

**COMMUNICATIONS: ANNUAL UPDATE**

**Executive Summary**

1. This paper sets out progress made by the Communications Division in the past year, and the key challenges for 2010.
2. The Board is asked to **note** the report.

**COMMUNICATIONS DIVISION**

**Contact:** Terrence Collis      Tel: 020 7276 8820  
Email: [terrence.Collis@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:terrence.Collis@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk)

## **COMMUNICATIONS: ANNUAL UPDATE**

### **Issue**

1. Update the Board on progress since December 2008.

### **Role of Communications**

2. The role of the Communications Group is to support the delivery of our vision – safe food and healthy eating for all – and to make the Food Standards Agency the most trusted source of advice on food safety and nutrition.

### **Our profile**

3. Effective communication requires all parts of the Agency to work together to ensure that our policies are clear and coherent, that we work effectively with all stakeholders, and that we communicate successfully to consumers. During the past year, 47 different Agency spokespeople have been interviewed by the media and many more have contributed to the hundreds of briefings, web content and announcements that form the backbone of our communications activity.
4. Major scientific announcements have included the review of research into the nutrient value of organic food. The Chief Scientist's blog continued to stimulate both scientific debate and coverage of important scientific issues in the media. A summary of our major media activity and its evaluation can be found in Annex 1.
5. We also negotiated the Agency's first advertiser-funded programme this year, a partnership with UKTV to produce the series 'Family Supercooks'. As part of the programme, we were able to develop some programme bumpers to promote the FSA's role in the programme, our eatwell website and also pass on general healthy eating tips.

### **Agency campaigns**

6. Raising our profile this year was, as ever, helped by our campaigning activity. There were two major healthy eating campaigns this year – saturated fat in February and salt in October – our Food Safety Week campaign in June and, coming this month, our food safety messages on cooking turkey. All campaigns are measured and evaluated for impact, but of course behaviour change in the wider population requires sustained campaigning over a number of years. We are now in phase four of our salt activity. In contrast, saturated fat is only in its first phase, with phase two early next year. Our GermWatch-branded food safety activity is now into its second year. With the saturated fat campaign, the combination of TV and posters, and text messaging giving practical tips,

produced a significant change in awareness, not only of the dangers of excess saturated fat but also of the simple ways of reducing intake.

7. Food Safety Week focused on addressing the 'spike' in listeria cases. The campaign included community initiatives, with more than 70% of local authorities taking part. The messaging was aimed at the over-60s and several members of the Board were able to join us for the launch at the Houses of Parliament. In another carefully targeted exercise on food safety a new version of Safer Food, Better Business packs were produced for childminders – and 10,000 were ordered in the first few weeks.
8. The infamous Xmas 'Turkey Tussle' advert will be back this year, which will be supported by new radio adverts. The activity will be reminding festive cooks of food hygiene tips also giving advice on defrosting, preparing and cooking their turkeys.

### **Engaging with consumers**

9. The Agency's direct consumer engagement has been monitored by the Advisory Committee on Consumer Engagement, which will be reporting to a future Board meeting. The key activity has been the Citizens' Forums on Food, which have debated and fed back on issues such as country of origin labelling and the new strategic plan. We have also set up the independently managed GM Dialogue with the Nation, which the FSA is funding with support from Sciencewise. The independent steering group set up to oversee this dialogue contains representatives from all sides of this often heated debate. The aim of the project is to hear the informed and argued opinions of consumers on this complex and often confusing issue.

### **Working with stakeholders**

10. This year the External Affairs team implemented a programme of direct stakeholder engagement as part of the development of the new strategic plan. However, the bulk of the activity on our stakeholder engagement continues to be in supporting the staff and officials right across the Agency who maintain a regular dialogue with their particular stakeholder contacts. The stakeholder research presented to the Board in September demonstrated how much this direct contact is appreciated by key stakeholders. The first half of next year will include major international scientific conferences organised by the Agency on campylobacter and on salt, and a conference in February to reflect on 10 years of the FSA and to discuss the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2010-2015.
11. Partnership with stakeholders, particularly those from industry, is a vital part of our campaigning activity, too, and we are grateful for the support in this area given by retailers and manufacturers. The launch of the first saturated fat campaign in Borough Market was enthusiastically described by an industry

executive as the 'greatest gathering of the wider food clan for years'. It certainly had wide representation from all parts of industry, local authorities, other Government departments and non-Governmental organisations.

