



Food
Standards
Agency
food.gov.uk



Food Standards Agency
Strategy 2015-20

INTRODUCTION

A lot of different things will affect the supply of food to this country and the world over the next 25 years and beyond – potentially very radically. It isn't clear how much will have already happened by 2020 but our strategy needs to guide us in addressing the changes that materialise in that period, and help us be more prepared for the changes that follow later. We will review the strategy on a regular basis so that we can take account of the pace of change as it happens.

We have looked at the evidence that tells us what is already happening and what might happen and we have talked to lots of different people about what they believe will happen, and how we should react and try to shape the future in the interests of consumers.

We have heard from scientists and academics, consumer organisations, people in local government, the food industry and our own people within the FSA. And we have held sessions with consumers and looked at what the research tells us about what they want and need from the food system now and in the future.

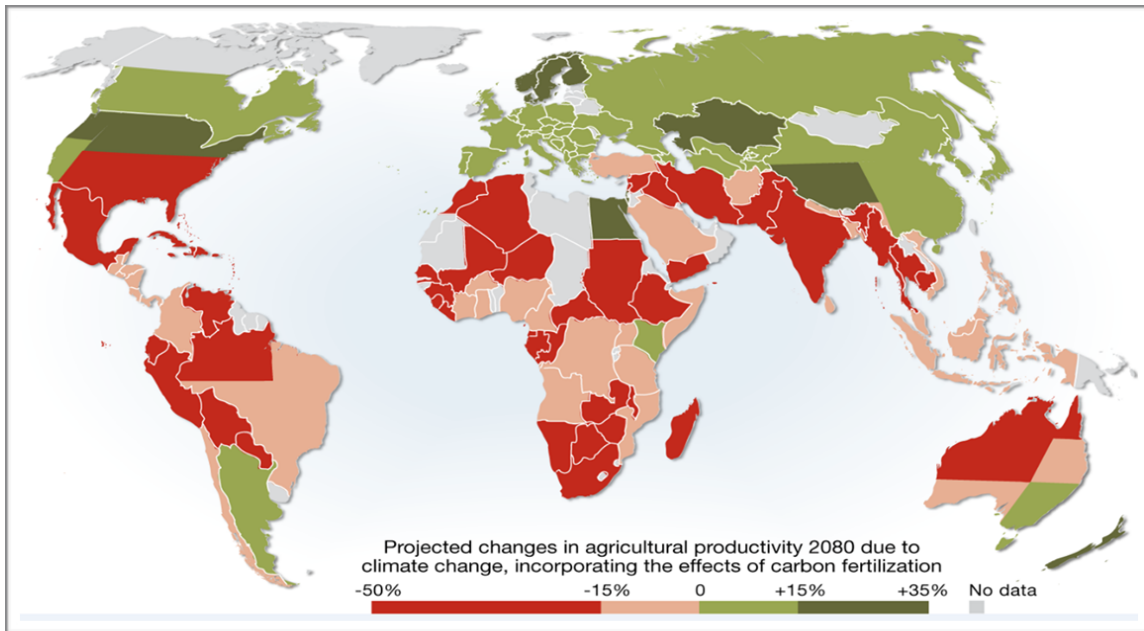
The many discussions we have had reflect the fact that everyone is interested in food. Whatever else we may be, we are all consumers of food, and we all want eating food to be a safe, affordable and pleasurable experience – we want to be able to trust the food we eat.

THE WORLD WE WORK IN

The scientists who study food systems are clear that climate change and its consequences are likely to have massive impacts on the amount and types of food that can be produced in the world in decades to come. The food supply is globalised – most of our food comes from 6 countries, but we import food from more than 180 countries. This means we have to consider pressures on the food system around the world when we think about protecting the interests of consumers in the UK.

