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Press Release

www.consumersfiji.org

Council lauds efforts to improve food safety

The Consumer Council of Fiji applauds recent efforts of Ministry of Health's Food Unit in ensuring compliance of food safety regulations by traders. Despite being implemented for more than a year we still see several breaches of Food Safety Regulations 2009. The Council believes regular monitoring and enforcement of the law is greatly needed to ensure safe and quality food to consumers. We want harsher penalties for traders who ignore fair trading and food safety laws particularly those traders who are repeat offenders.

The Food Unit's initiative early this year to remove all food items with foreign labels from the marketplace is commendable. The Council has for long been concerned about the large number of imported food items with labels written in a foreign language. This issue became more worrying when we found that some items had double labels. One such complaint received by the Council was of a tin fish with two different stickers on the packaging. One of the stickers was put by the local supplier while the other was by the manufactures in overseas. Both stickers had different information on the product. Council believes that consumers should be given clear and readable information on products particularly food items which have health implications. With the help of Food Unit this tin fish was removed from the supermarkets and other small retail outlets.

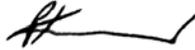
Council also appreciates Food Unit's efforts to have the restaurants in Fiji graded as it will not only help consumers make informed choice on based on hygiene standards of restaurants but will also be beneficial for restaurant owners who give high priority to cleanliness. Restaurants that comply with safety and hygiene standards will have a good reputation and hence will be able to attract more customers.

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.

Council is also very much concerned about handling and storage of food products particularly meat and perishable food in the country. Our regular market surveillance has shown that in addition to the problems with freezers, the workers in most butchers and supermarket meat sections do not wear proper safety accessories needed in these places. Most of them don't have caps or gloves and pack meat with bear hands. Some are even seen wiping their hands on their dirty aprons.

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 labelled food products should report offending retailers to the Ministry of Health, municipal councils and the Consumer Council.



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Premila Kumar
Chief Executive Officer