### **Online and digital**

12. Direct contact and communication via the media remain at the core of good communications but, increasingly, online and digital information provide both a clear factual base for our activities and a means of communication in themselves. Our websites are increasingly popular with the general public, as well as with the many other interested parties in the Agency's work, including local authorities, the food industry, other Government departments, charities and pressure groups, health professionals, schools, academic institutions and researchers, who tell us they rely on our websites for data, advice and policy explanation. This year we focused particularly on looking at ways we could add value to the Agency's campaigns by giving people digital tools that they could take and use where they wanted, so our initiatives have included publicising our web stories via Twitter, creating a mobile phone application as part of the salt campaign, and a wider drive to embed social media into our communication activities.

### **Bringing it all together**

13. Increasingly, major Communications activity involves all facets of FSA Comms, colleagues in policy divisions and other Government departments and partners. To coordinate this work, a small strategic communications team has been set up from within the group. In particular, this team has built up our relationships with the Department of Health's Change4Life initiative and is leading the development of a communications strategy for 'scores on the doors' and healthy eating.

14. The Communications teams in the devolved countries are also a key part of getting our messages out to local audiences. Each country has its own range of activities as well as being important in spreading UK-wide communication. The Strategic Communications team will be working closely with our colleagues in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to coordinate and support this activity. We also look forward to merging the communications activity of the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) into the wider team as part of the new Operations Group.

15. With the FSA celebrating its 10<sup>th</sup> birthday next year and the merger with the MHS, we have also been working on our branding. This also needs updating for use in the digital age to include website addresses and to improve its usability in electronic form. This work will also allow the merged MHS to become part of the FSA brand. Our new look will roll out slowly from February 2010 with the natural cycle of replacement and updating.

## **Engaging our staff**

16. At a time of change and re-organisation in the Agency, working with our staff has been particularly important. A range of events, such as the annual conference for 150 or so team leaders, has been developed to help ensure that the FSA operates as 'One Agency'. The new 'FoodChain' monthly cascade briefing has been introduced to keep staff informed, face to face, on key issues and changes. Other Agency developments and day-to-day information is published on Foodweb and on the MHS's intranet.
17. We have also been involved in the first ever cross-Government civil service-wide People Survey. This survey attempts to gauge the levels of engagement across the whole of the civil service and aims to reach 500,000 (97%) civil servants. The initiative has been led by Sir Gus O'Donnell and has been co-ordinated centrally by a core team based in the Cabinet Office. We have worked collaboratively with the Cabinet Office as well as with the MHS to ensure that the survey is as robust as possible and reflects the key issues with which Food Standards Agency and Meat Hygiene Service staff are concerned.

## **Reputation, reputation, reputation**

18. *'Reputation, reputation, reputation! O, I have lost my reputation! I have lost the immortal part of myself, and what remains is bestial. My reputation, lingo, my reputation!'* Othello II iii
19. Above all the Communications group must protect and enhance the reputation of the Agency: as a body that puts consumers first, with policy based firmly on science and evidence, and by operating in a fully transparent and open manner. We continue to work with Agency colleagues to ensure that we make our policy and advice freely available, easy to understand and that we are at all times ready and able to be questioned and explain about what we do, and why we do it.
20. It is also important to support and promote the role of the Board in governance, strategy and the enforcement of the Agency's independence. The launch of the strategic plan will be an excellent opportunity to reinforce the role of the Board.

## **The future**

21. As already mentioned, the tenth anniversary of the FSA next year provides an opportunity to highlight our achievements and restate our commitment to safe food and healthy eating for consumers. We will be highlighting to stakeholders the outcomes described in the strategic plan and seeking their continued support to work with us on these.
22. Over the next year, we will continue to work closely with colleagues in the MHS and the devolved nations to ensure the smooth transition to the FSA Operations

Group. The coming year will provide challenges in terms of helping to coordinate messages and supporting the senior leadership team through the next phase of the change agenda.

