

HORSE MEAT FACTS: MINISTRY FOR PRIMARY INDUSTRIES (MPI)

1. What checks and balances are there to ensure meat products being sold are what they say they are? Are these mandatory?

a. There are legal requirements not to mislead the consumer.

b. Processors of animals (those who slaughter and dress or further process eg store meat) are subject to performance-based verification by MPI. This consists of MPI on-site verification to check compliance with regulatory requirements.

c. MPI operates a mandatory Species Verification Programme. This programme checks the effectiveness of the regulatory requirements in place to ensure truth in labelling with respect to species of origin.

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

Each sample is tested and the test checks for contamination by other possible species. For example, a sample of ovine (sheep) meat will be tested for contamination by bovine (cattle), cervine (deer), caprine (goat), equine (horse) and porcine (pig) meat.

2. Is this testing done independently or by the meat company itself?

MPI contracts a laboratory to do independent testing using an International Accreditation New Zealand (IANZ) method. The contracted laboratory operates under comprehensive quality systems that as a minimum comprise compliance with the ISO 17025 "Standard for Technical Competence of Testing Laboratories".

3. Are meat products DNA tested?

The test method used in the NZ programme is an enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA). This method identifies proteins unique to a species.

4. What rules are there about meat patties and sausages containing minimum amounts of meat?

The Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code contains standards for meat and meat products.

Sausage meat must contain no less than 500g/kg of fat free meat flesh; and the proportion of fat in sausage must be no more than 500g/kg of the fat free meat flesh content.

There are no specific rules for meat patties but there must be truth in labelling so the consumer has the information regarding meat content.

5. How can a consumer know that the meat product they are buying is what it says on the pack?

There are legal requirements not to mislead the consumer.

Processors of animals (those who slaughter and dress or further process eg store meat) are subject to performance-based verification by MPI. This consists of MPI on-site verification to check compliance with regulatory requirements

The compliant results obtained from the mandatory MPI Species Verification Programme provide evidence that substitution is not occurring in the samples of meat from randomly allocated cold stores all around New Zealand.

6. What chance is there of a meat not mentioned in packaging being in the product?

Controls already mentioned minimise this as much as practicable.

7. Do you know of any incidents where a meat product in New Zealand was discovered not to be what it said it was?

No

8. What about testing for contaminants in meat products? How is this done?

In addition to the Species Verification Programme MPI runs a comprehensive residues and contaminants monitoring programme.

9. What about controls on NZ exports of meat and meat products?

Animal products such as meat are not permitted for export until they first comply with requirements for sale in NZ. Additional to that for overseas markets, MPI provides export certificates that provide MPI-verified assurances on the species of animal from which the exported products were derived.