



FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN POLICY MAKING

DRAFT STATEMENT OF APPROACH

Our goal is to ensure our primary objectives of food safety, nutrition and protecting the interests of consumers in relation to food are achieved, while maximising positive impacts in all areas of sustainable development.

The Agency recognises the importance of the social, environmental and economic aspects of sustainable development and will give consideration to all these areas in developing policy. In considering policy options, we will seek to minimise any negative impacts in all areas of sustainable development, whilst ensuring that our statutory remit to protect the interests of consumers in relation to food is achieved. We will assess the sustainability of our policies on a case by case basis and our decisions will be based on the best available evidence and good governance.

The Agency will take responsibility for its actions in relation to sustainable development and we will not ignore significant negative environmental, social or economic sustainability impacts. We will take responsibility for the impacts of our implemented policies and accept that we may, on occasion, not proceed with a policy on sustainability grounds.

Where the impacts of our policies fall outside of our remit, we will work actively with Government departments and other organisations to mitigate adverse effects, deliver a more sustainable solution and provide co-ordinated messages.

Application

The goal of sustainable development is to enable all people throughout the world to satisfy their basic needs and enjoy a better quality of life, without compromising the quality of life of future generations. Underpinning this goal are the 'three pillars' of sustainable development; environmental, economic and social, together with using sound science responsibly and promoting good governance. Together these are the Government's five principles¹ of sustainable development. Sustainability also requires that long-term and global views should be taken when developing policy.



¹ Northern Ireland has the additional principle of promoting opportunity and innovation.

The Agency's remit is set out in law. Our role is to protect consumers in relation to food safety, nutrition and other interests in relation to food. We will deliver our statutory remit, whilst seeking ways to maximise positive impacts in all areas of sustainable development.

We recognise that the different pillars of sustainability interconnect; for example, climate change impacts under the environmental pillar could, in turn, impact on food safety. Considerations under all three pillars are, therefore, important when developing Agency policy. When assessing policy options and deciding priorities we will, however, give priority to food safety and health issues as these are where most, though not all, of our policy goals lie.

The Agency will assess policies on a case by case basis, as there can be no hard and fast rules and the complexity or otherwise of impacts will vary widely with the issue under consideration. We will assess the sustainability of all new and amending policies. We will do this at the earliest possible stage in policy development and keep the assessment under review throughout the process. Our Impact Assessments will all include consideration of sustainable development.

Where policies involve European or International negotiation we will seek to influence the European Commission and other relevant bodies to abide by their commitment to include sustainable development in their own impact assessments.

As an evidence based organisation, the Agency will base its decisions on the best available evidence, properly taking account of proportionality and the precautionary approach and ensuring good governance, including transparency.

Where significant negative impacts are identified we will seek to moderate or amend our policies to reduce these. In doing so we will take a risk based approach to protecting food safety or public health, and give these matters priority. The degree of moderation will be influenced by how severe, immediate and direct the risk is to consumers. We recognise the importance of conserving non-renewable natural resources and that less immediate environmental impacts can rebound on consumers. We will try to minimise our impacts on these.

We will seek to minimise negative impacts in our policy design, but recognise that it will not always be possible to avoid them. Once a policy has been decided, the Agency will take responsibility for reducing any significant remaining negative impacts. The degree of responsibility we will take will depend on how the impact might affect the Agency's goals and whether any remedial action is within our power and expertise to influence. Whether or not we take the remedial action forward ourselves, we will clearly communicate how this will be addressed. The Agency does not have expertise in all aspects of sustainable development and we recognise that it will be necessary to seek input during policy development from other Government departments and organisations. Similarly, impacts of our policies may adversely affect matters that fall to other departments and the devolved Governments. In such cases we will liaise with the relevant bodies.

