Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Additional Estimates 2013 - 2014, 26 February 2014

Ref No: SQ14-000143

OUTCOME: 1 – Population Health

Topic: Carbendazim in Imported Orange Juice

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Senator: Xenophon Nick

Question:

Although carbendazim is banned for use within Australia, imported oranges and frozen concentrate orange juice (FCOJ) may still contain carbendazim. As the main provider of orange juice imports, Brazil continues to export carbendazim contaminated FCOJ to the country without limit, while domestic suppliers must find alternative fungicides and bear the cost of their development. Given carbendazim contaminated FCOJ is cheaper than locally produced orange juice, these imports are putting pressure on local growers and threatening the future of the local industry.

Has FSANZ identified imports with unsafe levels of carbendazim in the last two years? How many cases have been identified? What were the levels of carbendazim in these cases?

Answer:

Testing for carbendazim residues in imported orange juice and orange juice concentrate was introduced by the Department of Agriculture in March 2013. The Department of Agriculture is responsible for inspecting imported food to check it meets Australian requirements for public health and safety and compliance with Australian food standards. Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ) has been advised that during the period March–December 2013, there were no exceedances of the maximum residue limits for carbendazim in orange juice. Details regarding the Imported Food Inspection Scheme and compliance are publically available on the Department of Agriculture's website at http://www.daff.gov.au/biosecurity/import/food/inspection-data

FSANZ regularly monitors the food supply through the Australian Total Diet Survey (ATDS); the ATDS does not distinguish between domestic and imported products. Carbendazim was surveyed in various food products, including oranges, in the 23rd ATDS and there were no safety concerns associated with this chemical. Details of the 23rd ATDS can be found on the FSANZ website:
http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/publications/Pages/23rdaustraliantotald5367.aspx