

## PRINCIPLES GOVERNING THE FSA'S POLICY ON THE PUBLICATION OF FSA INFORMATION

1. In 2007, the FSA Board agreed to establish a Task Force on the Publication of Information to advise it on criteria which might be applied by the FSA to decisions on whether and how to publish information. The Task Force agreed that it was essential that the FSA maintain its open and transparent approach and agreed it should remain the presumption for the FSA to publish information that it receives from, or that relates to, food companies and premises, food products, local authority regulatory services, or other external bodies.
2. In June 2008, the FSA Board agreed that publication should be subject to the following principles. For the purposes of applying these principles:

**peer review** is the process of subjecting an author's scholarly work, research or ideas to the scrutiny of others who are experts in the same field. Peer review requires a community of experts in a given (and often narrowly defined) field, who are qualified and able to perform impartial review. Publications that have not undergone peer review are likely to be regarded with suspicion by scholars and professionals.

**open access publication** is composed of free, online copies of peer-reviewed journal articles and conference papers as well as technical reports, theses and working papers. In most cases, there are no licensing restrictions on their use by readers and they can, therefore, be used freely for research, teaching and other purposes. Open access publication is not self-publishing, nor a way of bypassing peer-review and publication, nor is it a kind of second-class, cut-price publishing route. It is simply a means to make research results freely available online to the whole research community. The FSA has an open access repository, [foodbase.org.uk](http://foodbase.org.uk) which was launched in the autumn of 2008. The repository increases the availability of reports of FSA funded research, other science and evidence used in policy making. Technical information about FSA funded work is now made available through this repository (rather than the Library) in addition to the lay summaries of projects published on [food.gov.uk](http://food.gov.uk) and in FSA news.

***Published information should be useful and readily understandable to all audiences.***

Attention should be paid, in particular, to:

- the purpose of providing information;
- the timeliness of publication;
- the potential for summarised, redacted, incomplete or unsubstantiated information to be misleading;

- the need for inaccurate published information to be corrected promptly;
- the need to reflect any uncertainty in the evidence base;
- the need, in some circumstances, to be specific about the audience at which particular pieces of published information is targeted; and
- the need, where possible, to archive out of date information.

***Similar pieces of information should, in general, be treated in similar ways.***

The FSA should be consistent, fair and impartial in its approach to the publication of information (although it would be for others to decide whether a particular approach had been fair). In general, the approach applied to some specific information within a general class of information, should be applied to all other information in that class.

***In fulfilling its statutory remit of providing advice and information to the general public about matters connected to food safety and dietary information, we should also consider any unintended impact this may have on our other stakeholders.***

Where the FSA has information, whether from its own surveys or from other sources, about products or premises that are not in compliance with the law or with statutory standards, it is appropriate to publish information on such products in order to advise the public on products and premises they may wish to avoid. However, where the FSA has information on the extent to which best practice guidance is being observed, good practice should be to focus on highlighting those companies or products that adhere to best practice, in order to advise the public on products and premises that deliver benefits or other aspects of performance that exceed those required by law.

The FSA's Guidelines for Undertaking Surveys should be followed at all times and provide important information about the handling of results from surveys that are not statistically significant.

***Although publication of information serves the public interest, there may be circumstances in which the balance of public interest may be against publication. If this is the cases the reasons should be made public.***

We would expect such circumstances to be limited to those in which the publication would:

- prejudice current or future enforcement action;
- have unintended and negative consequences in relation to those not directly covered by the publication;
- jeopardise current or future negotiating positions;
- fail properly to protect commercially sensitive and confidential information, or personal data;

- fail properly to protect legal privilege;
- jeopardise national security;
- inhibit frank provision of advice or exchange of views at the early stages of policy development;
- inhibit necessary investigations during incident management; or
- compromise work on incident prevention, including horizon scanning.

Peer review of scientific research material is of fundamental importance and we would not expect to publish such material until it has been fully peer reviewed. In each case the balance of public interest would be assessed before any decision is taken on whether and when to publish information. The balance of public interest may change and therefore the FSA would aim to publish at the earliest appropriate opportunity information that had been previously withheld.

***The nature of any validation/external evaluation carried out of the effectiveness of information published by the FSA should be made clear.***