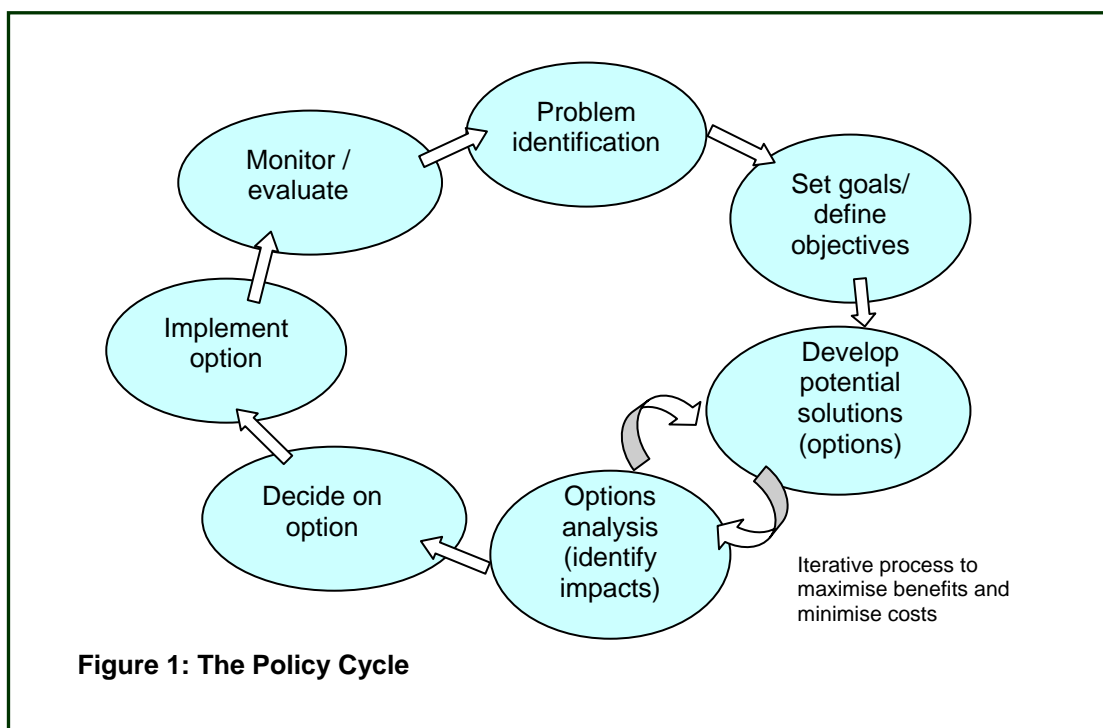
In some cases we may not proceed with a policy on sustainability grounds, such as where there are highly significant and unavoidable adverse impacts and there is insufficient benefit to justify proceeding.

Reflecting their different remits, different parts of Government will give different priority to different aspects of sustainable development. The Agency believes that by working together Government can achieve a joined-up approach and greater sustainability. We therefore consider partnership working to be key to delivering more sustainable solutions and will actively work across Government to facilitate this.

Implications of the sustainable development approach for Agency policy making

Introduction

1. Policy making involves identifying a need for change, developing a solution by identifying options and subjecting them to rigorous analysis, implementing the policy, and reviewing it periodically when in operation (Figure 1). A number of potential solutions will normally be considered and their impacts analysed. Once these impacts (risks, costs and benefits) are understood, decision makers can then determine which risk management option should be implemented. This annex explains how the Agency's approach to sustainable development will impact on the policy making process and gives illustrative examples.



Options analysis

2. Good policy making involves identifying potential impacts of different options, in terms of risks, costs and benefits. Typically the Agency's focus will have been on consumer impacts, in terms of safety, health, choice, food quality issues, diversity issues and implications for food prices, access and availability. These impacts are typically set against economic impacts on the UK industry and to Government and wider considerations of public acceptability. Underlying all of this analysis is the Agency's commitment to a strong evidence base, using sound science responsibly, and a strong commitment to good governance, including transparency. The Agency actively engages stakeholders throughout the policy process and promotes the values of the organisation.

