



GARDINER FOUNDATION



Learning Networks for Dairy Food Safety Victoria – Final Report

The “Learning Network” project commenced in January 2007 with the objective of bringing together the dairy manufacturing industry within Victoria to discuss pre-competitive issues relating to food safety, so that all manufacturers had the opportunity to benefit from the collective knowledge within the industry.

Four rounds of Learning Network forums were held in five regional dairy manufacturing areas over the period February to July 2007. Various strategies were employed to attract dairy manufacturers to the forums, and the input of attendees was encouraged by providing current and relevant industry information and raising topical issues.

Attendance at forums saw a progressive increase in the number of manufacturers being represented. Approximately one quarter of all 155 licensed dairy manufacturers were represented at the last round of sessions. By the end of the project, 42% of all manufacturers had attended one or more of the forums. The range of subjects raised and discussed has been extensive, and participants have over time become progressively more confident and cooperative in sharing openly their concerns and questions on food safety and related matters.

Through the expansion of their Network contacts, individuals have found new opportunities outside of their regular circles, and gained a greater appreciation for other sectors within the industry, and the particular problems they face.

Feedback from survey responses and individual communications demonstrate that those who have attended the forums are putting to good use information gained from the Learning Network in various ways, so as to advance food safety in the dairy industry to a level even higher than currently exists.

The continuing level of industry support and current interest, and the commitment of Dairy Food Safety Victoria to continue the regional forum concept into the future, is testament to the success of this Learning Network project.

“The forums have been a real help to me. We are quite isolated, and I have limited resources, particularly time. I have little opportunity to either meet with other dairy people or to go to forums or conferences, which are normally held in Melbourne, which is a 2.5 hour drive. The direct benefits I have gained are through being able to trial some magnets to help treat bore water deposits, identifying areas that may be the cause of intermittent product contamination through a plant audit/inspection, and more recently getting useful information on the possible causes of gas production in mature cheese”.

- Ferial Zekiman, Owner/Manager, Maffra Cheese.

“The forums have been confidence-boosting for us as smaller sized operations compared to some, as many of the problems that have come up are ones we can also relate to – It is not just us!

There are many topics that are not of relevance to us at this point in time, however gathering the knowledge is handy for future reference, if we were ever to be in that situation.

The aspect of training & monitoring staff hygiene through using microbial plates and UV detection methods on hands is one that we are looking to adopt shortly."

– Liz Cooke Owner/Manager, Micropowders Australia.

"I am writing to confirm my support for the "Information forums" held at Camperdown during this year. I feel particularly privileged to be able to be involved in the informal discussion with very experienced and highly qualified staff from larger dairy manufacturing plants. As a small "on farm" producer of cheese and yoghurts I often feel isolated, so to be able to speak freely about food safety issues and hear first hand from staff who have experienced issues was extremely worthwhile.

In particular, the issues discussed which I found beneficial are:

- *Implementation of preventative maintenance programs. The particular issues I had was with the use & life span of "O" rings and other rubber ware.*
- *Plate Heater maintenance. In particular the frequency of inspections of the plates and contractors who can advise me on testing the PHE.*
- *Foreign Bodies in product, Metal detention, X-ray etc as a tool in HACCP programs. This was followed by an informal discussion from QA officers who have experienced situations where a FB was in cheese. I left this forum feeling that as a producer I was not on my own when it came to Food safety issues, reassured that in the possibility of an event occurring at Meredith Dairy I could put systems in place and even contact other QA officers for advice.*
- *Allergens in food was discussed which was of interest to me particularly as Meredith Dairy produces Sheep & Goat milk product.*
- *Recent product recall including the very difficult Botulism toxin food poisoning and its implications.*

Unfortunately I missed a forum held in July but I hope to continue the informal discussions at the next meeting and in the future" .– Julie Cameron. Owner/Manager Meredith Dairy.