23. The past 10 years have seen an explosion in the use of the Internet as a communication tool and the growing diversity of channels, as individuals use social and digital media. The classic communications approach of a major advertising campaign being the sole route to inform consumers has long had its day – hence the importance of continuing to supplement our campaigns by working with partners, using digital media and face-to-face communications. As channels continue to diversify we will need to innovate, learning from experience and from others to ensure that we can effectively communicate with all consumers.
24. Working with the Integrated Advice for Consumers (IAC) team to develop cross-Government advice for consumers, a Cabinet Office Food Matters initiative will also be a major piece of work for the year ahead. We will also be starting to analyse food.gov.uk with a view to upgrading and redesigning the site over the next couple of years. There will also be changes in our printed communication with stakeholders: developing an e-newsletter to replace the printed version of FSA News and adding a new quarterly publication to give space for improved engagement with stakeholders.
25. There is also more to be done to understand how our communications activity translates into changes in consumer behaviour. We will also need to ensure that we continue to invest in improved measurement and evaluation of all our communications.
26. The principal communications challenge we face in the next five years is no different from that faced by the rest of the Agency – delivering these outcomes against a background of reduced resources.

### **Board Action Required**

27. The Board is asked to **note** the report.

## STATISTICS ON AND EVALUATION OF COMMUNICATIONS ACTIVITY

### Our profile

#### Family Supercooks

The Agency joined forces with the Good Food Channel to produce a new cooking show, Family Supercooks, that started airing in October. As part of our involvement, we contributed content to the Good Food website, including recipes and advice on healthy eating. So far, consolidated figures show the first four transmissions of the series reached around 800,000 people. This is 8% up on the averages for the time slot.

These are the first four of a guaranteed 23 transmissions across two years, which would project to a reach of around 4.5 million viewers.

#### Organics

In late July, the Agency published its long awaited review of the nutritional value of organic food. This was an important piece of work for the Agency and a major piece of work for the communications team. This work generated enough media coverage to reach every adult in the UK the equivalent of three times. Organics is a controversial issue and not all of the coverage was positive – but not all of the coverage was well informed either.

The Agency worked closely with the researchers from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and set up interviews with all major UK broadcast channels. The story appeared on the front page of the Evening Standard, the Daily Express and The Times, Metro and The Herald and was covered on the news pages of every other national paper. The news stories were broadly accurate but follow-up coverage tended to take the form of opinion pieces, which presented more polarised views. This led to the publication of an open letter from Tim Smith on food.gov.uk to set the record straight. Gill Fine's guest post on our Chief Scientist's blog attracted intense debate.

Coverage of this issue wasn't limited to the UK – we also set up interviews with broadcast media as far away as Australia and print coverage appeared around the world. Even now, this issue is sporadically picked up by the media.

#### Incidents

The communications team is, as always, heavily involved in relaying information about incidents to the media and also directly to consumers via the website. While major incidents are not a regular occurrence the press and PR team works closely with the incidents branch on a regular basis to plan and prepare for any issues. We also work hard to build relationships with retailers and trade bodies, other

Government departments and special interest groups to make communication swift, accurate and consistent in the event of a food incident.

The press and PR team is also building relationships with the European Commission and UK Rep to provide information on emerging incidents and to ensure that we are not only handling incidents but also keeping other interested parties informed of the Agency's work.

The last communications paper I delivered was during the dioxins incident. This particular incident has been subject to a full review and we have all learnt from this. This is something we always strive to do, but it is often a challenge as it is rare that any incident follows the path of a previous one. There have been many smaller incidents since then – we have issued information about salmonella in peanut products from America, pine nuts with a bitter taste, salmonella in sesame seeds, BSE testing breaches, the presence of arsenic and lead in clay-based drinks, the presence of a banned drug in supplements, an algal bloom off the coast of Cornwall, among many others. A total of 19,439 people are currently (end of October 2009) signed up to receive an email when food alerts are issued; 4,566 for allergy alerts; 2,491 for text messages when food alerts are issued and 1,195 for allergy alerts. These are all increases on 2008. In 2009 (until end of November) 36 food alerts and updates were issued by the Agency and 51 allergy alerts.