Example 1: Agency's Advice on Fish Consumption

The Agency's current advice to eat two portions of fish a week, one of which should be oily, is based on sound scientific evidence in relation to health benefits and safety. At the time that this advice was issued consideration was not given to any wider impacts, such as on fish stocks. Growing concern has been expressed about declining fish stocks and other environmental impacts of fishing and fish farming. Work is underway to consider the Agency's advice in the context of these concerns.

Taking a sustainability approach involves considering not just the nutrition and safety evidence, but also wider sustainability issues such as fish stocks and the environmental impacts of fishing and fish farming. The Agency is working closely with stakeholders, including other Government departments such as Defra and the devolved equivalents, who have the relevant remit and expertise. A public consultation will be issued in the autumn.

The Agency already links, alongside advice on the health benefits of fish, to sources of information to help in making sustainable choices. In addition, the recently published Food Matters report gives the Agency the lead in a wider cross-Government consumer information initiative to provide a single source of integrated Government advice on food; this will include advice on a low environmental impact healthy diet.

Defra, and the devolved equivalents, are already engaged in improving the sustainability of fish stocks and reducing environmental impacts.

3. The main consequence of the new sustainability approach (Annex I) is that the Agency will routinely consider a wider range of impacts. In addition to those noted above, environmental impacts (eg climate change, biodiversity, use of non-renewable resources) will be considered, together with wider social impacts (eg education, social cohesion). Also, sustainability requires that a longer term view be taken, that we take more of a global view and that we try to design risk management solutions that, so far as it is possible, give positive impacts under all three pillars of sustainability – environmental, social and economic.

Deciding on the option to pursue

4. After potential impacts have been identified, the next stage is to decide on which option to implement. This involves deciding which risk management option has the best balance of costs and benefits. Clearly, numerous and often competing considerations will impact on the decision, including:

- whether the goals and objectives are met;
- negative impacts (costs, risks), their significance and where they fall;
- positive impacts (benefits), their significance and where they fall;
- stakeholder views, including public attitudes and values;
- legal constraints;

- the strength of the scientific evidence, risk assessment advice from expert advisory committees and others, uncertainty and the precautionary approach;
- issues of good governance (eg consistency with Agency values, accountability, capability to deliver).

5. These considerations will continue under the sustainability approach, but the range of impacts considered will be extended and the overall sustainability of the policy will become a key consideration.

6. A truly sustainable policy is where there are no negative impacts under any of the 3 pillars. While this is the ideal, it is rarely possible to achieve. With any policy there will be costs, even when every effort has been made to minimise them. The decision makers' task is to balance these costs/risks against the intended benefits, taking into account where they fall and how significant they are. The sustainable development approach also requires the overall sustainability of the policy to be considered. Trading-off costs and benefits in order to reach the best risk management solution has never been easy and extension of the range of impacts considered does not simplify the situation. How do you weigh up diverse issues such as environmental pollution, natural resource use, food safety and nutrition, costs to industry or the consumer? Does the Agency's specific remit impact on this?

7. The sustainable development approach does not provide easy answers. What it does is bring greater transparency to the decision making process and means that the Agency will be fully aware and open about the effects of its policies. The approach makes it clear that when it comes down to a decision between food safety or health versus another factor, the Agency will give priority to food safety and health, although this is not an absolute. There are two other key points. Firstly, if there is a significant negative impact that could seriously undermine the sustainability of a policy, even if the impact falls in an area that is outside of the Agency's remit (eg the environment or international development), then we may decide not to go f

Example 2: Pesticide Minimisation

One of the first policies assessed for sustainability was the production of pesticide residue minimisation crop guides. Both the sustainability of the production of the guides and the sustainability of the advice they contain were considered. These guides were not produced to improve safety, as residue levels are already regulated to safe levels, but were in recognition that consumers wanted levels reduced further. Guides were produced for five crops – apples, pears, cereals, potatoes and tomatoes.

