
The Food Standards Agency's
Strategy to 2015

Safer food for the nation

March 2011 update




Foreword

This strategy to 2015, developed in consultation with our stakeholders, has been updated to take into account the latest information on food safety risks and reflect recent changes in nutrition responsibilities in the UK. The Agency's strategy is refreshed on an annual basis.


During 2010, nutrition policy and labelling in England and Wales were transferred from the FSA to these countries' health departments, with these activities retained in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Responsibility for some non-safety-related food labelling and composition policy was moved to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in England. The Agency continues to be responsible for these in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The FSA's incorporation of the Meat Hygiene Service and the development of our new operations division have, at the same time, strengthened our core remit covering food safety policy and enforcement.

The six outcomes described on the following pages highlight how we will continue to ensure that you can have trust and confidence in the food you buy and eat. To our core principles we have added an additional principle to abide by – of enforcing food law fairly. This demonstrates that we mean business when it comes to taking action on food safety and food fraud. And by being evidence-based, acting independently and in an open and transparent way, we will continue to put the consumer first in everything we do.



Jeff Rooker
FSA Chair



Tim Smith
FSA Chief Executive

Always on the alert

During 2010, the FSA dealt with more than 1,200 national food and environmental contamination incidents. These ranged from the discovery of the non-permitted substance 'morpholine' on apples to the presence of listeria in imported sausage. We also issued

more than 70 food recalls and withdrawals, which resulted in contaminated or mislabelled foods being removed from sale. Almost half of these cases were allergy alerts – about mislabelled foods that could have caused allergenic reactions in some people.

The Food Standards Agency: who we are and what we do

Our core principles:

- putting the consumer first
- openness and transparency
- science and evidence-based
- acting independently
- enforcing food law fairly

The Food Standards Agency is the national authority responsible for ensuring your food is safe to eat.

Food safety is our concern from the time ingredients come into the country, or leave the farm, right through to when food is sold to you in shops or served to you if you are eating out.

If we become aware that food contains unsafe ingredients, or is labelled in a way that makes it unsafe for some people to eat, we will have it removed from sale. We do this in conjunction with other enforcement organisations, such as port health authorities, trading standards and environmental health.

Our 'Safer food, better business' initiative ensures that good food hygiene is central to how food businesses operate. Our Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (and the Food Hygiene Information System in Scotland) lets you see the hygiene standards of catering establishments when you eat out or shop for food. These initiatives are delivered through our local authority partners.

FSA operations staff work in slaughterhouses and meat plants throughout England, Scotland and Wales to ensure the meat you buy has been produced safely and hygienically. In Northern Ireland, this role is carried out by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. We also deal with the safety of animal feed.

In England and Wales, responsibility for nutrition and healthier eating now lies with the departments of health, but in Scotland and Northern Ireland we continue to work on this. We continue to have responsibility for safety related food labelling, including allergen labelling, and in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales we also work on non-safety-related food labelling.

In the European Union, our legal experts and policy officials negotiate on behalf of the UK to ensure that EU law reflects the interests of UK consumers.

And the scientists on our staff and in our independent scientific advisory committees guarantee that all of our work – from day-to-day decision making to the assessment of emerging risks – is evidence-based.

