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9 September, 2009

PRESS RELEASE

www.consumersfiji.org

Harsher penalties needed for bad food

The Consumer Council of Fiji commends the recent effort of Health Inspectors of the Macuata Rural Local Authority in removing the condemned food items from the supermarkets of Labasa worth approximately \$20,000.

The monitoring of trading practices and consumer protection in Fiji's far-flung towns and rural areas has always been a concern for the Council.

The Council calls for harsher penalties on traders who ignore fair trading laws and food regulations. These traders who sell expired or bad food products are profiting and putting consumers and the general public at risk. What concerns the Council is that despite the regulations in place and constant calls from the authorities for compliance, some traders continue to sell food items which are either unsafe for human consumption or stored under unhygienic conditions.

Council's regular market surveillance has revealed that selling of expired, substandard, dented and damaged food products is still very rife and some retail outlets are habitual offenders. The Council had received a complaint from a consumer against a prominent retailer in Suva who had sold him smelly and sub-standard meat. A follow-up survey on some retailers in the Suva-Nausori corridor revealed sub-standard meat or meat items were sold under most unhygienic conditions. Bloodied water was either seeping around the freezers attracting flies and insects while others let out foul stench.

The Food Safety Regulations 2009 has clearly defined standards on the quality of meat that should be sold to the people, including alluding to hygiene standards required for quality management and presentation of meat for sale.

Meanwhile, in a regular survey this week, Council officers discovered a number of "YUMS - The big Snacks" in one supermarket to be under its stated weight. Together with the Department of Weights and Measures, the Council was able to verify that the packets were underweight. The packet stated '20g net' but the report from Weights and Measures showed three packets to be grossly underweight. The gross packs of the seal packs were 12.6g, 14.2g and 10.4g.

The Council wishes to remind retailers that our officers are regularly checking out their products. As the Food Safety Regulations comes into full effect on October 14, retailers are also urged to take the responsibility to understand the laws and comply with the provisions for food safety and hygiene. Ignorance of law is no defence.

The Council applauds the good effort made by Ministry of Health to curb unfair trade practices and protecting consumers from health risk and dangers through their vigilant and proactive actions to get such sub-standard food products off the shelves.

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Mr Narendra Padarath
Council Chairman

Member, Consumers International (CI)
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