The sustainability assessment noted benefits to consumers in terms of choice, costs to businesses (minor as guides reflect industry good practice and savings from reduced pesticide use) and to the Agency (minor cost of production), but also noted potential beneficial effects on biodiversity and water pollution. On the other hand, the assessment noted the negative impacts of increased use of some non-renewable resources (eg protective nets) and that the glasshouse production of tomatoes, required for pesticide minimisation, is energy intensive compared with unprotected cropping systems. That said, the tomato guide was still produced, as irrespective of pesticide minimisation strategies no commercial field crops of tomatoes are grown in the UK.

In this case the sustainability assessment did not change the policy, but it did throw up interesting points about how a wish to have lower pesticide levels can have potentially negative impacts on climate change. These considerations may have influenced the priority given to the work, if not the outcome itself.

even if the gains expected were in terms of safety or health. This may mean giving up a short term consumer benefit, but it will be looking after the longer term interests of consumers. The second aspect is that if it is decided to implement an option, but there still remains a significant negative impact, the Agency will take greater responsibility for that negative impact than we might have in the past. (See the next section for further discussion on this point.)

Example 3: Changes to labelling provisions

A number of legislative instruments contain labelling provisions, including the general Food Labelling Regulations 1996. Where new legislation is introduced that requires a change in labelling this can result in significant amounts of packaging being thrown away. Transitional provisions allowing existing stocks of labels to be used up can minimise this packaging waste. Previously the arguments for inclusion of transitional provisions were based on costs to industry of the wasted packaging. Sustainability assessments would also require that environmental impacts be considered, both in terms of wasted resources and potential impacts of disposal on climate change.

In this case sustainability considerations give additional justification for transitional provisions. As most of the legislation on labelling comes from Brussels, the example also illustrates the importance of considering sustainability at early stages of European negotiation.

Policy implementation

8. The Agency's approach to sustainable development will impact on the implementation stage to some extent, mainly in relation to ensuring that the chosen risk management option is implemented in a sustainable manner. The key considerations at this stage will be any remaining significant negative impacts to be considered, in line with the commitment to take responsibility for our actions.

9. This commitment is likely to result in a range of different actions. Where there is a significant negative impact in an area for which we have responsibility we will look into ways to resolve it. Where the impact is a matter outside of our direct responsibility we will contact the relevant Government Departments as well as independent expert bodies. Action in this case might range from simply alerting them to the problem, through seeking their advice or urging action. In some cases the Agency might work in partnership to resolve the situation.

10. In all cases resource priorities and proportionality of response will be important considerations.

Example 4: Ban on Kava Kava

Kava kava is a herbal ingredient traditionally used to treat anxiety, tension and restlessness. It is derived from a plant and produced by Pacific Ocean islands. These are some of the most disadvantaged countries in the world and kava kava production is significant to their economies. Kava kava is found in both herbal medicines and food supplements.

In 2003 the sale or distribution of kava kava was banned in the UK, both in food and medicinal products. The reason for this was evidence that its consumption may be associated with severe liver damage, although uncertainties in the evidence were acknowledged. The majority of kava kava was in medicinal products and thus within the remit of the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency. The Agency's decision to ban kava kava in food was based on protecting public health and the need to prevent previously medicinal kava kava being sold as a food supplement. Other countries also banned the product, including Germany and France. The sudden withdrawal of kava products from the world market resulted in great hardship for many rural Pacific communities.

At the time of the decision to ban kava kava the impacts on the developing countries were considered and the Agency alerted the Department for International Development. The Agency also undertook to keep the ban under review (the first review being in 2006, when the ban was upheld).