## **Campaign evaluation summaries**

### **Saturated fat**

Launched in February, the saturated fat campaign aimed to raise awareness of the health risks of eating too much saturated fat and to encourage reduction among consumers by promoting a range of simple tips. It included television, six sheet, press and digital advertising and a range of joint marketing initiatives with retailers and manufacturers. The coverage provided every adult in the UK with between two and three opportunities to hear or read about the campaign. The story was enthusiastically reported with arresting headlines that reflected the graphic nature of the TV ad campaign. '*Why the average Brit eats 2,200 packets of lard*' and '*Campaign to cut killer fats*' announced the Sun, echoing the Guardian's '*People urged to cut out foods with "killer" fats*'. While headlining on the health risks most of the coverage was constructive – with 67% offering advice based on our 10 tips for reducing sat fat.

The campaign helped generate extensive positive media coverage. With the key message 'too much sat fat can lead to heart disease', the campaign was reported on in 245 media outlets (press: 146; Internet: 79; television: 4; radio: 16) with 94% positive coverage equivalent to £783,670 advertising spend. Following the campaign, we saw a 38% increase in awareness that eating too much saturated fat can clog arteries, an increase in awareness of what foods were high in saturated and an increase in those reducing their saturated fat intake by using our campaign tips.

### **Salt campaign**

Phase 4 of the Agency salt campaign was launched on 5 October. The campaign re-ran previous TV advertising but newly developed press and outdoor and digital creative. The campaign also included 23 experiential roadshows that visited supermarkets across the UK. Against the odds, the press team still managed to generate impressive coverage, particularly across broadcast media. Consumers were able to learn more about how to reduce their salt intake and taste lower salt options. The evaluation on this campaign is not yet complete but early indications are positive and awareness of the issue has clearly improved. All the major TV news programmes covered the story, including BBC Breakfast and GMTV, as well as extensive regional radio interviews. Stories also featured widely in the national press with major pieces in the Observer, Daily Mail, Telegraph and Independent, with the focus either on supermarket own labels often having the lowest levels or bread/cereals as major contributors. Our phone application was twittered approvingly and downloads are continuing of the iPhone application and the 'other phone' version. The top key message throughout was the importance of checking labels to find the lower salt option.

### **Food Safety Week**

National Food Safety Week ran in the week 15–21 June with a campaign to tackle the recent rise of food poisoning in the over-60s. This aimed to raise awareness of listeria and the measures that can be taken to prevent it. The campaign included local community initiatives, a national press partnership with the Daily Telegraph newspaper, advertising and leaflet distribution via the Life Channel in 1700 doctors' surgeries and advertising, and leaflet distribution through 750 targeted pharmacies and messages on pharmacy bags. The leaflet has been nominated for a Plain English Campaign award. Key results included an increase in local authorities taking part (up to 73%), an excellent response to the campaign resources (97% of LA's and 100% of other delivery partners said they were either very or fairly useful), and a very good response to the Telegraph advertorial reader offer for fridge thermometers and fridge magnets, which elicited approximately 12,000 responses.

### **General food hygiene and safety campaigning**

We piloted a different approach this year by using advertorials in popular weekly women's magazine titles throughout the year. This gave us a more constant presence and allowed us to cover a variety of food hygiene messages in topical ways. Smaller adverts are also appearing in several TV listings magazines. To complement this, we ran radio advertorials on Talk Sport around barbecuing. This was weather 'triggered' to make sure the activity ran on popular barbecue weekends.

