

News story: Government Chemist work regarding management of food allergens

The Government Chemist has a long standing interest in food allergy stemming from acknowledged difficulties in allergen analysis. Our interest focuses in three areas:

1. Metrologically traceable food allergen analysis (the science of ensuring allergen measurements correspond from one lab to another across the globe)
2. Resolution of analytical disputes about allergen measurement (referee cases)
3. Food allergen management – better to understand industry best practice so as to interpret allergen measurement results in the right context and offer advice to businesses, regulators, enforcement authorities and consumers on request.

We continue to contribute to knowledge transfer in these areas. Some examples of our recent work include speaking engagements to key audiences.

Food hypersensitivity post graduate module at Imperial College School of Medicine

On 12 November 2018 [Michael Walker](#) gave an invited lecture on 'Food Allergy: Public Health Issues' to an audience of paediatricians, GPs and health care professionals. This was part of a post graduate module on Food Hypersensitivity delivered by Imperial College School of Medicine, St Mary's Hospital, London. The lecture covered:

- Food Allergen Regulation, Enforcement and Food Law
- Food labelling – allergen labelling
- Analysis of food for allergens
- Case Study – Almond or Mahaleb?

Michael quoted [Audry DunnGalvin and co-authors](#):

Targeting uncertainty should be a major goal for health professionals working with children, teens and families with a food allergy

Michael's aim in this lecture was better to equip medical professionals to advise their patients what to expect from food labelling and the information they should be provided with to help manage their allergies.

“Food allergy – human clinical and forensic implications” at the Institute of Global Food Security (IGFS)

On 3rd December 2018 Michael took part in a seminar ‘Food Allergy – human, clinical, analytical and forensic implications’ at the Institute of Global Food Security (IGFS), Queen's University, Belfast. Organised by Dr Katrina Campbell of IGFS, this seminar mainly for MSc students in food safety brought together a spectrum of speakers.

Dr Hazel Gowland spoke on ‘Food Allergy: human impact and forensic implications’, Professor Clare Mills, University of Manchester described ‘Food Allergen Analysis in a Risk Assessment Context’ and Pauline Titchener, Neogen Europe Ltd, described ‘Commercial allergen diagnostics’. Michael's talk: ‘Complementary analysis for food allergens – the [almond/mahaleb story](#)’ described the resolution of several complex food recalls involving compromise of allergen test results by cross reactivity within the Prunus genus .

From left to right, Professor Chris Elliott, Dr Hazel Gowland, Professor Clare Mills, Dr Michael Walker, Professor Duncan Thorburn Burns

During the seminar for the first time all five authors of the [influential paper on potentially flawed allergen analysis](#) were in the same room.

Food labelling seminar at Campden BRI

On 4 December 2018 Michael gave a talk: ‘Allergen labelling and regulation: Implications of UK Exit (and other things)’ at a Food Labelling Update Seminar at Campden BRI.

The ‘other things’ included remarks on the recent inquest on the death of a teenager after eating a baguette that was ‘prepacked for direct sale’, a form of labelling that legally permits food allergen information to be available orally on request rather than printed on the food label. The seminar, attended by over 70 food company representatives, was an opportunity to describe the Government Chemist approach to food allergy and engage in dialogue.

Improving metrological traceability

Improvement in food allergen analysis in Official Control laboratories across the EU is being fostered by a cooperative analytical exercise called a ‘ring trial’ where labs analyse a matrix spiked with allergen and return their results for evaluation along with information on the methods they have used.

Organised by the Joint Research Centre, JRC, the European Commission's science and knowledge service, this ring trial will enable JRC to disseminate best practice advice to official labs. The Government Chemist is representing the UK in this exercise with analysis spearheaded by Malvinder Singh.

Malvinder Singh