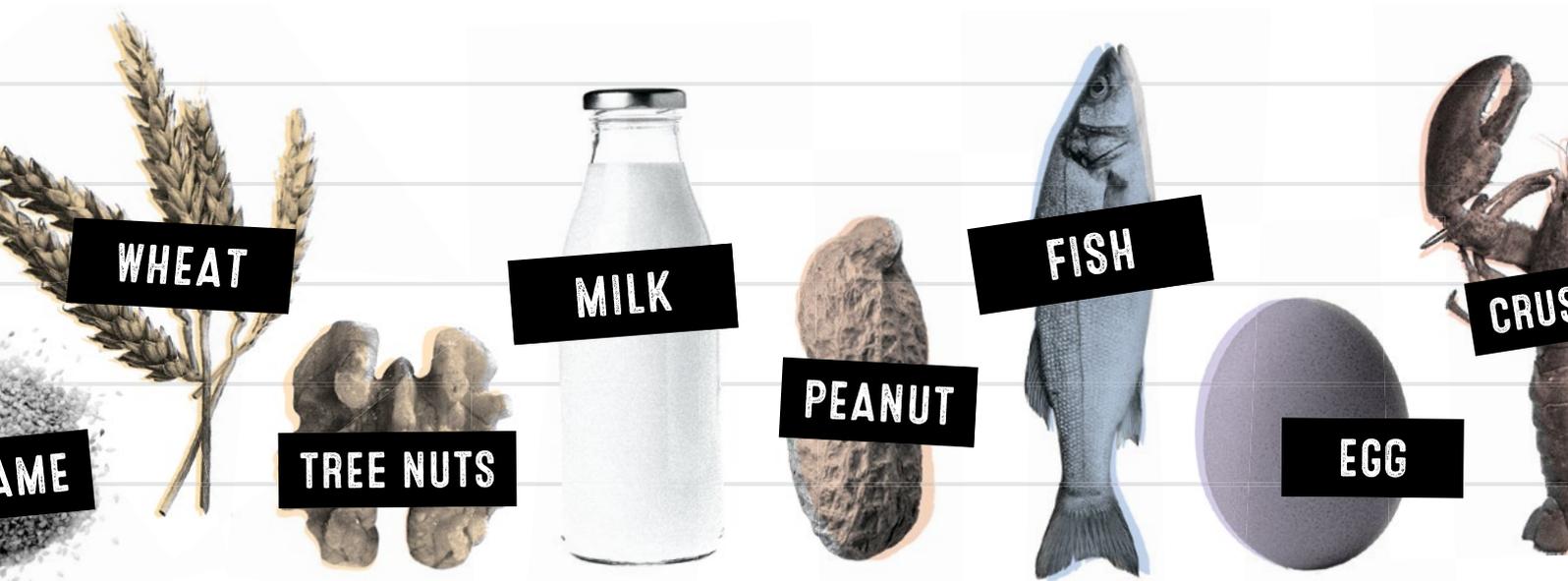


# ALL ABOUT ALLERGENS

IMPROVING  
ALLERGY AWARENESS  
IN FOOD SERVICE



# FOOD ALLERGY

## IS A SERIOUS ISSUE

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Approximately **1 in 10** Australian infants will develop a food allergy<sup>1</sup>

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Food allergy affects around **1 in 20 children** (under 5 years of age) and about **2 in 100 adults** in Australia<sup>1</sup>

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The most severe allergic reaction is known as **anaphylaxis** – which is potentially life threatening

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Food related anaphylaxis has **doubled** in the last 10 years<sup>1</sup>

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Hospital admissions for anaphylaxis have increased **5-fold** in the last 20 years<sup>2</sup>

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For a customer with food allergy, even **a small amount (traces)** of the food they are allergic to, can cause an allergic reaction.

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The only successful way to manage a food allergy is to **avoid the food allergen**

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With education, food allergic reactions, including **deaths can be avoided**

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There is currently **no cure** for food allergy

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**The law requires you to provide accurate information** when a customer asks about **allergens** in foods you are serving.