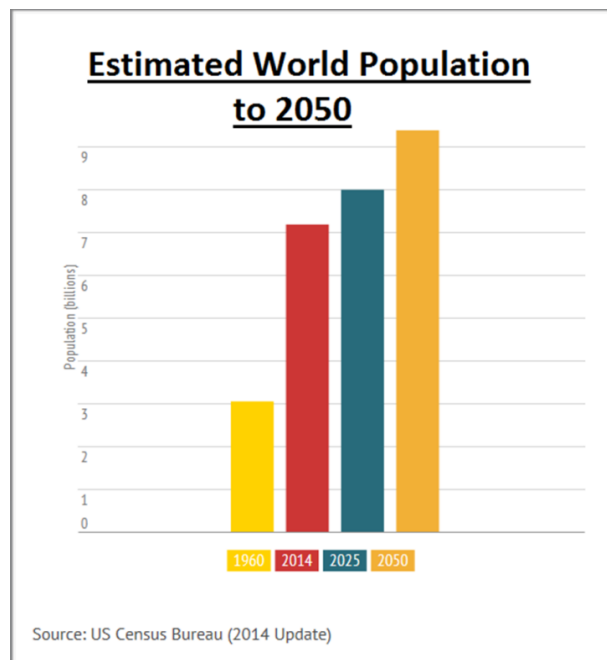
The FAO defines food security: “food security exists when all people at all times have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”¹.

¹ The Food and Agriculture Organisation, World Food Summit, 1996



Source - Projected changes in agricultural productivity, Cline, W. R. 2007. Global Warming and Agriculture: Impact Estimates by Country. Washington D.C., USA: Peterson Institute (<http://www.climatecommunication.org/affects/food-production/#!prettyPhoto/0/>)

Meanwhile the population of the world is growing.



Predictions suggest that if consumption patterns do not change, agricultural production will need to increase by 60% relative to 2005 to meet food demands in 2050².

² (Source: Alexandratos and Bruinsma 2012, Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO))

So as we look forward to the future it is clear that there will be increased pressure on our food supply. Issues of whether food is safe, authentic and affordable will be inextricably linked to questions of food supply, food trade and sustainable development.

THE FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY - OUR ROLE IN THAT WORLD

Our roles and responsibilities are set out in the Food Standards Act 1999.

“The main objective of the Agency in carrying out its functions is to protect public health from risks which may arise in connection with the consumption of food (including risks caused by the way in which it is produced or supplied) and otherwise to protect the interests of consumers in relation to food.”

Based on what consumers and others have told us, the definition we propose for consumers’ interests in relation to food is:

Food is safe and what it says it is, and we have access to an affordable diet, and can make informed choices about what we eat, now and in the future.

None of these things is guaranteed – there are still thousands of people a year who are hospitalised as a result of food poisoning, food allergies, and food intolerance, and hundreds die. Our test results regularly show that food is mislabelled – beef as lamb, cobbler as haddock, and in 2013, horse as beef. Already there are consumers who cannot access enough safe, healthy food for them and their children. The public health impacts of obesity already cost the NHS £4.2bn per annum³. And the evidence suggests that the pressures on the food supply system are only going to become more intense, so food security and sustainability for the future will be under increasing pressure. We are well placed to play a leadership role on some of these issues (e.g. safety), and on others we can support those who are better placed than us to lead (e.g. food waste reduction).

These pressures affect food businesses as well as consumers. Responsible food businesses seek to align business and consumer interests – making sustainable profits by meeting consumer needs safely and honestly. But a proportion of businesses will react to the pressure on international food supplies and their own supply chains by cutting corners or trying to pass off cheaper ingredients as more expensive ones. In food this can be lethal – substituting more expensive almond powder with cheaper ground nut powder without warning can kill someone with a food allergy.

In all our discussions about our strategy, everyone we have spoken to has reiterated the need for a strong regulator, independent of the food industry, to make sure that consumers have a powerful and well informed champion. People are aware of the resource pressures on local and central government and the need to find different ways of working that protect consumers in this context.

Responsible business people as well as consumer organisations want an FSA that is strong, appropriately resourced, and credible – basing its interventions on the best evidence available.

Consumers know this makes them safer and ensures that their interests are championed.

Food businesses know that a strong, independent and respected regulator protects the reputation of UK food for both domestic consumers and the international export market. The food industry is a vital and growing part of the UK economy – the sector employs over 3.7 million people⁴, and food exports are now as valuable as those in the aerospace sector. The FSA supports the growth of responsible businesses by protecting the reputation of UK food and clamping down on businesses which put consumers at risk, and can therefore have an unfair cost advantage in the short term over responsible businesses – ensuring a level playing field.

Given the challenges to the food system the rationale for the FSA as a non-Ministerial Department is stronger than ever.

So for 2015 to 2020 we are renewing the pledge that we made, and that was approved by parliament, in 2000;

We will put consumers first in everything we do.

We will step up and speak out for consumers about their interests in relation to food and find ways to support them in becoming informed and empowered and making their voices heard.

