



MEDIA RELEASE

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A healthy scorecard for Victoria's dairy industry

At the 8th Annual General Meeting of Dairy Food Safety Victoria (DFSV) held at the RACV Club today, Chairman Shirley Harlock commended the dairy industry for maintaining the high standards of dairy food safety for which Victoria is renowned.

"Public health was protected from potential dairy food safety incidences and there were no market assurance breakdowns in 2007/2008. This is a healthy scorecard for the dairy industry and the best possible outcome for Dairy Food Safety Victoria," said Ms Harlock.

As the independent regulator of Victoria's dairy industry, DFSV is responsible for ensuring the safety of all dairy foods produced in Victoria for domestic and international markets.

"In light of the recent melamine incident in China, consumer confidence in dairy foods has never been more topical and the importance of improving our security against intentional food contamination cannot be emphasised enough," said Ms Harlock.

Dairy Food Safety Victoria has evolved in line with these challenges and for some time has been working on major projects with Biosecurity Victoria and the Food Defence Project team at the University of Maryland in the United States to ensure the Victorian dairy industry is at the forefront of food defence initiatives.

"The strength and integrity of our systems, backed with strategic relationships with like-minded organisations is paying dividends for our dairy producers and manufacturers," said Ms Harlock.

The DFSV Board is currently mapping the path for the future and finalising the organisation's next Corporate Plan. "We are now on the cusp of strategic change that goes hand in hand with the maturing of the organisation. 2009 will bring with it a new Corporate Plan and a new Board as the Board term expires in late 2009," said Ms Harlock.

According to DFSV CEO Dr Anne Astin, there were many highlights during the 2007/2008 financial year and much to be proud of.

Ms Astin said DFSV invested significant resources during the year to drive the development and implementation of the new national *Primary Production and Processing Standard* for dairy products – which is now in effect.

DFSV also successfully negotiated an agreement with Biosecurity Victoria, within the department of Primary Industries, eliminating the need for duplicate regulatory audits on farm in relation to the use of agricultural and veterinary chemicals.

“Our aim is to improve consistency and decrease the regulatory burden on industry by reducing duplication and streamlining processes. This is an area that will continue to be a focus for DFSV and is driven by what the industry wants.”

This focus on the needs of the dairy industry is at the forefront of operations at DFSV.

“Our main approach remains one of supporting and up-skilling of industry to ensure they can achieve and maintain the highest food safety standards. We do this through our library of Food Safety Notes, industry training courses and Learning Network Forums which are attended by a wide cross-section of manufacturers who come together to discuss pre-competitive issues and share collective knowledge,” said Dr Astin.

DFSV’s enhanced product testing reporting system was also introduced during the year, enabling manufacturers to compare their microbiological performance against the industry standard, providing added impetus for those with elevated results to strive to improve.

Dr Astin said the European Union Review during 2007//2008 was another major body of work for DFSV which saw the organisation collaborating nationally to maintain international access to key European markets. The EU has accepted some of Australia’s responses to its requirements and collaboration work continues.

“Building and maintaining international markets’ confidence in our food safety system is essential, enabling smooth entry of dairy products, resolution of any concerns in current markets and the negotiation of new trade opportunities.”

Dr Astin said DFSV ended the year in an extremely solid position.

“Although globally we face uncertain economic times, Dairy Food Safety Victoria is well positioned. Together with industry, we have kept Victoria’s dairy food safe and built an enviable reputation for food safety and integrity of production that makes our products internationally preferred.”

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