

# HUSH NEWSLETTER

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## Report of Godstone Farm *E.coli* O157 Published

The largest outbreak of *E. coli* O157 linked to an Open Farm in the UK occurred at Godstone Farm, Surrey, in August and September 2009. There were 93 people affected, of whom 76 (82%) were under 10 years of age. Of the 78 people with symptoms, 27 (35%) were admitted to hospital and 17 (22%), all of them children, were diagnosed with HUS. Eight of the children with HUS required dialysis, some of whom have been left with permanent kidney damage.

The report of the independent investigation into the outbreak, the factors that contributed to it and its subsequent handling, has just been published. Led by George Griffin (*Professor of Infectious Diseases and Medicine at St George's University of London and Chair of the Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens*), the key findings are:

- ⇒ Farm operators should ensure that the layout and design of public areas are such that visitor contact with animal faecal matter (particularly ruminant) is minimised or eliminated.
- ⇒ There is a need to raise public awareness of the potential infection risks when arriving at a farm attraction, emphasising the parent/carer's decision to allow children to have animal contact.
- ⇒ There should be a reassessment of the risk of *E. coli* O157 infection as 'low'. Its probability may be low but the impact is high and the consequences very severe.
- ⇒ An Approved Code of Practice should be developed for the Open Farm industry, involving relevant authorities and in close consultation with leading representatives of the industry to underpin the industry's initiative in establishing an accreditation scheme.
- ⇒ The regulatory agencies and others should explore ways of working together in regulating Open Farms clarifying roles, responsibilities and relationships.
- ⇒ Research should be pursued to assist clinicians in the rapid diagnosis of *E. coli* O157 and the identification of and treatment for children likely to develop severe complications of the infection. Research should also be undertaken aimed at preventing or limiting carriage of the organism in animals.

Prof. Griffin stated that *"This outbreak could very likely have been avoided if more attention had been given to preventing visitors being exposed to animal faecal matter. Once it had started, there is no doubt that even with prompt action this would have been a big outbreak. Nevertheless there was a lack of public health leadership by the Health Protection Agency and a missed opportunity to exercise decisive public health action and thereby restrict the size of the outbreak."*

*"The assessment of risk carried out by Godstone Farm was inadequate and it principally relied on the actions of the public, primarily through handwashing, to control the risks. The risk assessment process used by the Local Authority did not facilitate the identification of hazards on the farm despite a programme of inspections.*

*"It is currently very difficult for families to make their own informed decisions about the risk of visiting an open farm and better public education is crucial. In addition to public education on the risks of infection from *E. coli* O157, an accreditation scheme, led by the farming industry and informed by the regulators, would help the public identify which farm premises were operated to a known and acceptable standard."*

HUSH welcomes this report but is disappointed and saddened that the outbreak happened in the first place, as in 2000/2001 such issues were discussed by others and ourselves in the compilation of the Multi Government Department sponsored Scottish Task Force Report on *E.coli* O157. The Charity plans to address the findings of the report with the Health Protection Agency and DEFRA and have asked them through the FSA to attend our meeting in London with the FSA and Department of Health on 16th July.

LEADING THE FIGHT AGAINST E.COLI O157

## Good Food For Our Money

HUSH has joined other like-minded organisations to support the *Good Food for Our Money* Campaign, organised by Sustain, the alliance for better food and farming,

Every year, the public sector spends more than £2 billion on food in schools, hospitals, care homes, the armed forces and all other public organisations throughout the country. We believe this should be spent on food which is good for us and the planet, so that tax payers' money is invested in improving people's health and rewarding the best farmers.

At the moment, our money pays for food that can be harmful to our health, damaging to the environment and fails to invest in local and sustainable suppliers, and in fair trade with poor countries. And there are no rules to stop this happening. The *Good Food for Our Money* campaign demands that government introduce new rules so that we know our money is being spent on good food.

Years of failed voluntary initiatives to improve the quality of public sector food have convinced us that the only way to achieve the improvement we need is a new law to set legal health, social and environmental standards for food served in the public sector. This will help to build large-scale and reliable markets for sustainable produce and reward producers for adopting better practices. In turn, citizens will see their taxes providing food that solves environmental and social problems, instead of creating them.

### 13.1 Miles for HUSH

The family of Richard Walsh was left devastated by the loss of his 6 year old cousin, Joanna, to E.coli O157 in 1994.

Joanna's parents Steve and Norah were two of the founding members of HUSH and remain dedicated to preventing others suffering as they have.

Wanting to support the work of the charity, Richard offered to take part in the Plymouth Half Marathon in order to raise sponsorship.

Richard joined a field of 6,000 elite and fun runners to complete the run in 1:51 hour. As we go to print he has raised £1041.41 (*which includes £221.41 in gift aid and a donation from his employers, Brittany Ferries*).



Well done and thank you Richard!



To find out more about the campaign please visit:

<http://www.sustainweb.org/GoodFoodForOurMoney>

### E.coli Risk from Seafood

A recent 4.00 am raid on Billingsgate Market was followed by the arrest of four men and the seizure of 50kg of clams with concerns about possible *E. coli* contamination. The market supplies fishmongers, fish and chip shops, restaurants and cafés, London embassies and buyers for many of the capital's most famous department stores and hotels.

Officers from the Gangmasters' Licensing Authority (GLA) joined police, health officials and fisheries authorities in Operation Enterprise; which involved undercover surveillance and night patrols on Rustington beach, West Sussex.

The investigation began after complaints from residents about men working round the clock, digging for clams and cockles. There were concerns about damage to the beach and fears that the shellfish were sold for food despite possible *E. coli* contamination.

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