### **Safer Food, Better Business (SFBB) childminders pack**

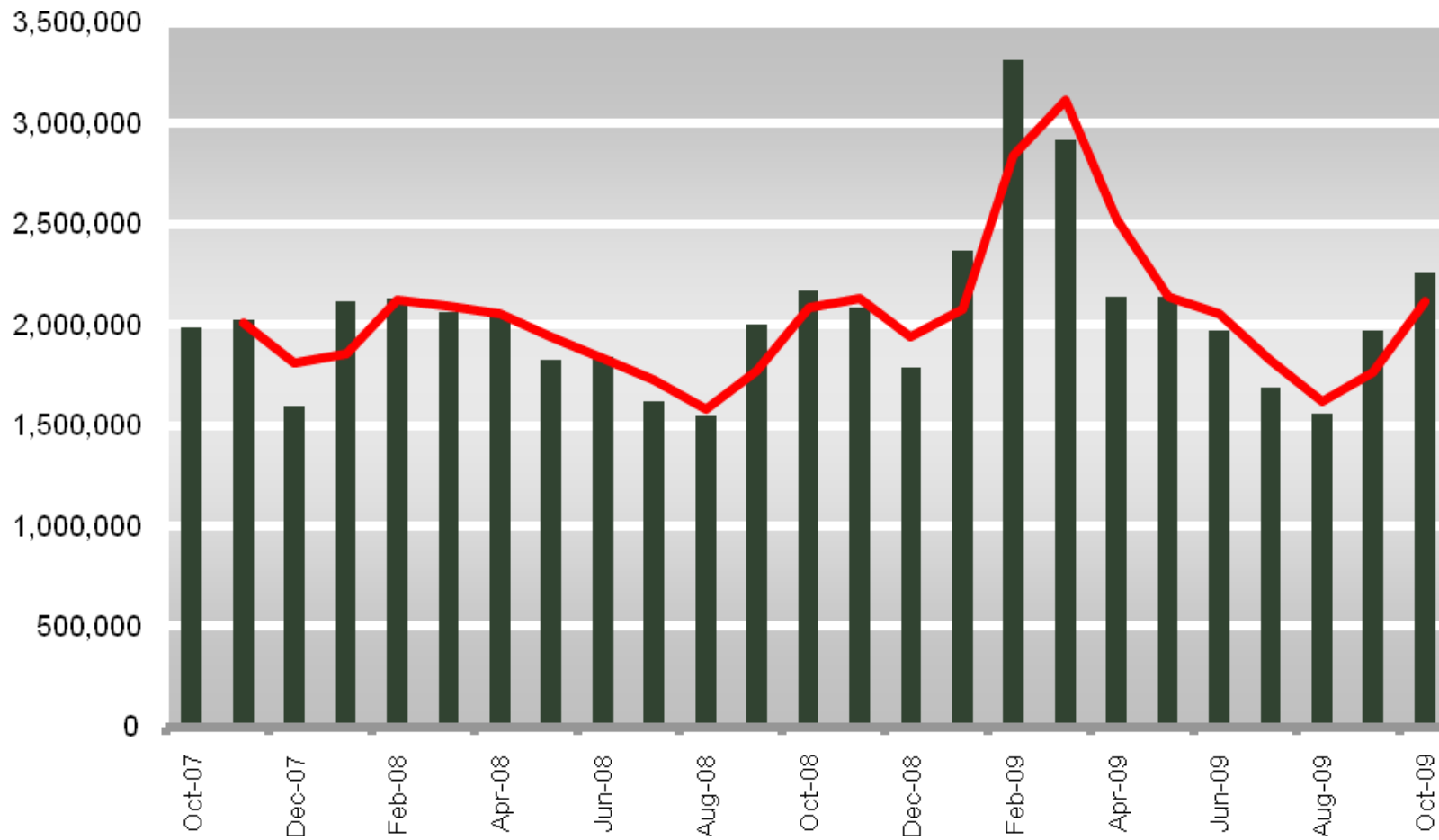
A new version of the SFBB pack was produced because all childminders are now covered by Food Hygiene Regulations. The pack has already proved very popular with 10,000 being ordered and distributed in the first few weeks. A leaflet promoting the pack was distributed at the National Childminders Conference, which increased demand even further.

### **Website statistics**

The first quarter of 2009 saw traffic increase by 46%, mainly due to the saturated fat campaign (the major spike in February) and the new searchable eatwell recipe section, which included a nutritional breakdown of each recipe, launched in January. Activity levels fell slightly during the summer (as is normal) but with a month on month rise from the same time in 2008. The salt campaign is increasing the traffic in October, building on the rise started in September after the summer break.

