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6 June 2015

Feature

Food Quality and Safety

Have you ever been in a situation where you purchased a food item from a supermarket, market or a street vendor and it may be out of date, havemould or other foreign objects?

What comes to your mind – of course, its ‘quality’ and ‘safety’!

Unfortunately, despite the law being clear that the food you buy must be safe and of satisfactory quality, consumers are still confronted with issues related to food quality and safety

The Council continues to receive complaints about food and drinks which have expired, carried questionable objects and creatures in it. The Council’s market surveillance and complaints lodged by consumers show that some retailers continue to breach food safety laws by selling expired, rotten and insect-infested food items. Weevils in wheat products like flour and sharps are an ongoing issue that the Council continues to receive complaints on.

This is a recurring issue for the Council as some retailers and manufacturers are not acting responsibility due to poor enforcement of food laws. The Food Safety Regulations 2009 covers standards, good hygiene practice, substantiating claims, labeling rules and packaging.

Recently, some bread-lovers cried foul over the mould found in bread, maggots found in canned fish, bile found in chicken liver, poor quality of locally produced liquid milk, a dead fly found in a rum ball and weevils found in flour, semolina and sharp. Other glaring cases which were brought to the Council were of a consumer finding a rubber-band inside a snack, a lizard in a packet of sealed dhal, a plastic found inside a canned meat, stones mixed in a fruit cake and fake black forest cake.

The market surveillances also shows that some traders care less about food safety issues as they sell food items which have expired, the food packets are half-torn, cans with food are dented and rusted, dirty fridge stocking meat and dirty shop-shelves. Some supermarkets are also fooling consumers on the amount they would save from in store specials. Consumers should check the normal price on the shelf is displayed correctly so that they can clearly distinguish between this price and the special price in order to calculate the right amount of savings.

In such a circumstance, the consumers have to take the lead role – by being vigilant.

If you have a complaint about poor quality or unsafe food you should keep the food item if possible as evidence. You could keep it in a sealed freezer bag. The shop or manufacturer is unlikely to give you a refund or replacement without it. You should also keep your receipt if possible as proof of purchase.

Returning food or a sample of the food, to the manufacturer may be the best option. If consumers cannot handle this on their own then they can always lodge their complaints with the Council. Where a complaint is justified, a food manufacturer generally compensates.

Most foods must carry a best before date or a use by date. These dates give you an indication of how long the food will last if stored correctly. The best before date indicates when food is at its best for consumption. Once this date has passed, the food may be in a less good condition. For example, crisps may have gone slightly stale.

Use by date marks are mostly used for foods that don't last long, such as eggs, milk, bread, meat or fish. If you eat food that has passed its use by date you could be at risk of food poisoning. Shops are not allowed to sell food that has passed its use buy date.

Expiry dates on the other hand means exactly what it says! If the expiration date is past, don't use it.

If you bought food by mistake that had passed its use by date or has expired, take the food back to the shop with your receipt or lodge a complaint with the Council, Ministry of Health's Food Unit.

The council is urging consumers to be more vigilant and observant when shopping for the family to avoid frustrations and disappointments.