

Maple Leaf Foods Bartor Road Positive Test Results Media Backgrounder

Status Update: October 9, 2008

Maple Leaf Foods voluntarily recalled 191 products produced at its Bartor Road facility from January 1, 2008, to present, as a precautionary measure after the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) and Public Health Agency of Canada concluded that the same *Listeria monocytogenes* strain identified in some Maple Leaf products was linked to the illness and loss of life of several Canadians.

- The Bartor Road plant began phasing in production on September 17, 2008.
- The plant has been operating within a very highly controlled and monitored environment, with daily on-site inspection and oversight by the CFIA to ensure the effectiveness of food safety protocols.
- As part of the controlled plant start-up, all products have been subject to a hold and release program to test for the presence of *Listeria monocytogenes* (*Listeria mono.*).
- Nearly 6,000 samples in total have been taken to date, (5,040 product and 841 environmental). We have received 3,850 product test results that include production through to October 2nd, all of which have tested negative with the exception of four product samples (0.1%) produced on Line 7 and one environmental swab (0.15%).
- No products from the plant, including the four product samples that tested positive, have been distributed for public consumption and the protocols we have in place have proven to be very effective.
- We are being ultra-cautious in this facility. Maple Leaf and the CFIA has placed all product on hold pending a confirmation that these findings are validated, reflecting the conservative approach to phasing in the start-up of the Bartor Road plant.

The Facts

- Of 841 environmental samples taken to date, we have obtained 671 results, of which only one (0.15%) has tested positive for listeria species.
- 60 product samples are taken from each line daily. Samples are taken off the line every 8-12 minutes:
 - 5 products are put into a composite test
 - One day = 12 composite samples
- Of 5,040 product samples taken to date, we have obtained 3,850 test results, all of which have been negative for *Listeria mono.* except for four samples, which all came from line 7.
- The four samples that tested positive were from two products, *Hygrade* smoked meat and *Coorsh* smoked meat.
- No products have been released for distribution and there is no risk to the public.

Background:

- Listeria is pervasive in the environment and exists in all food plants. While it can be reduced it can never be eliminated. The more you test the greater the probability that you will find listeria.
- As Health Canada states, the incidence of *Listeria mono.* in RTE foods ranges from 1-10%. Put another way, one in every 200 products will test positive for *Listeria mono.* To most people, *Listeria mono.* poses a very low risk.
- The Bartor Road plant is subject to the most rigorous testing and inspection in North America. It has a number of checks in place to ensure we verify on a continuous basis the effectiveness of our food safety protocols.
- The standard protocol for positive tests in a Maple Leaf plant is immediate product quarantine and remediation through sanitization programs.
- The four product samples from Line 7 that tested positive have not been shipped to customers and all remaining production since the plant re-opened is 100% within our control.
- None of our products in the market are affected.
- Our testing protocols are doing what they are intended – identifying listeria so that it can be remediated. We are upholding the highest standard of food safety vigilance in Canada.

Background information on listeria, *Listeria monocytogenes* and related health risks

Source: Food Directorate, Health Canada, Policy on Listeria monocytogenes in Ready-To-Eat (RTE) Foods, July 2004

- International experts of the World Health Organization (1988) concluded that “the total elimination of *Listeria monocytogenes* (*Listeria mono.*) from all foods is impractical and may be impossible”
- It is estimated that 5% of humans carry *Listeria mono.* in their intestines without ill effects.
- Occasionally this organism causes an infection – listeriosis. The highest incident is among newborns, the elderly and immuno-compromised individuals.
- A number of major foodborne outbreaks have been documented in Europe and NA. In Canada there have been relatively few outbreaks.
- *Listeria mono.* has been found in a wide range of foods, including unpasteurized cheeses, cold cuts, smoked fish, shellfish and vegetables.

- The incidence of *Listeria mono.* in RTE foods ranges from 1-10% (or approximately one in every 200 products). It can be assumed, therefore, that Canadians are consuming foods contaminated with this organism on a regular basis.
- Although the minimum infectious dose (MID) for *Listeria mono.* has not been determined, if the MID were low, one would expect many more cases of listeriosis to be reported than are currently observed. In fact, from the limited outbreak data available, there is little evidence that low numbers of *Listeria mono.* in a food will cause listeriosis, even in susceptible individuals. (FAO 1999)
- Therefore, the likelihood of any one food contaminated with low numbers of *Listeria mono.* resulting in illness, based on current data from around the world, must be considered remote.