As well as the usual range of new material and sections on both eatwell and food.gov, we added a new search (Google) on our external websites; refreshed the Chief Scientist's blog with new design and software; created new microsites for the General Advisory Committee on Science and the Social Science Research Committee; launched an online training tool for vacuum packing; and created a page that brings our wider web offerings together: [food.gov.uk/interactive](http://food.gov.uk/interactive).

Web traffic for all sites (page views) from Oct 2007 - Oct 2009



## Quarterly Public Attitudes Tracker: September 2009

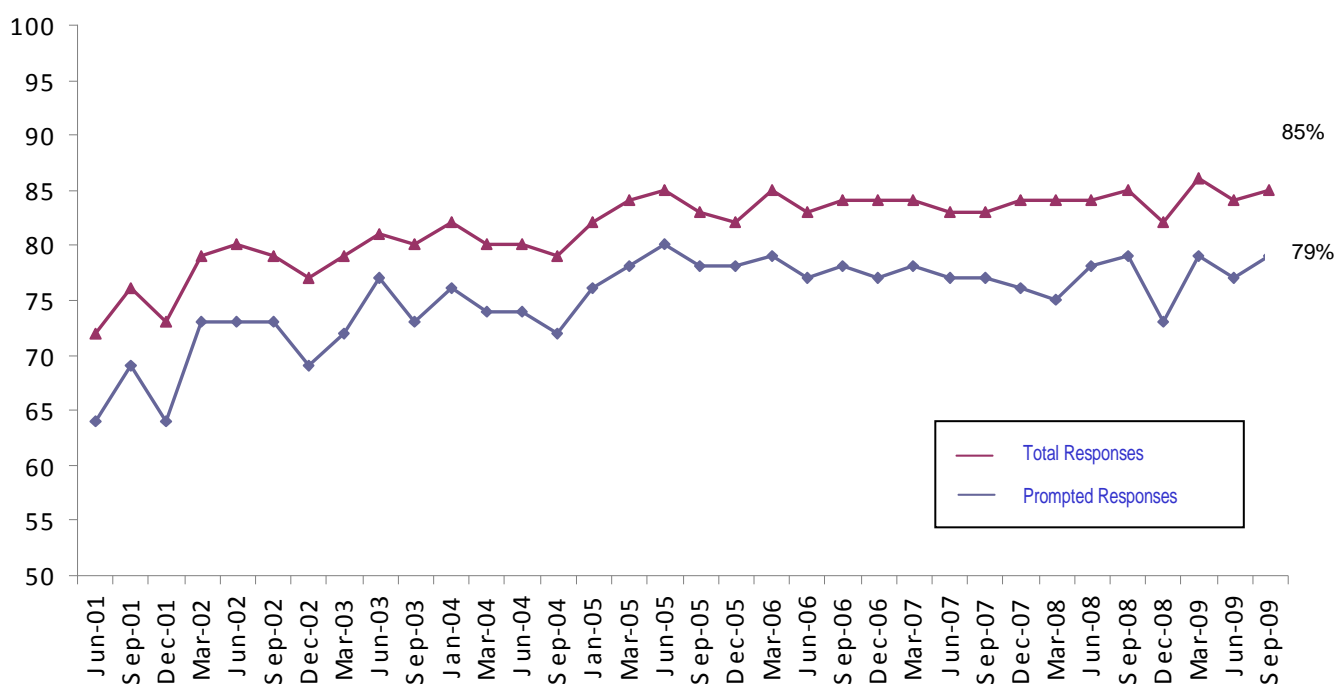
The Food Standards Agency places six questions on the TNS consumer face-to-face omnibus survey on a quarterly basis in order to monitor key Agency issues. Tracking began in 2001. The fieldwork period for this wave of research was 2–6 September 2009. A representative sample of 2,081 adults in the UK were interviewed.

The questions tracked cover awareness of the FSA, attitude towards food safety issues, concern about specific food issues (spontaneous and prompted), confidence in all organisations, and in the Food Standards Agency specifically, with regard to food safety, and trust in the FSA.

