The Australasian food manufacturing industry current practice with regards to allergenic food labelling

Giovanni A. Zurzolo\textsuperscript{1,2}, Jennifer Koplin\textsuperscript{3}, Maximilian de Courten\textsuperscript{2,3}, Michael L. Mathai\textsuperscript{2}, Katrina J. Allen\textsuperscript{1,4,5}

\textsuperscript{1}Centre for Food & Allergy Research, Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, University of Melbourne, Australia; \textsuperscript{2}Centre for Chronic Disease, College of Health and Biomedicine, Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia; \textsuperscript{3}Department of Pediatrics, University of Melbourne, Australia; \textsuperscript{4}Department of Allergy and Immunology, Royal Children’s Hospital, Melbourne, Australia; \textsuperscript{5}Institute of Inflammation and Repair, University of Manchester, United Kingdom

Rationale: Drivers of uptake of VITAL (a risk assessment tool for food allergen labelling) by Australian manufacturers has never been formally assessed.

Aim: To examine the proportion of unlabelled products that have used VITAL or a similar risk assessment tool versus those that have not.

Methods: A web-based questionnaire was distributed via email to 700 newsletter subscribers of the Australian Food and Grocery Council (AFGF) and the Allergen Bureau during April-May 2016 with two reminder emails sent out during that month.

Results: Of the 59 questionnaires returned, respondents were from companies that employed <50 (20%), <100 (9.0%), 200-1000 (26%) and >1000 (36%). The responders represented 454 different manufacturing sites throughout Australasia.

Of those products that had been through the VITAL process different product categories were more or less likely to carry a PAL statement. Commonly labelled categories were cereal (100%), confectionery (100%) and egg products (100%). Other foods were more often not labelled after the VITAL process these included dairy and meat substitutes (20%), soup (100%), savoury sauces and condiments (66%) and snack foods (80%).

Of those products that had been through another risk assessment process (other than VITAL) different product categories were more or less likely to carry a PAL statement. Commonly labelled categories were cereal (100%), milk (45%), and savoury sauces and condiments (80%). Other foods were more often not labelled after the other risk assessment process these included cereal (53%), milk products (16%), soup (100%) seed and nut products (100%) and snack foods (34%).

Discussion/Conclusion: This research has identified specific food categories that have been through the VITAL and other risk assessment processes that carry no PAL statement. Recent research has shown that 35% of supermarket products carry no PAL statement. It is not certain why these specific products have been chosen and why they are not labelled with PAL. These products should be low risk for allergic consumers, however they carry no information to alert allergic consumers to that effect. Information on food products to alert the consumer to this effect is essential.