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Most fatalities relating to a food allergy occur when eating **outside the home**<sup>3</sup>

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Both the customer and the food service business have a responsibility in **preventing** an allergic reaction

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# FOOD ALLERGY

## IS A SERIOUS ISSUE

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### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

There are four things you can do to help prevent an allergic incident:

1. Know what's in your food
2. Be 100% truthful
3. Prepare food safely
4. Understand the consequences

### TAKE CUSTOMER REQUESTS ABOUT ALLERGIES SERIOUSLY.

Everyone in your food business – from the manager through to the food preparation and food service staff need to be aware of the risks food allergies pose and need to be clear on how to identify and manage food allergens and enquiries from customers with food allergies.

### WHAT IS A FOOD ALLERGY?

**Food allergy** is an immune system reaction to a food protein. **Anaphylaxis** is the most severe form of allergic reaction and is potentially life threatening.

A food allergy is not the same as food intolerance.

A **food intolerance** does not involve the immune system. It is the inability to digest a food which can cause discomfort and distress, but is not life threatening.

### WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

The signs and symptoms of food allergy can vary from person to person. An allergic reaction can happen very quickly after eating and can suddenly become life threatening.

**Signs of a mild to moderate allergic reaction can include:**

- Swelling of lips, face, eyes
- Hives or welts
- Tingling mouth
- Abdominal pain, vomiting

**Signs of a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) can include:**

- Difficult/noisy breathing
- Swelling of tongue
- Swelling/tightness in throat
- Wheeze or persistent cough
- Difficulty talking and/or hoarse voice
- Persistent dizziness or collapse
- Pale and floppy (young children)

### WHAT FOODS CAUSE MOST ALLERGIC REACTIONS?

Any food can cause an allergic reaction. However, the most common food allergens, which cause around 90% of food allergic reactions include peanuts, tree nuts (e.g. almonds, cashews), eggs, cow's milk (dairy), fish, crustacea (shellfish, e.g. prawns, lobster), sesame seeds, soy and wheat.

Most fatal allergic reactions are triggered by peanut, tree nuts or seafood<sup>3</sup>, however, any food allergy can cause severe and even fatal reactions.

### WHAT ABOUT GLUTEN?

Some people need to avoid gluten and gluten containing cereals. This is different to having a wheat allergy, where the person is allergic to the proteins specifically in wheat.

People with coeliac disease need to avoid all gluten and cereals containing gluten and their products namely, wheat, rye, barley, oats, spelt and hybrids of these cereals (e.g. triticale).

# ALLERGY AWARENESS IS GOOD FOR YOUR BUSINESS

Attending to a customer's allergy requests is not difficult. It's not only your legal obligation, but it's the right thing to do. A good customer experience will help build loyalty and is good for your business.

## GOOD CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

A customer calls ahead to an Italian restaurant to advise them of his cow's milk allergy. The waitress notes his request, his food allergy and his booking time. She says she will speak with the chef and call him back if there is a problem.

When the family arrives at the restaurant, the customer tells the waitress he is the person with the milk allergy. He orders plain steamed vegetables, boiled pasta (without butter or cheese) and fish of the day.

The waitress discusses the order with the chef and returns with a packet of pasta for the customer to check. He approves the ingredients and asks for the fish to be grilled on a piece of foil to help prevent cross contamination.

The waitress tells the man the chef is cooking his food separately with clean utensils including a clean knife and cutting board. She writes MILK ALLERGY on his final order, hands it to the chef whilst explaining the customer's allergy.

The chef reviews the order, and thinking the meal seems a bit bland, heads to the table to ask the customer if he would like chilli sauce on the side. He accepts the offer after checking the ingredients of the chilli sauce.

When delivering the meal, the waitress explains what the chef has done to reduce risk. When dessert is offered, the customer is advised that fruit is the only choice available to him.