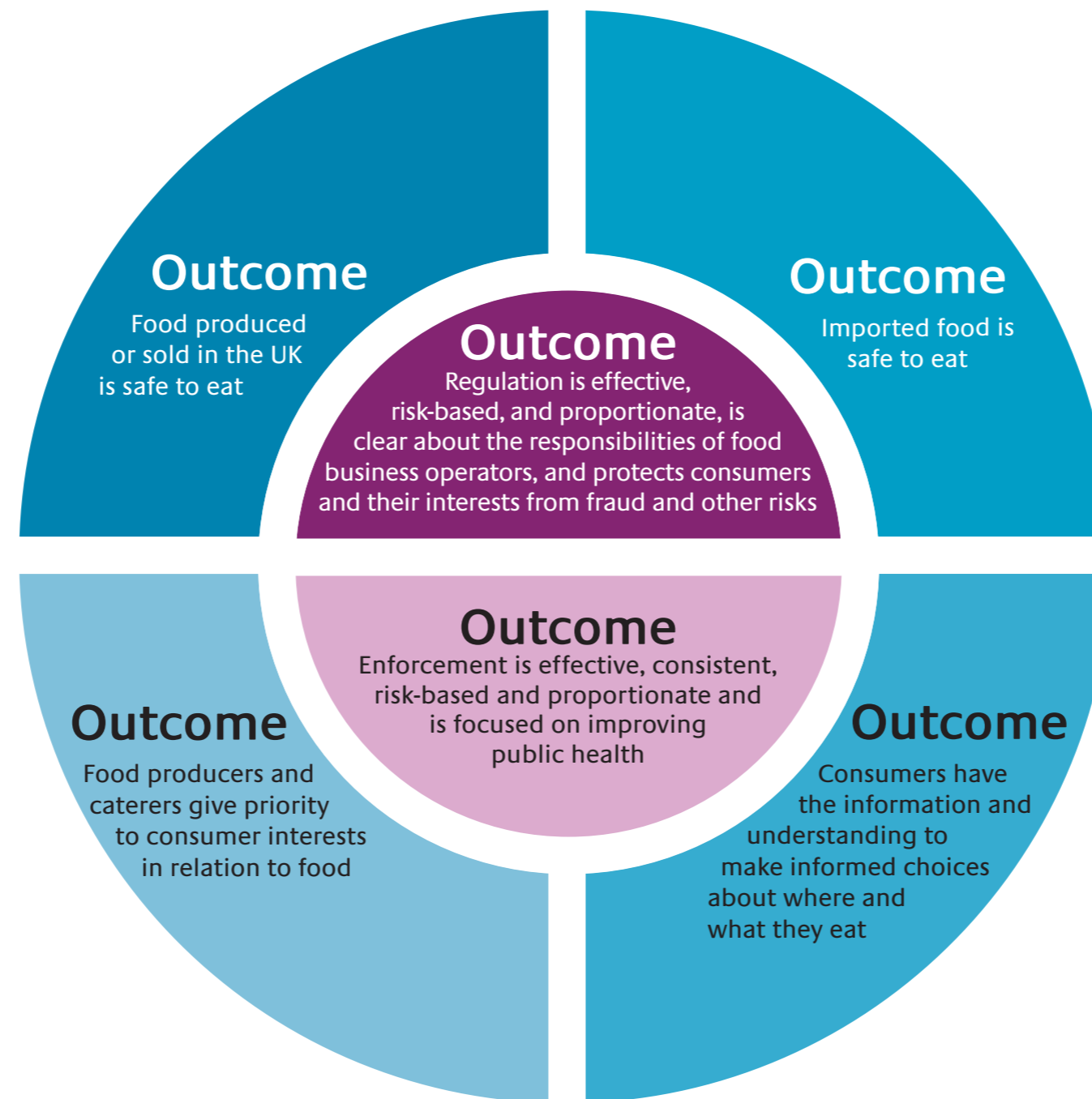
The Food Standards Agency was set up in 2000 as an independent Government department. We are governed by a Board and can publish any advice we offer to Ministers.

Since 2000, there have been real improvements in food safety in the UK, and our regular consumer surveys, workshops and focus groups suggest that these improvements have been matched by increases in people's confidence in food.

This strategy has been updated to ensure that these improvements continue.

The Food Standards Agency's Strategy to 2015

Our strategic objective is: safer food for the nation



Food produced or sold in the UK is safe to eat

The main priorities:

- reduce foodborne disease using a targeted approach – tackling campylobacter in chicken as a priority
- increase horizon scanning and improve forensic knowledge of, and intelligence on, global food chains to identify and reduce the impact of potential new and re-emerging risks – particularly chemical contamination

Food producers and caterers give priority to consumer interests in relation to food

The main priorities:

- increase the provision of information about allergens, including in catering establishments
- work with relevant organisations in Scotland and Northern Ireland to:
 - continue to achieve reductions in levels of saturated fat, salt and calories in food products
 - encourage the development, promotion and availability of healthier options when shopping and eating out
 - make sure that portion sizes appropriate for a healthy diet are available and promoted

Imported food is safe to eat

The main priorities:

- work internationally to reduce risks from food and feed originating in non-EU countries
- ensure risk-based, targeted checks at ports and local authority monitoring of imports throughout the food chain

Consumers have the information and understanding they need to make informed choices about where and what they eat

The main priorities:

- improve public awareness and use of messages about good food hygiene practice at home
- increase provision of information to consumers on the hygiene standards of food premises when they choose where to eat out or shop for food
- work with relevant organisations in Scotland and Northern Ireland to improve public awareness and use of messages about healthy eating

Regulation is effective, risk-based and proportionate, is clear about the responsibilities of food business operators, and protects consumers and their interest from fraud and other risks

The main priorities:

- safeguard consumers by making it easier for businesses to comply with regulations, and minimise burdens on businesses
- secure more proportionate, risk-based and effective regulation by strengthening our engagement in the EU and in international forums
- work internationally to design a model for a new regulatory and enforcement regime for ensuring meat controls are effective

Enforcement is effective, consistent, risk-based and proportionate and is focused on improving public health

The main priorities:

- secure effective enforcement and implementation of policies within the UK to protect consumers from risks related to food and from fraudulent or misleading practices, targeting the areas where there is highest risk
- strengthen the delivery of official controls
- develop our knowledge of what works in driving up business compliance with regulations

Working within the UK

We work with other Government departments to deliver an integrated approach to food policy. We are a UK-wide department and because there are four governments in the UK, and food policy is devolved, we work closely with governments across all four countries. The Food Advisory Committees in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland give advice and information, in particular related to those parts of the UK. This is to ensure both consistent application of food safety and standards throughout the UK, and that our work reflects national and local priorities and circumstances.

