

**Adverse reactions to food and the relevance to the food industry**

*GR Townsend, NJ Mann*

Department of Food Science, RMIT University, Melbourne, VIC, 3001

Adverse reactions to food include food allergy, intolerance and sensitivities. Food allergy is an Immunoglobulin E (IgE) mediated reaction to a food component and can result in serious and even fatal conditions such as anaphylaxis. An intolerance to food has been defined as "An abnormal physiological response to an ingested food or food component" and includes conditions such as lactose intolerance and sensitivity to sulphites (1).

Current food labeling legislation contained in the Food Standards Code (FSC) only provides for mandatory labeling of the presence of peanuts. Under the proposed Draft FSC (2), which will be gazetted in November 2000, there is mandatory labeling declaration required for: gluten, crustacea and their products, egg and egg products, fish and fish products, milk and milk products, nuts and sesame seed and their products, peanuts and soybeans and their products and sulphite in concentrations of 10mg/kg or more.

The serious potential consequences of ingestion of some food components and the incoming legal requirement for certain food products, necessitates food companies to survey their ingredient suppliers. This will allow an auditable record of food composition to be set up and maintained in respect to the above mentioned food components, indicated as potentiators of adverse reactions. This will assist food companies in labeling products to meet the new mandatory declaration guidelines. Furthermore, manufacturers must attempt to prevent the inadvertent addition of these substances to their products.

This project was done in conjunction with a large food manufacturing company and involved creating an information database for all processed food products. A questionnaire was sent to suppliers, via electronic mail or surface mail, for each ingredient or partially manufactured product. The questionnaire requested information on the eight groups of products required to have mandatory declaration, plus information on whether the product contained monosodium glutamate, yeast, butylated hydroxyanisole (BHA), hydrolysed vegetable protein (HVP) and other compositional data and whether the ingredient was suitable for someone on a vegan, halal or kosher diet.

The results were collated into an electronic database that can be used in conjunction with recipes to provide information on each product. This type of information can assist food companies to ensure the labeling of their products complies with the proposed mandatory declaration criteria and to provide information to consumers with special dietary needs.

1. Clarke L, McQueen J, Samild A, Swain A. The dietary management of food allergy and food intolerance in children and adults. *Aust J Nutr Diet* 1996; 53:89-98
2. Draft Joint Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code (online)  
<http://www.anzfa.gov.au/draftfoodstandards/> [accessed 2 August, 2000]