## BAD CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

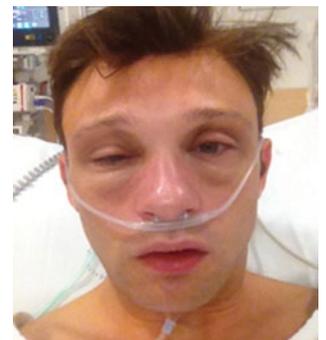
BASED ON AN ACTUAL EVENT

A man with an allergy to cow's milk attended a work function and upon arrival, disclosed his allergy to wait staff. Despite this, he was served a bowl of pasta with cheese on it.

After once again advising that he was allergic to milk and therefore could not eat the meal given to him, the bowl was taken away and he was brought, what he thought was a new meal.

However, after eating only a spoonful he went into anaphylaxis, which required three doses of adrenaline (epinephrine) and emergency transport to hospital.

Upon further investigation, it was revealed that the original bowl of pasta with cheese was simply taken back to the kitchen and upturned into another bowl, which was then brought out to him.



"Reproduced with permission from Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia"

**DON'T LET A LACK OF EDUCATION  
THREATEN A CUSTOMER'S LIFE OR RUIN  
YOUR BUSINESS!**

Remember, there are four things you can do to prevent an allergic incident:

1. **KNOW WHAT'S IN YOUR FOOD**
2. **BE 100% TRUTHFUL**
3. **PREPARE FOOD SAFELY**
4. **UNDERSTAND THE CONSEQUENCES**

# EVERY STAFF MEMBER CONTRIBUTES TO FOOD SAFETY

## **KNOW WHAT'S IN YOUR FOOD - IT'S THE LAW**

When a food does not have to have a label (such as food made and packaged on the premises from which it is sold), then the Food Standards Code, requires the seller to provide information about the following food allergens to customers on request:

- peanuts
- tree nuts, (e.g. almonds, cashews)
- eggs
- cow's milk (this includes all dairy foods)
- fish
- crustacea (e.g. prawns, lobster)
- sesame seeds
- soy/soybeans
- cereals containing gluten and their products, namely, wheat, rye, barley, oats, spelt and their hybridised strains (e.g. triticale)
- lupin

Sulphites in concentrations of 10mg/kg or more must also be declared on food labels of packaged foods.

Some people find labelling about gluten and wheat confusing. Customers with wheat allergy will need to know if wheat is an ingredient rather than just gluten, as the gluten may come from another source (e.g. rye, barley, oats, spelt or their hybridised strains).

Remember, the law requires you to provide accurate information when a customer asks about allergens in the food you are serving. Consumers have a legal right to receive, on request, written or verbal information on allergen content when buying takeaway foods or eating out.

By law, manufacturers must declare all of the allergens listed above on foods with a label.

It is also useful to know that those allergic to peanut may also be allergic to lupin. Remember that ANY food (e.g. kiwi fruit, mushroom, celery) can cause a severe allergic reaction in an at-risk person.

### **Food businesses breach the Code if:**

- Information is not on a label or is not given by staff selling unpackaged food made at the premises when a customer asks for it, or
- An allergen is found in a food that was specifically requested not to contain that allergen.

Further information about the Food Standards Code is available from the FSANZ website: [www.foodstandards.gov.au/code/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/code/Pages/default.aspx)

## **GOOD TRAINING AND GOOD SYSTEMS ARE CRITICAL**

- Develop a process for preparing foods for customers with food allergy and ensure it is followed.
- Train your staff about food allergens so they understand what information they need to be able to provide to customers if they ask.
- Train your staff to ask customers about food allergies.
- Ask your suppliers about their allergen management policy and for a Product Information Form.
- Keep ingredient lists of foods/ingredients in a specified location where all staff can access this information.
- If re-using containers for storing ingredients be sure to wash them with hot soapy water before use.
- Consider including the allergen in the name or description of the food item on the menu.
- Include a note on menus encouraging people to ALWAYS tell you about their food allergy when ordering.

