

To: Directors of Public Protection Wales

8th May 2008

Reference: ENF/W/08/028

Dear Director

UPDATE ON SKIN-ON SHEEP MEAT (SMOKIES)

New Food Standards Agency research

In September 2007, the Food Standards Agency advised that it was proposing new research into skin-on sheep meat, known as smokies.

A contract has recently been awarded to the Central Science Laboratory for a study that will investigate whether residues from medicines used during the sheep's lifecycle are present in sheep skin, potentially posing a risk to consumers.

Whilst it had been anticipated the research would commence in April 2008, the Agency was able to bring the start date forward to 1 February 2008 and it is now expected the research will be completed by August 2009.

The new work will build on published research commissioned by the FSA which found that under controlled conditions, skin-on sheep carcasses could be produced hygienically.

Withdrawal periods for veterinary medicines

The effectiveness of current withdrawal periods of veterinary medicines will be a key element of the new research. Withdrawal periods ensure that any medicine residues in meat from animals are below a 'safe' limit to protect the consumer. A related desk study has looked broadly into this issue but found that current withdrawal periods do not take into account the presence of skin on sheep-meat as it is not normally eaten.



To address these gaps in knowledge, the new research will aim to practically determine whether certain medicines, including those that control external parasites and flies in sheep and concentrate in the skin and skin-fat, could pose a risk to consumers of the product. Sheep feet with the skin on that have been washed, depilated and smoked are legally available for human consumption. These items will be used as the testing product in the new study.

Possible legalisation of smokies

The new research will add to the evidence base, required to determine if and how skin-on sheep carcasses can be produced hygienically and safely in approved slaughterhouses.

It is too soon to speculate when the Agency would be in a position to approach the European Commission to suggest a change in the law in order to allow the production of skin-on sheep meat in approved slaughterhouses in the UK.

However, the Agency is aiming to approach the European Commission to seek agreement to a change in the law following the completion and peer review of the new research project and the subsequent development of production specifications that would ensure that any risks from veterinary residues in skin-on sheep can be adequately controlled.

Subsequently, FSA Wales plans to bring forward subordinate legislation for the consideration of Welsh Ministers within six months of a decision by the Commission that UK approved slaughterhouses could legally produce skin-on sheep carcasses for human consumption.

Further information

More background information about the production of skin-on sheep meat and FSA commissioned research is available on the Agency's website at:

<http://www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2008/mar/smokies0803>.

Yours sincerely,



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Head of General Enforcement Branch