The Agency's sustainability approach would be unlikely to have changed the decision to ban kava kava. But, sustainability considerations might have given greater recognition to the significant impact on developing countries. The Agency may have considered taking more proactive action. This might have included lobbying the WHO to investigate, or supporting the countries affected to do so, or possibly (but perhaps less likely) commissioning research in partnership with others. Interestingly, the WHO was asked by producing nations to investigate the safety of kava kava and the report was published in 2007. It concluded that there was significant concern about the safety of kava kava, but that further research was needed.

Problem identification

11. Issues and problems will be identified through many different routes. Some will be identified by the strategic planning system, others will arise on an *ad hoc* basis; they may result from unexpected events, public concerns, changes in technology, developments in Europe etc.

12. Once a problem has been identified, the Agency has to decide if it is a matter that falls within the Agency's remit and is of sufficient priority to justify the necessary resources.

13. The Agency's approach to sustainable development will impact on this stage of policy making but at a more strategic level. In practice, it will mean that when the Agency decides its work programme, impacts under all three pillars of sustainable development should be taken into account. The sustainable development approach would give greater priority to issues involving consumer safety or health, but that is not to say that the Agency should not also take forward work where the main issue to solve lies in another sphere, such as economics or environmental protection.

14. Sustainability considerations might result in a broader range of policies in the Agency's strategic plan and to impact on the relative priorities of different work areas. It must be emphasised, however, that it would not extend the Agency's statutory remit.

Promoting more cross Government working

15. A key aspect of the sustainable development approach is the promotion of increased working with other Government Departments and with other experts. In part this is because the Agency does not have the expertise in all areas that we will need to consider and we will need to seek external advice. This cooperation should go further and there will be synergistic benefits from more joined up policy development. This is also recognised by the Cabinet Office's recent 'Food Matters' report.

Example 5: meat and dairy consumption

One issue that might usefully be subjected to cross Departmental working is the question of whether a low environmental impact mix of farming would also deliver safe food, give nutritionally beneficial diets and be economically viable. In part such a project would be likely to look at the optimal mix of domestic agriculture (arable, horticulture, meat, dairy etc) in the light of climate change and other environmental impacts, safety, nutrition and economic viability, trade and international development. This would necessarily need to draw on the expertise of many Departments and others.

Meat and dairy production is known to have significant impacts on climate change and the environment. Their over consumption can impact on health, contributing to saturated fat intakes that are high in Western economies. Often it is suggested that meat and dairy production and consumption should be reduced. But when you start to assess the sustainability of this the impacts are far from straightforward.

For instance, modelling work by the Rural Economy and Land Use Programme has indicated that a reduction in demand for dairy products could lead to dairy herds being replaced on lowland pastures by beef and sheep. Reduced demand for meat, plus increased competition from the lowlands, will impact on the economic viability of upland livestock, leading to loss of employment and associated community impacts. With reduced grazing the landscape of upland areas would change, in turn leading to biodiversity changes. Promoting the consumption of better quality (lower fat) meat could also have unintended impacts. If people favour the better cuts of meat it is likely that the value of the less favoured meat will reduce, the economic viability of the whole carcasses might then be undermined. Careful thought also needs to be given to where excess dairy fat, resulting from the consumption of lower fat dairy products, will end up. If not in the food chain, how will it be disposed of?

These are only indications of some possible considerations. This does not mean that it is wrong to try to reduce production and consumption of meat and dairy, but they do illustrate that robust policy development needs to consider the impacts under all three pillars of sustainability so that unintended consequences can be avoided or managed. For some of the big questions partnership working across Departments, and involving other bodies, is likely to be the most effective and efficient way forward.