### Awareness of the Food Standards Agency

Both prompted and total awareness of the Food Standards Agency remained stable when compared to June 2009 (77% to 79% and 84% to 85% respectively). Awareness has shown a relatively steady and gradual increase since tracking began in 2001 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Awareness of the Food Standards Agency

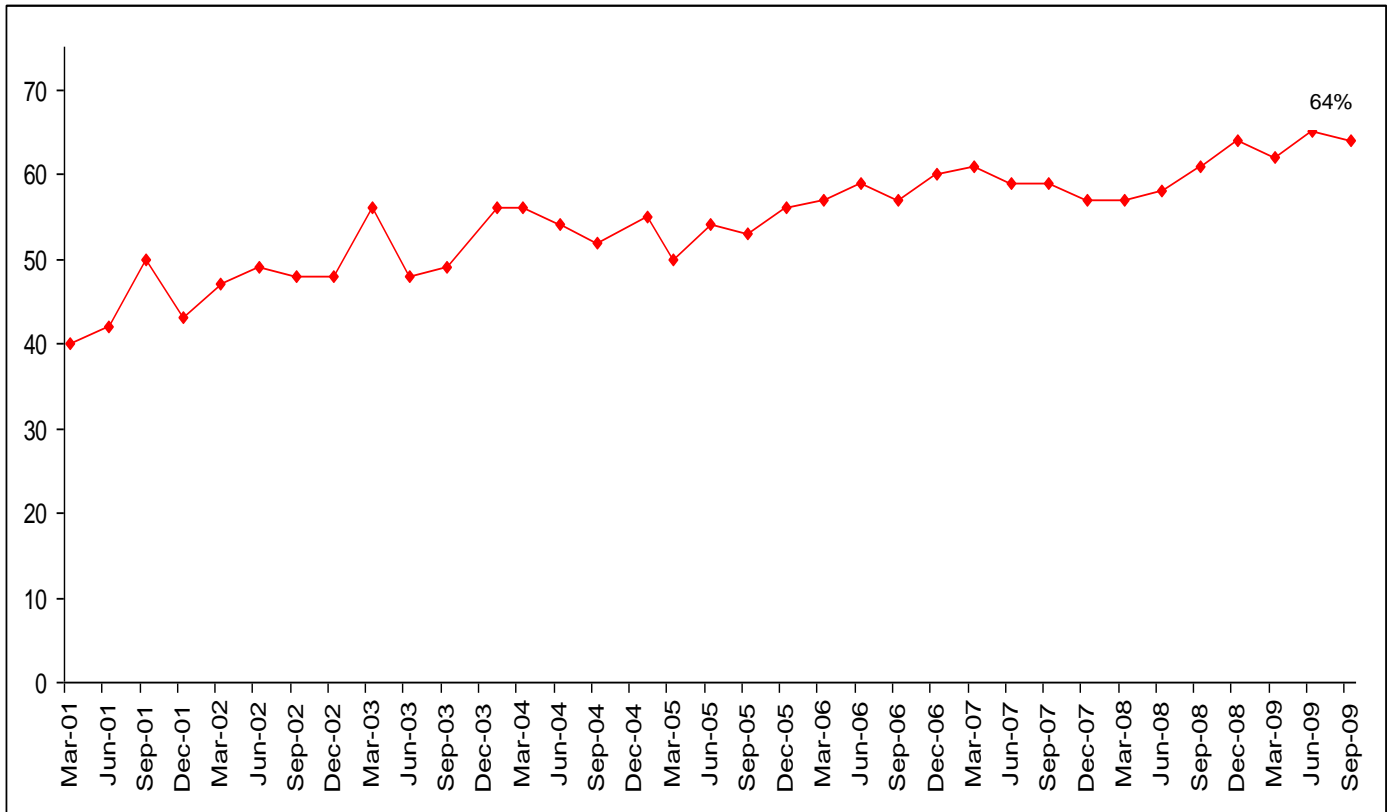


Q1a, Q1b. Base: All respondents

## Confidence in food safety measures

Confidence in the role played by the Food Standards Agency, specifically in protecting health, remained stable since June 2009 (currently 64%). Confidence in the Food Standards Agency has gradually increased over time (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Confidence in role played by the Food Standards Agency



Q5. Base: All respondents (% very confident/fairly confident)