## FOOD PREPARATION FOR SOMEONE WITH A FOOD ALLERGY

When preparing a meal for someone with a food allergy:

- Advise all kitchen and service staff that an allergen free meal is being prepared.
- Avoid cross contamination at all times - from the time the food arrives at the business to when it is served to a customer.
- Ensure surfaces, utensils and hands are clean before preparing the food.
- Do not substitute or add ingredients if you are not sure what the replacement product contains.
- Check that the food the customer is allergic to has not been added as a garnish.
- Have a clear way of identifying the meal for the person with food allergy.
- Know your ingredients - always check food labels and Product Information Forms.
- Remember that heating and cooling of food does not destroy allergens.

### AVOID CROSS CONTAMINATION OF FOOD ALLERGENS

Cross contamination occurs when food allergens come into contact with a food that does not contain that allergen.

#### Examples include:

- A food handler using the same cutting board to cut a peanut butter sandwich, and then a ham sandwich.
- A baker making muffins that contain eggs, then using the same unwashed mixer to mix a dough without eggs.
- A chef preparing cooked prawns and then cutting lettuce without first washing their hands with warm soapy water.

**SOLUTION:** Use clean equipment and utensils every time you are preparing an allergen free meal and wash your hands before food preparation begins.

## SERVING A CUSTOMER WHO ADVISES THEY HAVE A FOOD ALLERGY - BE 100% TRUTHFUL

In the first instance, it is the customer's responsibility to advise food service staff that they have a food allergy. It is then the responsibility of food service staff to make sure the food they serve the customer does not contain that allergen.

- Provide the customer with the information they need to make an informed choice.
- Ensure you are very clear on what food allergens are in the meal they have ordered and answer honestly. Explain that you cannot guarantee allergen free food, but you can do your best to make sure the allergen is not an ingredient of any component of the menu item chosen, and that you will do your best to avoid cross contamination when preparing the food.
- If you are unsure of the customer's question, say so. Never guess...a wrong response could lead to a life-threatening allergic reaction.
- Write the customer's request clearly on the order docket and also talk to the kitchen staff about it.
- Take care that no food or liquid spills onto the meal for the customer with a food allergy from another plate.
- Always take the meal to the customer with a food allergy separately, not whilst carrying other meals.
- Check the allergen free meal is given to the person with the food allergy.
- Tell the customer what you have done to reduce the risk of an allergen being present in their chosen menu item.

## IDENTIFYING FOOD ALLERGENS IN THE KITCHEN

Food allergens can be present in many food ingredients and are not always obvious from their name. Did you know that coconut milk often contains casein, which is a milk protein? Or that vegetable oil may contain soy, peanut or sesame?

Downloadable allergen cards that include alternate words for food allergens in ingredients lists are available from: <https://allergyfacts.org.au/resources/allergen-cards>

# WHAT TO DO

## IF A CUSTOMER HAS AN ALLERGIC REACTION

1

### FOLLOW CUSTOMER'S ASCIA ACTION PLAN

If available, give the adrenaline autoinjector (e.g. EpiPen) as per instructions.

**ascia**  
www.allergy.org.au

**ACTION PLAN FOR Anaphylaxis**  
For EpiPen<sup>®</sup> adrenaline (epinephrine) autoinjectors

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Photo: \_\_\_\_\_

Confirmed allergies: \_\_\_\_\_

Family/emergency contact name(s): \_\_\_\_\_  
Work Ph: \_\_\_\_\_  
Home Ph: \_\_\_\_\_  
Mobile Ph: \_\_\_\_\_  
Plan prepared by medical or nurse practitioner: \_\_\_\_\_

**SIGNS OF MILD TO MODERATE ALLERGIC REACTION**

- Swelling of lips, face, eyes
- Hives or welts
- Tingling mouth
- Abdominal pain, vomiting (these are signs of anaphylaxis for insect allergy)

**ACTION FOR MILD TO MODERATE ALLERGIC REACTION**

- For insect allergy - flick out sting if visible
- For tick allergy - freeze dry tick and allow to drop off
- Stay with person and call for help
- Locate EpiPen<sup>®</sup> or EpiPen<sup>®</sup> Jr adrenaline autoinjector
- Give other medications (if prescribed)
- Phone family/emergency contact