Summary of the Outcome of the Consultation Process

1. The Agency's Approach to Sustainable Development in Policy Making consultation was issued on 11 March and closed on 3 June 2008. A summary of the substantive comments to the consultation can be found at <http://www.food.gov.uk/consultations/ukwideconsults/2008/sd0803> together with the Agency's considered responses to stakeholders' comments.
2. The Agency is an open and transparent organisation and as such sought input from stakeholders during the early development stages of the draft approach. Comments were sought both internally and externally through a series of workshops, culminating in a major stakeholder workshop in December 2007. On the basis of this work, the draft approach was developed and launched for UK wide public consultation. The consultation was issued to over 300 interested parties. In addition the Food Advisory Committees in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland were consulted. A summary of their comments can be found in the table below.
3. The key proposals on which the consultation sought views were:
 - Should priorities be set within sustainable development, whilst ensuring negative impacts in all areas of sustainable development are minimised?
 - Should food safety and nutrition be a priority for the Agency?
 - Should the Agency take responsibility for the significant negative impacts of its policies by moderating policy where possible or advising and communicating alternative action being taken?
 - Should the Agency seek a more integrated approach, working with other departments and stakeholders, in order to achieve greater sustainability?

Summary of stakeholders' comments

4. A range of comments were submitted which have helped to shape the final approach adopted by the Agency. These are summarised below:
 - There was general agreement among stakeholders that the Agency should incorporate sustainability within its work, whilst ensuring that its remit of protecting the interests of consumers in relation to food remained. It was emphasised that work of other Government departments should not be duplicated or the statutory remit of the Agency changed.
 - There was general consensus that food safety and nutrition should remain priorities for the Agency, but that all aspects of sustainability – environment, economic and social, should be considered to ensure positive impacts are maximised. It was highlighted that this should not detract from the Agency meeting its statutory remit which puts consumers and their safety first.

- It was agreed that the Agency should take action, either directly or by working with other Government departments and other organisations, to ensure all negative impacts are minimised. However, a number of comments were made on the importance of ensuring the Agency's remit was not compromised and duplication of effort avoided. Industry groups flagged up the need to ensure clear communication of how departments work together to avoid confusion and blurring of responsibilities.
- It was advised that the Agency should seek expert advice from others when developing policy and communicate clearly the decisions that are made.
- It was agreed that impact assessments should accompany all policy decisions so that costs and benefits to those affected are set out clearly.
- Recommendations were made to ensure the Approach reflected the UK Government sustainable development priorities and principles and emphasised the pro-active approach the Agency was taking. In addition, it was suggested that the approach explained how the Agency would be transparent in its decision making. The positive benefits of the Agency adopting the new approach were outlined and a proportionate and risk-based approach urged. These suggestions along with others have been incorporated into the final text of the approach.
- Recommendations were also made in relation to the implementation of the approach including: development of guidance and advice for policy staff to aid delivery of the approach, reflecting the principles and priority areas of the UK strategy, use of the precautionary principle and risk management. It was also emphasised that an effective monitoring and evaluation system would need to be developed so that the Agency could assess how its approach is being implemented.
- Integral to the success of the implementation and monitoring of the new approach is ensuring that staff have the skills and knowledge to make the necessary decisions. In light of this the Agency will develop training alongside the guidance and advice so ensuring capacity is there.
- In addition to the specific comments made on the approach, a number of stakeholders provided suggestions for future policy areas to be considered by the Agency. These include links to wider sustainability issues such as the food chain and food security, food waste, packaging and food storage. In a number of cases it was commented that sustainability considerations should be used to inform the Agency's work priorities.

Summary of comments from the Food Advisory Committees

Scotland – 16th April 2008

Wales – 23rd April 2008

Northern Ireland (and stakeholder meeting) – 13th May 2008

Specific comments relating to the approach have been incorporated into the revised text. A number of the comments relate to how the Agency takes forward and implements the approach, as well as highlighting areas of work that the Agency should explore further. These have all been noted and will be considered alongside the consultation responses.

The Agency should only apply the principles of sustainable development within its remit. The FSA should also consider alternative solutions or ways of delivering its policies to improve their sustainability. The example of the Agency's advice on oily fish consumption was highlighted. It could be possible to look at alternative sources of long chain omega 3s, e.g. use of other marine sources, to achieve the same health goal.