We work with local authority regulators and professional bodies in all four UK countries, to make sure that food law is applied and enforced consistently.

We provide information and guidance on best practice and legal requirements to help food businesses understand and comply with the law.

We aim to provide consumers with reliable, up-to-date information about food to help them make informed choices. We work with consumers through, for example, Citizens' Forums, and with non-Governmental organisations and the Third Sector (this includes charities and other public interest groups).

Working in the EU and internationally

We represent the UK Government on food safety and standards issues in the EU. We work in close collaboration with the European Commission, the Council of the EU, Standing Committees, the European Parliament and the European Food Safety Authority.

We work internationally, representing the UK Government on international bodies such as the Joint FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission, the World Health Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

We also have strong links with food authorities around the world – for example, the Member States of the EU, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Science and Evidence Strategy

The Agency's Science and Evidence Strategy describes the priorities for the evidence we will need and the activities we will carry out to ensure we obtain and use science and evidence effectively in our work. It supports the delivery of this strategy to 2015, tests our progress and will inform development of our work beyond this period. The Science and Evidence Strategy is published as a separate document.

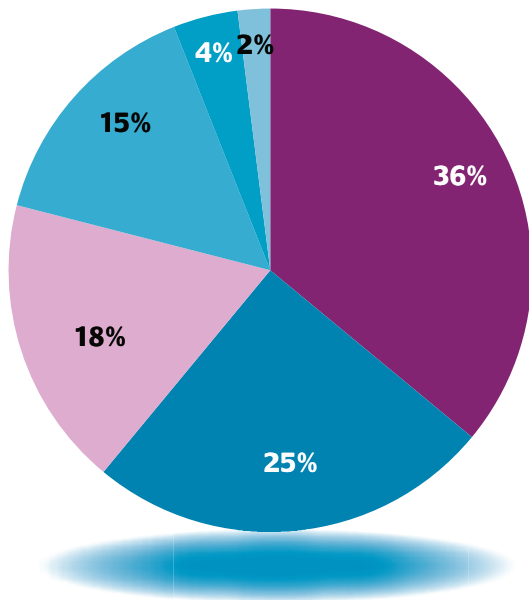
Sustainable development

We want to ensure our purpose of safer food for the Nation is achieved, while maximising positive impacts and minimising negative impacts on society, the environment and the economy.

Currently, there is limited robust data on what constitutes sustainable food but this is an important issue. Our expertise lies in food safety, so we will work with sustainability experts to make progress on this new agenda and build the necessary evidence base, coherent policy responses and advice to consumers. We will also continue our horizon scanning processes through the scientific advisory committees and joining up across Government to develop more understanding of, for example, the interaction of climate change with food safety.

We are committed to carbon emissions reduction, energy efficiency and recycling. We aim to pursue sound environmental practices at our offices to contribute to sustainable development and so minimise the negative environmental impacts of our activities.

Annual resource needs to achieve the six outcomes for 2011/12 onwards



The FSA is funded by the UK Parliament, Scottish Government, Welsh Assembly Government and Northern Ireland Assembly.

Total annual resource needs = £135m

36%

Regulation is effective, risk-based and proportionate: £49m

25%

Food produced and sold in the UK is safe to eat: £34m

18%

Enforcement is effective, consistent and proportionate: £24m

15%

Consumers have the information they need to make informed choices: £20m

4%

Imported food is safe to eat: £5m

2%

Food producers and caterers give priority to consumer interests in relation to food: £3m

Resources

The resources that we will need to deliver the priorities of this strategy, our statutory obligations and commitments as a Government department, are shown above according to the strategic outcomes they support.

Delivering value

In delivering the outcomes set out on the previous pages, we aim to work in a way that is sustainable for the future, delivers value for money for the taxpayer now, and gives businesses a fair deal. We aim to work smarter as a Government department and as a food regulator. We will deliver better value for money through a series of measures. These include the formal merger of the FSA and Meat Hygiene Service, and their corporate support services, that created a new FSA Operations Group with

the work of the MHS at its core. We will also configure the organisation in line with our strategy.

Performance measures

We will set performance measures to monitor progress against the six key outcomes we are pursuing in the strategy. We will also evaluate the impact we and our partners are having in improving public health. For example by measuring trends in foodborne disease.

We will review the strategy each year and will adjust it as necessary to ensure that the public are protected from food safety risks.

The analysis and evidence used to support this strategy and further information on how we will evaluate achievement against the six outcomes can be found on our website at food.gov.uk/strategy

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