MICROBIOLOGICAL TESTING

FOOD SAFETY SCHEMES MANUAL
APPENDIX 1

NSW GOVERNMENT Food Authority

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Contents

Methods for microbiological testing

All methods used for the microbiological testing must be validated test methods. Examples of certification bodies that list validated test methods include: Australian Standards (AS), International Standards Organisation (ISO), AOAC, AFNOR, FSIS MLG or FDA BAM.

Submitting microbiological samples

- A RTE finished product is to be randomly selected – consult the laboratory about the minimum amount of sample required for testing.
- It is preferable to select a packaged finished product and to submit the whole sample.
- If the finished product is not packaged, a high level of personal and process hygiene must be maintained during sampling. The sample must be placed in a sterile container and placed in a clean plastic bag that can be sealed and delivered to the laboratory.
- The package must not be opened or damaged. It must be packed in a small esky or equivalent, using ice bricks or something similar, to ensure that product can be maintained at 5ºC or below. It must be delivered or sent by courier to a NATA (or ILAC equivalent) accredited laboratory for analysis.
- The laboratory will require you to complete a submission form detailing what type of analysis you require. Please ensure that you request the correct testing for the product being submitted and include a batch number or lot identification for each individual product on the submission form and on the product packaging. This identification must also relate to batch information on your production sheets for complete traceability.
- Once results are received, all acceptable results are to be filed with the monitoring documentation and kept on the premises for audit purposes.

Corrective action and traceability

Where unacceptable results are found in finished products, the business must notify the Food Authority:

- verbally **within 24 hours** after the license holder becomes aware of the results (e.g. by phone), **and**
- in writing **within 7 days** after the license holder becomes aware of the results (e.g. by fax, email or letter). The *Notification of pathogen detection* form must be used and it can be found on the Food Authority's website.

Product from that particular batch still on the premise is to be placed on HOLD until advice is given by the Food Authority. Ensure that all RTE product sold or distributed can be batch identified on invoices and documentation to facilitate a product recall if required.

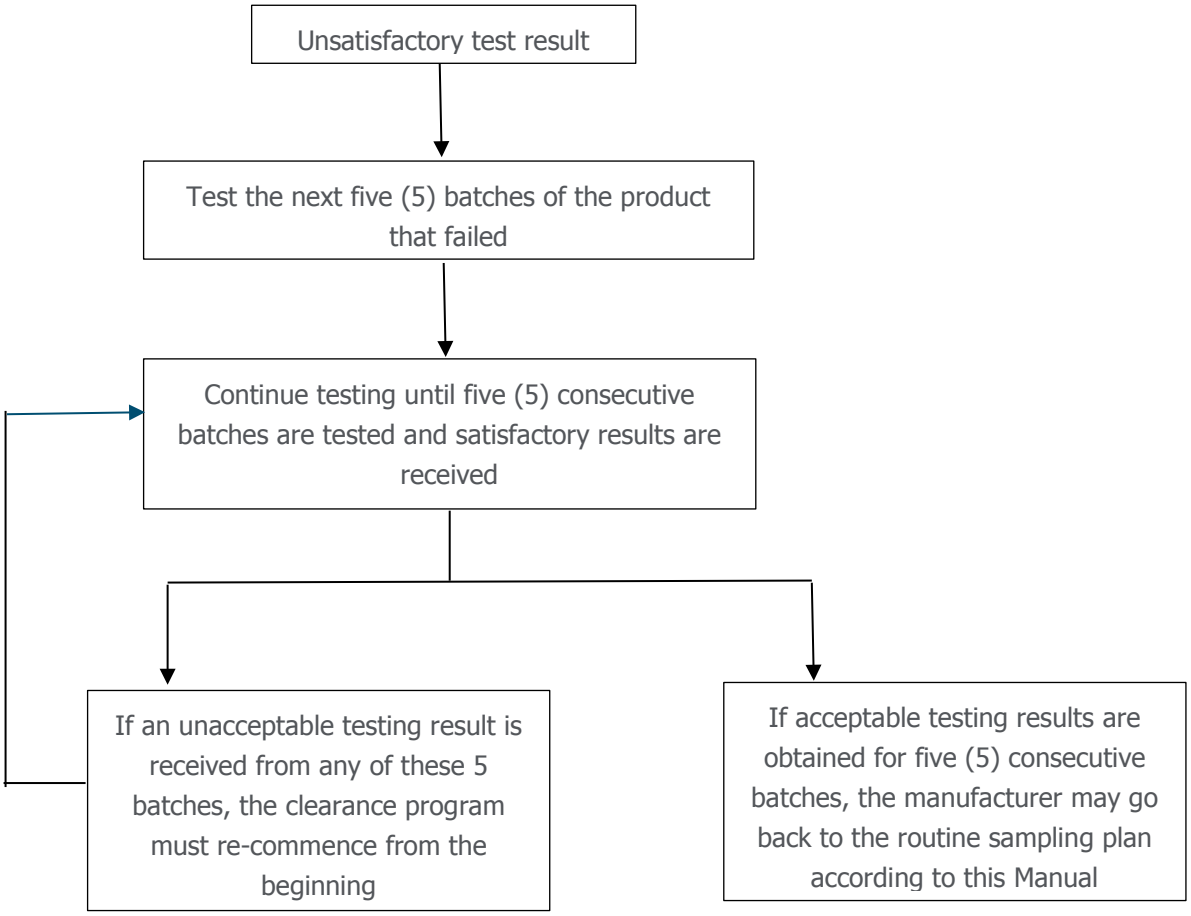
Clearance program requirements

Following confirmation of a microbiological test failure, samples of finished product from the affected production line are to be sent to a NATA (or ILAC equivalent) accredited laboratory for testing for the microorganism identified in the 'failed' test. Every batch of product must be tested until five (5) consecutive batches have recorded satisfactory results.

If, during the clearance program, a failed result is received, then the clearance program must recommence from the beginning.

It is strongly recommended that a "Test and Hold" system is used which will ensure that acceptable results are obtained prior to the batch release.

Figure A1. Clearance program flowchart



Investigation

In the event of positive results for *Listeria* species or *Salmonella*, it is strongly recommended to conduct environmental sampling to assist in determining the source of the contamination. The environmental sampling procedure can be found in Appendix 3 of this Manual.

It is also strongly advised that all product from other production lines in the same production room be tested for the microorganisms identified as failing from batches produced on the day before, the day of and the day after the original contamination.

Note: The Food Authority reserves the right to direct specific action in relation to monitoring and corrective actions.

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