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PRESS RELEASE

www.consumersfiji.org

Council applauds efforts to improve restaurant hygiene

The Consumer Council of Fiji is impressed with the efforts of the Ministry of Health and Municipal Councils to improve restaurant hygiene in the country. The recent initiative to introduce colored stickers for restaurants passing the minimum health standards by the municipal councils is commendable. The Council has for long advocated for restaurant grading system based on the large number of complaints it has been receiving against eateries.

The Council believes that the colored sticker system for restaurants is a very good initiative as it will not only help consumers make informed choice on hygienic restaurants but will also be beneficial for restaurant owners who give high priority to cleanliness. Restaurants that comply with safety and hygiene standards will have good reputation and hence will be able to attract more customers. The health inspectors should also be commended for their regular inspections of the restaurants. The absence of regular and stringent monitoring of restaurants and lack of recognition for good practice in the past saw laxity amongst eatery owners and as a result we have seen tuna stored in toilets, the presence of cockroaches, maggots, rat tail along with other foreign objects in the food that put consumer's health at risk.

The Council launched a campaign on restaurant hygiene in August 2008 and since then we have received 60 complaints against restaurants around the country. Council would like to see stringent action taken against those eateries that violates food safety and comprise hygiene.

We are also pleased to note the good work done by Ministry of Health's Food Unit in implementing and enforcing Food and Safety laws in Fiji. Their regular inspection and proactive enforcement has seen many sub-standard and questionable food items being removed from the retail outlets.

The Council wants harsher penalties for traders who ignore fair trading and food safety laws particularly those traders who are repeat offenders.

Fiji's Food Safety Laws and Regulations have clearly defined standards on the quality of food items that must be sold and it prohibits the sale of damaged/ expired and foul food products. If traders continue to breach the laws, they are liable to fines and penalties.

Meanwhile the Council would also like to urge consumers to make better choices for their own safety; consumers are advised to check the expiry dates on food labels they

purchase. Consumers who have inadvertently purchased expired or improperly labeled food products should quickly inform the retailer concerned. This will help prevent the sale of such product to other buyers. They are also advised to report offending retailers to the Ministry of Health and the Consumer Council of Fiji should they come across the sale of expired or improper food labeling problems.

The Council would like to inform those habitual offenders that the Council's mystery shoppers are always in the markets watching them and would soon name and shame those supermarkets found in breach of food safety laws.



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Premila Kumar
Chief Executive Officer