



FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN POLICY MAKING

STATEMENT OF APPROACH

Our goal is to ensure our primary objectives of food safety 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.



The Agency's remit is set out in law. Our role is to protect consumers in relation to food safety 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.

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

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 issues as this is 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 and give this matter 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.