There is a need to be aware of the possible global impacts of policies. Displacement should not be taken lightly – e.g. changes in oils and fats, energy usage etc.

Policy development in the areas of food safety and nutrition should come first, followed by an assessment of whether such policies were likely to impact negatively on sustainable development, for example increasing packaging/waste, causing pollution and imposing additional costs on individuals/businesses.

Policy making may be slowed down by considering the wider sustainability aspects. However, putting the consumer first should remain the focus of decisions taken.

Stakeholder engagement in policy making, including in considering sustainability impacts, is important.

Working in partnership with other Government departments and other stakeholders is important both to mitigate the negative impacts of Agency policies that fall outside the Agency's remit and to reduce any negative impacts of other department's policies on food safety, availability and nutrition.

The Agency should be more proactive in engaging with other Government departments and stakeholders and also in its approach to horizon scanning.

There is an urgent need to develop an evidence base to inform decisions on sustainability – social, environmental and economic. The FSA does not have all of this but needs to partner those who have credibility in this work.

The FSA's sustainability policy needs to take account of the different interests and targets of the SD Strategies of the devolved administrations.

The Agency should work with other Government departments, industry, and stakeholders to ensure relationships would not be damaged by the impact of sustainable decisions/policies.

As a rule of thumb the FSA should ask itself whether advice given today compromises the ability to give the same advice in a decade's time.

There is a need to review existing policies in relation to sustainability. For example, the provision of food information, labelling, approach to packaging.

The Agency as an independent organisation should be transparent in providing information on how sustainability has been taken into account in policy formulation and to share best practice.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH¹ INTO CONSUMER PRIORITIES IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Background

1. This research was commissioned to explore consumer interest in relation to sustainability issues around food and to help inform the debate on the Agency's approach to sustainable development in policy making. In particular, the research examined how pro-active the Agency should be in promoting the principles of sustainable development in policy making and how far elements such as food safety, health, quality, consumer information and other interests could be balanced against other aspects of sustainability, such as environmental protection and economic costs to businesses and consumers.
2. Results reveal that consumers have a wide range of views on sustainable food priorities, and these are often conflicting and vary with characteristics such as age, sex and household income. Choice in terms of food availability and access, food quality, cost and healthiness are the most important issues for consumers. Although economic and social issues appear to be of greater significance for consumers it is apparent that environmental issues do play a part in their shopping decisions.
3. The full report will be published on 12th September at the following web address:
<http://www.food.gov.uk/science/socsci/surveys/sustainability>

Research objectives

- Understand consumer priorities in relation to sustainable food policy
- Within this, assess the extent to which consumers are willing to trade-off food safety/choice/nutrition against other sustainability issues.
- Explore whether consumers would be prepared to pay more for food in order to protect/improve the specific aspects of the economy, society or environment.
- Explore the degree of consumer interest in the sustainability of food policy and any information requirements in this area

Methodology

4. The research was conducted through face-to-face interviews with a representative sample of the UK population. The survey was conducted between 7th and 11th March 2008. A total of 2,068 interviews were conducted. The survey took, on average, just over 20 minutes to complete.

Conclusions

Consumer priorities in relation to food policy

5. Respondents were asked a number of questions about their food shopping particularly focusing on what issues consumers considered when buying food and the relative importance of these issues. These issues were categorised into three broad areas; economic, social, and environmental. Consumers are most likely to

¹ Note that this research was conducted before the recent publicity about food price rises.

consider economic issues, such as cost and quality of food, followed by social issues, such as healthiness of food, when choosing one food product over another. Environmental issues are less likely to be taken into account, although over half of shoppers (53%) consider at least one environmental issue when shopping for food.

