel bites](#), [organic carrots](#) / [celery](#) / [mixed vegetables](#) (1, 2, 3, 4)
- Staphylococcus : [soft, ripened cheese](#)
- Yersinia enterocolitica: [soft, ripened cheese](#),
- Mould growth: [oat bars](#),
- Microbiological load: [seasoned minced beef and pork](#), [various meat products](#),
- Pathogen growth risk: [crushed garlic](#),
- Illegal import: [beef tallow](#)

Allergen recalls were spread evenly across a number of different allergen types.

- Egg: fish cake (1, 2), ice cream (1, 2), prepared salads, onion soup mix
- Fish: kimchi
- Gluten: honey, tortilla strips
- Mustard: salami, homemade salami
- Nuts: korma (cashew)
- Peanut: mustard (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8)
- Sesame: bao buns, dips
- Soya: seafood salad
- Multiple allergens: lasagne ready meal

Physical contamination events were on the increase and dominated by metal contamination.

- Metal: potato salad, jaggery powder, cream cheese, salads and dips, yogurts, tzatziki and dressing, pizza, cheese bites, salmon pizza, whey powder, ready meals, infant powder, herrings in yogurt
- Glass: paprika potato sticks
- Plastic: fish fingers, farmhouse bread
- Other: hummus dips (animal matter), confectionary (choking)

Chemical recalls included a mix of reasons with illegal chemicals being the most common.

- Illegal chemical: gummies, brownies and lollies (muscimol), cinnamon powder (lead)
- Mycotoxins: sunflower seeds (Aflatoxin)
- Natural toxicants: nettle tea (Pyrrolizidine alkaloids)
- Process contaminants: shrimp crackers (glycidyl esters)
- Burning sensation: chocolate pretzels
- Taint: advent calendar



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