



FACTS ABOUT HORSE MEAT in New Zealand

The discovery of horse meat in a range of European-made beef products has caused a great deal of interest among New Zealand media and consumers.

This fact sheet outlines the checks and balances that are in place to prevent meat substitution from happening in New Zealand, the labelling requirements for meat products, and information about beef-containing products that have been imported from the European Union (EU).

Q: How does MPI ensure meat substitution doesn't happen in New Zealand?

A: All slaughter houses must have a risk management programme registered with the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI). These programmes include procedures to ensure product is labelled correctly.

MPI operates a mandatory Species Verification Programme. This programme checks that the regulatory requirements which have been put in place to ensure truth in labelling with respect to species of origin are working.

Every year, MPI samplers collect 300 random samples of meat from cold stores all around New Zealand.

Each sample is tested for possible contamination by other species. For example, a sample of sheep meat will be tested first to confirm that it is sheep meat and then for contamination by cattle, deer, goat, horse and pig meat.

The test method used in the New Zealand programme identifies proteins unique to a species, and it is very sensitive with a level of detection of 1 percent contamination.

Q: What controls are there on imported meat products?

A: Any meat coming into New Zealand must carry official certification from the exporting country that it meets New Zealand biosecurity, food safety and legal requirements – including truth in labelling.

MPI has reviewed its data on beef products being imported from the UK. We have contacted importers of UK beef products and brought this matter to their attention.

There is no evidence to indicate New Zealand imported any frozen, chilled or fresh beef or horsemeat from any EU member country in the past year.

Q: How is meat labelled in New Zealand?

A: Labelling requirements for food for sale are set out in the Food Standards Code. These requirements apply to domestically produced as well as imported food.

Ingredients must be declared on the label using the common name of the ingredient or a name that describes the true nature of that ingredient.

Where applicable a generic name may be used for some ingredients – such as meat, spices, vegetables or cheese – without any further details.

Because New Zealanders generally would be unlikely to expect a food to contain horse meat, simply labelling the meat component generically as “meat” would be misleading under food and fair trading legislations. Horse meat would be a term that clearly describes the nature of the food.

It would be illegal to use horse meat in a food product but declare it as beef on the product's label.

If consumers want more specific information about food products, they can contact the manufacturer or supplier via the contact details provided on the food's label.

Q: Is horse meat safe to eat?

A: While horse meat would be considered unusual for most consumers in New Zealand, it is a perfectly safe meat for people to eat provided it has been slaughtered and processed as meat for human consumption.

In New Zealand there is one processing plant, which is legally able to process horse meat for human consumption. MPI understands most is exported.