Balancing different aspects of sustainability

6. Respondents took part in an exercise involving six hypothetical food policies designed to isolate which aspects of sustainability were most important to them; health, biodiversity, consumer information/choice, the environment or the economy.
7. Views were mixed with responses distributed across the whole scale and a number of respondents having no strong view either way and not one of the six scenarios generating a majority preference of 51%. However, choice appeared to be an important aspect for consumers when set against other sustainability issues. For example, the largest gap was 8%, where 49% of respondents chose detailed country of origin labelling even though this would lead to increased costs for industry. In addition to this, a large number of respondents were happy to admit that they would prefer a choice of fruit/vegetables all year round (45%) or a wide variety of fish regardless of stock levels (47%).
8. In contrast to this, when respondents were offered the choice of a ban, information or no information at all in relation to food that gives less consideration to animal welfare and the environment, 16% said they would prefer these types of food to be banned. Two-thirds however would prefer access to information on the food they buy so they can make the choice.

Willingness to pay more to ensure sustainable criteria are met

9. There appears to be a strong willingness among consumers to pay more for food in order to protect/improve aspects of the economy, society and environment, suggesting that consumers are prepared to take on some of the responsibility for improving the sustainability of food. Over 60% of respondents claimed they would be willing to pay a little more for items that are more sustainable.

Application of results to Agency's approach to sustainable development in policy making

10. The overarching message to come out of this research is that consumers have differing priorities when it comes to sustainable food policy. Sustainability issues receive varying ratings from consumers with little consistency and views are mixed. However economic and social factors are generally given greater consideration. The term sustainable development was unknown by 41% of respondents which highlights a current lack of understanding of the wider issues.
11. Issues such as food choice, food quality, food safety and nutrition which are fundamental to the Agency's remit are also important to consumers. What is evident is that issues relating to the wider sustainability agenda, including environmental considerations also have a place in relation to food policy.
12. Consumers would welcome advice that is inclusive of all aspects of sustainability in order to aid understanding and to help inform choice of healthy, sustainable food.

SUMMARY OF BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

1. The Board first considered how the Government's policy on sustainable development should be implemented in relation to the Agency and its work in 2004. In May 2004 (paper 04/05/03) the Board discussed the following aspects:

- assessing the sustainability of the Agency's policy development, decision making and advice; and
- the sustainability of how the Agency runs its business, including estates management and the Agency as an employer.

2. It was emphasised that the Agency's approach to sustainable development had to be consistent with the Agency's role of protecting consumers' interests in relation to food safety and standards, nutrition and helping consumers to make informed choices.

3. In October 2004 the Board considered a paper (04/10/02) which focused on two main issues:

- overall Agency policy in relation to sustainable development; and
- the mechanisms for its implementation into policy development, decision making and advice.

4. The importance of working with others to complement the specific remit and limited expertise of the Agency in this area was recognised. Board members also referred to the importance of judgement when weighing up the impacts of a policy (i.e. judgements about the trade-offs between, say environmental protection and benefits for consumers). Proportionality was also seen as an important issue.

5. The Board agreed a proposed mechanism for taking sustainable development considerations into account in policy making and other activities, along with plans to further develop and pilot the mechanism and associated guidance on a range of policy issues and projects across the Agency. The Board also agreed the following Position Statement:

“The Food Standards Agency's remit is to protect the interests of consumers in relation to food, both now and in the future. In doing so the Agency will take sustainable development into account in all of its activities and policy decisions.”

6. The Board received a progress report on the delivery of the above Position Statement via an intersessional paper issued in June 2006. This was

followed by a briefing session at a Board meeting on 14 June. The briefing covered sustainability assessments and the associated guidance to staff.

7. In March 2007 a paper (07/03/05) reviewed progress on sustainability assessments and their impacts in terms of decisions and resources. It was noted that a number of challenges remained if the Agency is to fully embed sustainability into its work. It was agreed that the Executive should explore and articulate what sustainable development means for the Agency and how we can embed sustainability into our policy making.