

# China moves on food safety

In the wake of the melamine scandal in the dairy industry and numerous other food-safety issues, China has implemented a Food Safety Law to go into effect on June 1.

The new law includes penalties for tainted products, cancellation of licences and the creation of a National Food Safety Commission to co-ordinate the work of five ministries that will retain day-to-day supervision over different phases of the food-production process. Difficulties in implementing the new law mean the old regulations are still applicable for the time being.

Reports about bad products from China have made headlines in the west but the issue is far more serious for people living in China, where a highly fragmented supply chain comprising hundreds of millions of farmers and 500,000 food-processing companies has operated with little oversight. Many of these processors struggle to make a profit, so economic survival takes precedence over food safety.

While the vast majority of food-safety issues are related to domestic producers, concern remains about whether food imports from other countries will be unfairly targeted as a form of protectionism. For countries like New Zealand, this is important. Food-related products contribute around 44% of total exports to China; in 2008 milk-powder imports alone were around 46,000 tonnes.

Like many laws in China it sounds good on paper but there is considerable confusion about how it will be implemented. Steven Dickinson, a partner with Harris Moure law firm, who has been based in China since the 1980s, says: "As is typical in China, on first reading the



■ Economic survival takes precedence over food safety.

law itself sounds quite modern. However, upon careful inspection you see that the law is very vague, lacking detail on both implementation and funding. It is more a wish list than a full-bodied law. They have taken a standards-based approach when the real issue is (lack of) enforcement of existing laws."

While the actual timing and implementation of the new law are still not clear, many food importers are optimistic it is a step in the right direction.

"There is a lot of uncertainty about how the new laws will be implemented and administered," says Craig Aldous, general manager of Elders Fine Foods in Shanghai.

"Established food importers should have the necessary relationships to cope with the new regulations but it would be tougher for a new importer to get up to speed with all the changes."

Philip Turner, general manager, Fonterra, China, believes it is a positive development for importers as well as the local food industry.

"Overall, it has generated more interest

in and demand for high-quality ingredients and food products. This is positive for importers, like Fonterra, as well as local industries that are driving higher standards.

"We are also starting to see it play an important role in re-establishing consumer confidence in the dairy industry, which, in the long-run, will support greater consumption of dairy products in China."

Higher compliance costs may be one effect of the new regulations.

Duccio Alabiso, senior manager at Sinodis, an importer of food products from many countries including New Zealand, says: "The new food-safety law will probably slow down our operations and we will incur higher costs (which may result in higher retail prices for the end-consumer), but the direction is definitely the right one.

"Compliance will likely result in more checks and slower processing times at Chinese customs leading to higher handling costs, for example."

On the positive side he hopes it will weed out some operators who can't provide guarantees of traceability and good handling procedures as well as those ignoring fair-trade practices.

The Chinese news media has had a relatively free hand to report on issues such as food safety in recent years which has made people far more aware of the problems.

The new law may help to improve standards although real change is likely to come only with reform of the agricultural sector that gives farmers the chance to make a decent profit, and consolidation of the food-processing industry into larger players better able to provide quality products. Until then food-safety issues are likely to remain an ongoing problem.

info tech | Alan Royal

## What to focus on when buying a new computer

I have previously advised against buying a new computer as long as your present machine is doing what you want.

Some of the reasons for this advice include the need to come to grips with a rapidly changing technology in terms of hardware and new learning curves and compatibility issues with new software.

Below are what, in my view, are the main features to be considered when you do make the decision to buy a new computer.

Forget about brand names. Today's computers are all robust. The additional specifications are, in most cases, unlikely to benefit many of the type of operations that you will use.

The most important component to look for is memory – called RAM. You can buy a cheaper machine and add RAM. RAM is a relatively cheap addition. My choice is to go for a minimum of 2GB of RAM, but preferably 4GB. An off-the-shelf machine with 4GB of RAM usually has more powerful built-in components.

Assuming that you will be buying a Windows Vista computer (unless you are going to hang out until late October for a Windows 7 system), go for a minimum of Windows Vista Home Premium. If you buy a Vista machine now you can request an upgrade voucher for Windows 7. My preference would be to hold off and get Windows 7 as the operating system, rather than having to upgrade.

One issue with Vista is that several programmes that ran on Windows XP will not run on Vista. The good news is that Microsoft has stated, with some confidence, that if your software runs on Vista it will run on Windows 7.

The most confusing aspect of computer buying is the processor – should it be an Intel or AMD processor? The experts will produce charts and graphs to prove one is better than the other – faster than the other, smarter than the other. Unless you're a scientist doing massive number crunching calculations, you won't notice any difference between Intel "Duo" and AMD Dual Core processors.

Your graphic adapter or "video card" (simplistically) determines what and how fast you see images on your PC screen. Preferably, do not buy a computer with a graphics adapter integrated into the computer's mainboard and using some of your installed RAM to operate. This means that whatever amount of RAM you have installed, some of it will be diverted to your graphics adapter, and this means your computer will not be able to take advantage of the entire RAM that is installed.

A separate graphics adapter or graphics card uses its own separate RAM which is part of the adapter itself. Note, though, that computers with integrated graphics adapters are cheaper than those with stand-alone graphics adapters. Almost always, computers with separate graphics adapters will outperform those with integrated ones.

The bigger the hard drive the more data it holds. Yeah, right. Some big hard drives are faster than others. You'll probably want at least a 320GB hard drive in a laptop and a 500+ GB hard drive in a desktop. Hard-drive speed is measured in RPM (Revolutions Per Minute). The more RPM the faster your hard drive will be. At present, hard-drive speeds average 7200. You can find them faster than that. Should you pay more for a 9600 RPM hard drive or save the money and go with the 7200 RPM hard drive? Save your money. You probably wouldn't notice a difference.

If spending extra money on a new computer, consider RAM, graphics adapter and hard drive first and don't worry about the processor.

Lastly – compare prices. There are some good bargains out there.

■ See: *Emerging from the dark ages*, p59, 60.

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## Growing a new future

Horticulture New Zealand has issued a new strategy aimed at doubling the size of the country's commercial fruit and vegetable industry to \$10 billion by 2020.

One of its cornerstone findings is that an increasingly competitive global market means maintaining the status quo is not an option - market share will actually

decline. So change is necessary.

"Scale is the key," HortNZ President Andrew Fenton says.

"Growing A New Future is the most significant piece of industry-wide work ever done on behalf of New Zealand's commercial fruit and vegetable industry."

The strategy was prepared by Deloitte.



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