

## New Zealand initiates 14 recalls affecting 65 products

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New Zealand Food Safety has recently released its annual report on consumer-level food recalls for the year 2023. The report identifies the presence of Salmonella in imported sesame seed-based products as the most significant food safety event of the year, causing 14 recalls that impacted 65 food products.

During routine testing by a New Zealand business that produces tahini-based products, Salmonella was found, which led to a complex investigation by Food Compliance Services. This investigation traced the contamination source back to tahini imported from a Turkish manufacturer. Further online surveillance and scanning of international food safety issues also revealed concerns with products from a manufacturer in Jordan.

By the time all the sesame seed-based products were traced and removed from the market, 14 recalls had been initiated, affecting 65 products. Fortunately, there were no confirmed reports of related illnesses.

The annual reports are a new initiative by New Zealand Food Safety to increase transparency and share information on consumer-level recalls with the public. The reports help identify trends and find ways to prevent food safety incidents.

Vincent Arbuckle, New Zealand Food Safety deputy director-general, emphasised that the priority of the organisation is to protect consumers. New Zealand's food safety system has a strong track record of keeping people safe. However, given the high volume of food being produced, manufactured, and imported, food safety issues may still occur. When such incidents happen, New Zealand Food Safety works quickly with food businesses to recall the affected product and remove it from the food supply chain.

The report also reveals that New Zealand Food Safety supported 70 consumer-level food recalls during 2023, out of which 48 were initiated for domestically produced foods and 22 were for imported foods. However, Arbuckle cautioned that the number of recalls is not an accurate indicator of the level of risk to consumers, as it depends on many factors, including regulatory changes, business and public awareness of food-related problems, and reporting of those problems.

Another food safety event highlighted in the report involved the possible presence of *Listeria* and *Campylobacter* in raw milk, which resulted in three recalls. Drinking raw milk carries inherent risks as it may contain harmful bacteria that would normally be killed through the pasteurisation process.