



Crisis Mode

And the hits just keep on coming. Just before Christmas the American beef industry received a nasty little present in the form of a confirmed case of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE). A ripple of disquieting stories in the Globe & Mail's financial pages early in December became a torrent of bad news about billions of Euros disappearing from milk giant Parmalat SpA's balance sheets. At this point 11 executives are in jail and one mid-level financial manager has committed suicide.

The amount of trans-fatty acids in almost every processed food competed for headline space in early January with the release of a two-year toxicity study on farmed salmon that appeared in the journal *Science*. It's pretty bad when neighbours at the mailbox in the subdivision I live in ask me whether or not they should eat the farmed salmon fillets they had flown in from B.C.

And as I write this, Pakistan and China just became the ninth and tenth Asian countries to confirm the presence of the avian flu virus, that has already wiped out millions of birds in the Pacific Rim and seems to be spreading like wildfire. In a global economy, you have to wonder – how long will it take to land on our shores?

Welcome to the new normal.

I can't remember a time in the last 15 years when the food industry has been reeling under a constant barrage of bad news and even worse press. It almost makes me fondly wish for the heady days of the non-stop drone of Free Trade talk in the late '80s.

The Canadian food industry is going to have to get used

to being under the bright lights of the media feeding frenzy scums. The need for transparency in every process, in almost every ingredient or input is going to have to be a given. And the big winners will be the food companies that are proactive instead of reactive. Perhaps that's why the Prime Naturally label from Maple Leaf Foods Inc. has taken off in Canada, at least consumers know what the chickens and pigs are being fed.

Yesterday the Food and Drug Administration in the U.S. tabled sweeping rules on just what can go into animal feed. And don't forget, it was the ruminant to ruminant feed practices in Britain that started the whole ball rolling on BSE in the first place.

Despite the non-stop bad press, there is some good news among the doom and gloom. Dr. Rickey Yada, professor and head of the food science department at the University of Guelph, is the new director of the Advanced Foods and Materials Network Centre of Excellence. He will oversee \$22.2 million of food-related research involving 29 Canadian universities, 29 associated government departments and 32 industry partners. The creation of the Dairy Processors Association of Canada under the direction

of president Don Jarvis has great plans to move dairy issues forward on the national agenda. And just last week, Jane Graham, executive director of the new Alliance of Ontario Food Processors, says there is a sense of urgency among her member groups to confront a variety of common issues affecting the provincial food industry.

Welcome to 2004. Hang on. It's going to be quite the ride.
sandra.eagle@food.rogers.com

I can't remember a time in the last 15 years when the food industry has been reeling under a constant barrage of bad news and even worse press. It almost makes me fondly wish for the heady days of the non-stop drone of Free Trade talk in the late '80s.

With the alarming regularity that food safety issues tend to take over the news, we're introducing a new monthly column in this issue called Ask an Expert. We're going to invite a number of food safety professionals to share their wealth of knowledge on a variety of topics. • We've also introduced a new job board in our biweekly newsletter. If your company is looking for qualified food professionals, let your Human Resources department in on the news. If you have a position in the industry you'd like to recruit for, please contact Maggie Chochol by email at: maggie.chochol@food.rogers.com or call her at (416) 764-1558.