Mild to moderate allergic reactions (such as hives or swelling) may not always occur before anaphylaxis

**WATCH FOR ANY ONE OF THE FOLLOWING SIGNS OF ANAPHYLAXIS (SEVERE ALLERGIC REACTION)**

- Difficult/noisy breathing
- Swelling of tongue
- Swelling/tightness in throat
- Wheeze or persistent cough
- Difficulty talking and/or hoarse voice
- Persistent dizziness or collapse
- Pale and floppy (young children)

**ACTION FOR ANAPHYLAXIS**

- Lay person flat - do NOT allow them to stand or walk
  - If unconscious, place in recovery position
  - If breathing is difficult allow them to sit
- Give EpiPen<sup>®</sup> or EpiPen<sup>®</sup> Jr adrenaline autoinjector
- Phone ambulance - 000 (AU) or 111 (NZ)
- Phone family/emergency contact
- Further adrenaline doses may be given if no response after 5 minutes
- Transfer person to hospital for at least 4 hours of observation

If in doubt give adrenaline autoinjector

Commence CPR at any time if person is unresponsive and not breathing normally

**ALWAYS give adrenaline autoinjector FIRST, and then asthma reliever puffer if someone with known asthma and allergy to food, insects or medication has SUDDEN BREATHING DIFFICULTY (including wheeze, persistent cough or hoarse voice) even if there are no skin symptoms**

Asthma reliever medication prescribed:  Y  N

2

### CALL AN AMBULANCE

CALL 000

3

### LAY PERSON FLAT

Do not allow them to stand or walk. If breathing is difficult allow them to sit on the ground with their legs outstretched.



# ALLERGY AWARE CHECKLIST

HERE'S A HANDY CHECKLIST YOU CAN PLACE ON YOUR WORKPLACE NOTICE BOARD OR LAMINATE FOR YOUR KITCHEN.

## 1. LISTEN to your customers and BE TRUTHFUL

- Take customer requests about allergens seriously. Listen carefully.
- Give customers accurate information about the content of meals when they ask.
- Have a specific protocol to follow if a customer says they have a food allergy.
- Include a note on all menus asking customers to ALWAYS disclose their food allergy when ordering from the menu.

## 2. KNOW what's in your food

- Only accept labelled foods or foods supplied with ingredient information (Product Information Form).
- Check all ingredients even in sauces, spices, garnish, oils, dressings etc for allergens. Food labels and Product Information Forms (for unlabelled foods) should be checked every time as manufacturers may change their ingredients or processes.
- Avoid ingredient substitution when preparing food.
- If you accept a substituted product from your supplier, check the food label/Product Information Form.
- Be familiar with all ingredients as some may be made from one or more food allergens which may not be obvious from their name.
- Set up an allergen matrix for each menu item which will help you and your staff easily identify the common allergens when customers ask for allergen information. An example of an allergen matrix and a template can be downloaded from: [www.foodallergytraining.org.au](http://www.foodallergytraining.org.au)

## 3 . PREPARE food safely

- Avoid cross contamination of food allergens.
- Always double check the ingredients with the chef and the customer (if unsure).

- Handle food safely with clean hands washed with warm, soapy water. Hands should be washed regularly and you should re-wash your hands before preparing food that must be free of a specific allergen.
- Clean and sanitise work surfaces, utensils and other food-contact items between foods. Even trace amounts can be harmful.
- Store food safely in labelled containers.
- Have a dedicated area for preparing allergen free meals (be aware that food that is safe for one person with a food allergy may be unsafe for another person with a different food allergy).
- It may be helpful to prepare meals for people with food allergy first.
- Have a clear way of identifying the meal for the person with food allergy (e.g. coloured toothpick for plated meals or stickers for wrapped foods).
- Always take the meal to the customer with a food allergy separately, not whilst carrying other meals.
- Check the correct allergen free meal is given to the person with the food allergy declared.

