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7 December 2021

Dear ██████████

RE: SCCL-FOI-2021-087

Thank you for your FOI request, requesting information in relation to the governments school fruit and vegetable scheme as outlined below.

Your request has been handled as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and we are able to provide a reply to your request. Supply Chain Coordination Limited (SCCL) confirms it does hold information for NHS Supply Chain. Our responses follow each question raised, detail below.

Q1. Please could you send me the results of the risk assessment covering the microbiological safety of giving children aged 3 to 6 years (i.e., a vulnerable group) soiled root vegetables (carrots) to be eaten raw, unpeeled, nor topped or tailed? Please could you ensure that the information relating to the risk of E. coli 0157 (in a vulnerable group) consuming raw soiled root vegetables is included?

NHS Supply Chain: Food does not require a risk assessment covering microbiological safety of giving 'soiled' produce as the carrot specification states that the veg needs to be clean and meet the requirement for EC class 1, therefore nullifying any potential risk.

NHS Supply Chain: Food expects all schools to follow the washing advice given to them by NHS Supply Chain: Food as they are required to follow school food standards.

Q2. Please could you also cover how the amount of information provided to schools relating to the safe consumption of the fruit and vegetables was determined? For instance, the guidance leaflet discusses allergies but there is no mention on the importance of washing root vegetables thoroughly particularly because of the E. coli 0157 risk (or providing FSA guidance on washing soiled vegetables), the avoidance of cross contamination from soil on carrots etc?

The washing process that carrots go through at source is enough to remove any potential risk of E.coli on the soil. Carrots can also be grown in sandy soils, so the soil does not stick very much to the roots.

The carrots are then washed, polished with brushes which removes any attached soil and scrubs the crowns of the carrots, the carrots are then washed again. All this takes place before they are bagged to stop any cross contamination with other products, the advice to wash before consumption is printed on the bag as an extra measure.

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Q3 contains the specification required for all carrots supplied to SFVS regarding soiling on the produce and standards required.

The information provided to schools is because the carrots are determined to be safe to eat and do not carry an E.coli risk after the thorough washing processes they have been through prior to consumption.

Q3. Please could you also cover how the amount of information provided to schools relating to potential risk of choking on the top or tail of carrots in particular for the under-fives was determined?

Below is the required specification of carrots that are supplied to the SFVS regarding size. Carrots have been determined not to be a choking hazard, as all carrots meet this minimum specification.

Carrot specification

- Clean, fresh, and whole vegetable. All varieties are eligible for supply into the scheme provided they meet the requirements for EC class 1 and comply with the size requirements below. Varieties include Chantenay, Nairobi or equivalent, coloured carrot varieties and include Purple Dragon or Kaleidoscope mix or equivalent.

Standards / Directives / Legislative requirements

- Refer to current EC Quality Standard for Class 1 Regulation 730/1999.
- Refer to School Food Standards. Version 3 January 2015

Size / Grade

- For Chantenay carrot varieties or equivalent - Finished product diameter 18-32 mm, product length 50-120 mm tolerance. Min weight 20g- Max weight 80g. target 20-80g
- For Nairobi carrot varieties or equivalent - 18–35mm, crown diameter 25-40mm, product length 50-150 mm. Min weight 35g - Max weight 100g target 20-80g.
- For coloured carrot varieties or equivalent - 18–35mm, crown diameter 25-40mm, product length 50-150 mm. Min weight 35g - Max weight 100g target 20-80g.
- Foreign Matter: Excessive soiling, spray deposits, visible foreign matter - Tolerance = Nil

Q4. Finally, please can you provide information on why it was decided that there would not be an 'opt in' or 'opt out' consent for parents of children participating in the scheme?

One of the terms and conditions every school agrees to when registering for the SFVS is that they must offer parents and carers of eligible children the opportunity to exclude their children from receiving fruit (opting out).

This is included and agreed to on the signed joining form when schools submit their registration forms to NHS Supply Chain: Food.

Q5. Why are parents not given all the information so that they can make an informed decision?

NHS Supply Chain: Food does not collect personal information about children who are eligible to receive fresh produce under the SFVS.

Instead, schools are asked to pass on information about the SFVS to parents and carers, and all schools are advised of this at the point of registration.

NHS Supply Chain: Food encourages parents to discuss any issues or concerns with the school in the first instance.

If you are dissatisfied with this response you may request an independent internal review of our handling of your request by submitting a complaint within two months to the postal or e-mail addresses above, quoting the reference number above. If you ask for an internal review, it would be helpful if you could say why you are dissatisfied with the response.

As part of any internal review the handling of your information request will be reassessed by a member of SCCL staff who was not involved in providing you with this response. If you remain dissatisfied after this internal review, you will have a right of complaint to the Information Commissioner as established by section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act.

If you require any further information do not hesitate to contact the FOI team
Yours sincerely,

FOI Team

Supply Chain Coordination Limited
Management Function of NHS Supply Chain