

Dairying

Keeping food scares away from milk products

Testing milk products and powders before export is crucial for clients that need clarity on quality very fast, writes Jack Kennedy

Advanced Laboratory Testing (ALT) has recently opened the first dedicated private dairy microbiology testing laboratory in Ireland. This facility allows for sensitive dairy products, such as infant formula, to be analysed for the first time in a dedicated testing environment.

ALT was established in Newbridge, Co Kildare, in 2013 to provide for the first time, a full range of laboratory testing services to the food and dairy industry in Ireland.

In 2017, due to continued increased demand, ALT also opened a dedicated food and environmental chemistry laboratory in Naas, Co Kildare.

The three big pathogens that Irish dairy processors need to keep a very tight handle on are salmonella, listeria and cronobacter. All Irish milk processors need to be aware of the presence of any of these bugs and both products and facilities must be tested on a continual basis. A hiccup in any pathogen could cost the milk processing company big money and potentially damage a brand and future potential of the business.



Michael Kennedy and Noel Doyle, ALT, Kildare.

Remember, some of the biggest dairy processors globally have had food contamination issues highlighted.

In 2017, New Zealand dairy firm Fonterra was ordered to pay French company Danone over €100m over a contamination scare. The milk powder supplier Fonterra said there was a risk of bacteria in its products that could cause fatal botulism. The scare was later declared a false alarm.

€100m

paid by Fonterra to Danone over a contamination scare

This year, French milk processor Lactalis recalled product and at the centre of it was a salmonella scare.

The investment required in testing equipment and resources to get a result returned in a timely manner means that the greater number of samples that can be put through efficiently is a key objective

for ALT.

There are other large-scale, global-testing operators that are vying for business from Irish dairy companies including Eurofins and ALS Life Sciences Ltd.

Billy Coleman, CEO of ALT, said: "We continually strive to improve the range and scope of accreditations and approvals by investing in the most up-to-date methodologies and technologies, all based on the international laboratory accreditation standard ISO/IEC 17025:2005.

An example of this commitment include our advances in 24-hour turnaround for key pathogenic bacteria such as listeria, cronobacter and salmonella, as well as the introduction of accredited nutritional chemistry and allergen testing services for the first time in Ireland."

ALT has 93 employees and many are highly qualified in their specialist area. The company has nine vans on the road collecting samples from all corners of Ireland on a daily basis.