## 4. EDUCATE your staff - UNDERSTAND the consequences

- If you are required to have a Food Safety Supervisor, ensure their training is up to date.
- Train and test all staff regularly in food safety, hygiene and allergen awareness - free online training is available from [www.foodallergytraining.org.au](http://www.foodallergytraining.org.au)
- Teach staff of their obligation to declare certain allergens.
- Display The Usual Suspects poster in your kitchen (available from: [http://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/\\_Documents/retail/the\\_usual\\_suspects\\_poster.pdf](http://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/_Documents/retail/the_usual_suspects_poster.pdf))

# NEED MORE INFORMATION?

## **FOOD STANDARDS AUSTRALIA NEW ZEALAND**

FSANZ is an independent statutory agency established by the Food Standards Australia New Zealand Act 1991 (FSANZ Act). FSANZ is part of the Australian Government's Health portfolio.

FSANZ develops standards that regulate the use of ingredients, processing aids, colourings, additives, vitamins and minerals. The Food Standards Code also covers the composition of some foods (e.g. dairy, meat and beverages) as well as foods developed by new technologies (e.g. genetically modified foods).

FSANZ is also responsible for some labelling requirements for packaged and unpackaged food (e.g. specific mandatory warnings or advisory labels). FSANZ also develops Australia-only primary production and processing standards.

[www.foodstandards.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx)

## **FOOD ENFORCEMENT CONTACTS IN EACH REGION**

In Australia, compliance with the Code for all foods is monitored by authorities in the states and territories. In New Zealand, it is monitored by the Ministry for Primary Industries and public health units.

Complaints about potentially non-compliant foods should be directed to the relevant agency in each state or territory in Australia or in New Zealand.

The contact details for enforcement agencies in Australia and New Zealand are available from the following link: [www.foodstandards.gov.au/about/foodenforcementcontacts/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/about/foodenforcementcontacts/Pages/default.aspx)

## **NATIONAL ALLERGY STRATEGY**

The National Allergy Strategy is an initiative of the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCIA) and Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia, the leading medical and patient organisations in Australia. The National Allergy Strategy was developed in collaboration with key stakeholder organisations and released in August 2015.

[www.nationalallergystrategy.org.au](http://www.nationalallergystrategy.org.au)

### **Acknowledgement**

This resource is based on the 'Be Prepared: Be Allergy Aware' booklet produced by the NSW Food Authority and Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia.

## **ASCIA**

ASCIA (Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy Limited) was established in 1990 as the peak professional body of clinical immunology and allergy in Australia and New Zealand.

[www.allergy.org.au](http://www.allergy.org.au)

## **ALLERGY & ANAPHYLAXIS AUSTRALIA**

Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia (A&AA) is a charitable, not-for-profit organisation established in 1993.

Our aim is to improve awareness of allergy in the Australian community. We do this by sharing current information, education, advocacy, research, guidance and support. Our outreach extends to individuals, families, school, workplaces, health professionals, government, food industry and all Australians.

[www.allergyfacts.org.au](http://www.allergyfacts.org.au)

## **ALLERGEN BUREAU**

The Allergen Bureau is the peak industry body representing food industry allergen management in Australia and New Zealand. The overall objective of the Allergen Bureau is to share information and experience within the food industry on the management of food allergens to ensure consumers receive relevant, consistent and easy to understand information on food allergens.

[www.allergenbureau.net/](http://www.allergenbureau.net/)

## **ALLERGEN COLLABORATION**

FSANZ established the Allergen Collaboration in late 2011 to strengthen engagement and collaboration among a range of stakeholders involved in managing food allergens. Members of the Collaboration, including food manufacturing, consumer and government representatives, meet to explore non-regulatory measures that can improve the management of food allergens.

[www.foodstandards.gov.au/consumer/foodallergies/collaboration/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/consumer/foodallergies/collaboration/Pages/default.aspx)

## **AUSTRALIAN FOOD AND GROCERY COUNCIL**

The AFGC exists to represent the food and grocery processing sector, to support its growth in the future, creating more jobs and income for Australia, supporting our farmers and regional communities and providing the highest quality products for Australians.

[www.afgc.org.au/](http://www.afgc.org.au/)