Because consumers have different and sometimes conflicting interests in relation to food, we will need to do our best to balance those conflicting interests correctly and we will engage regularly with consumers about how we are doing this. We will focus on three main themes which need to be addressed and balanced to get the best overall outcomes for consumers:

- The right to be protected from unacceptable levels of risk
- The right to make choices knowing the facts
- The right to the best food future possible.

In some areas we will play a leading role because we are particularly well placed to make a difference – for example in food safety. But for some aspects we will make our best contribution through supporting efforts led by others – for example in waste reduction as a contribution towards food security and sustainability.

Even in the areas in which we have a leadership role, we need to be clear about the roles and responsibilities of others as well as of the FSA. Only by everyone working together and playing their part will we be able to deliver food we can all trust.

Responsibilities for consumer protection are shared – businesses, the FSA, other parts of central and local government, and consumers themselves all have important roles to play.

It is the responsibility of people producing and supplying food to ensure it is safe and what it says it is ... and the Food Standards Agency has a key leadership role in making sure that they step up to that responsibility.

It is a responsibility of consumers to manage the risks relating to food that they can affect. They have a right to be informed and supported in responding to those risks. The Food Standards Agency has a key role to play in making this happen.

In ensuring businesses step up to their responsibilities and consumers are supported and informed to meet theirs, the FSA has access to two main sets of tools. There are traditional regulatory tools such as making legislation and regulations and enforcing them; and there are communication based tools, such as publishing league tables of business performance, which can incentivise rapid improvement and reward responsible businesses as well as empowering consumers. Our regulatory strategic plan will lay out in more detail how we intend to use and blend both these kinds of intervention. We will continue to place a high level of focus on food law enforcement that delivers for consumers, matching resources to risk, and using and improving the effectiveness of the full range of enforcement tools. For businesses who want to do the right thing we will continue to concentrate on finding cost effective ways to support them to do so, building on the success of our 'Safer Food, Better Business' pack for small businesses, for example.

Consumers sometimes tell us that they feel powerless in their relationship with food. We want consumers to be and feel powerful – able to contribute effectively to shaping a food system that protects their interests and respects their rights. As part of the next phase of delivering this strategy we will build a strategic plan for openness and engagement that identifies how we can help make this happen.

In consultation with consumers and others we have identified two areas where most consumers have some power and therefore some responsibility, and as part of the development of the strategic plan we will consult more on these areas and how we can use them to further support consumer empowerment.

The powers/responsibilities are:

- to store, prepare and cook food safely in line with good practice, including taking extra precautions when cooking for vulnerable people; and
- to take account of the information you have when you make food decisions – “stop, think, choose”

What else will the FSA do differently, particularly in areas outside our focus over the last few years on “food is safe and what it says it is”? Now we are focusing more clearly on the other interests of consumers in relation to food: “we have access to an affordable healthy diet, and can make informed choices about what we eat, now and in the future” - what does that mean for the FSA and its work?

Affordability, choice, food security and sustainability are issues where others have much greater ability to make a difference than we do. We do not want to spread ourselves too thinly, and by trying to do too much, achieve less for consumers. But we do want to contribute to the work that others do in these areas where we can support the best outcomes for consumers.

And we also acknowledge that when we take decisions or try to make a difference in our key areas of focus, we potentially affect other key aspects of consumer interest in

relation to food. So we commit to think more carefully about all our own activities and assess each of them through the lenses of their impact on affordability, choice, food security and sustainability.

The changes in the food system mean that there need to be changes in the behaviour of consumers and food businesses - and of course the FSA - to get the best outcomes for consumers.

We will gather and use evidence to identify where changes would be in the best interests of consumers, and we will focus our evidence gathering on the areas where it can support the delivery of the biggest impacts for consumers.

We will then use a “campaigning approach” to delivering change – by which we mean that we will focus clearly on what changes are in the interest of consumers and why; we will seek to persuade consumers and businesses to make changes that will benefit consumers in the long run; we will align our resources to achieve them; and we will build coalitions with other organisations, parts of government, and opinion formers to get their support for change.

Achieving sustained change is very hard, and a range of interventions are required to help enable and embed desirable change. These can range from regulation to providing information, advice and other support. A creative and blended approach is needed as we know that providing information on its own, however persuasive that information may be, is not enough.

We will seek to learn from successful behaviour change campaigns, for example, increasing the use of seat belts and encouraging recycling.

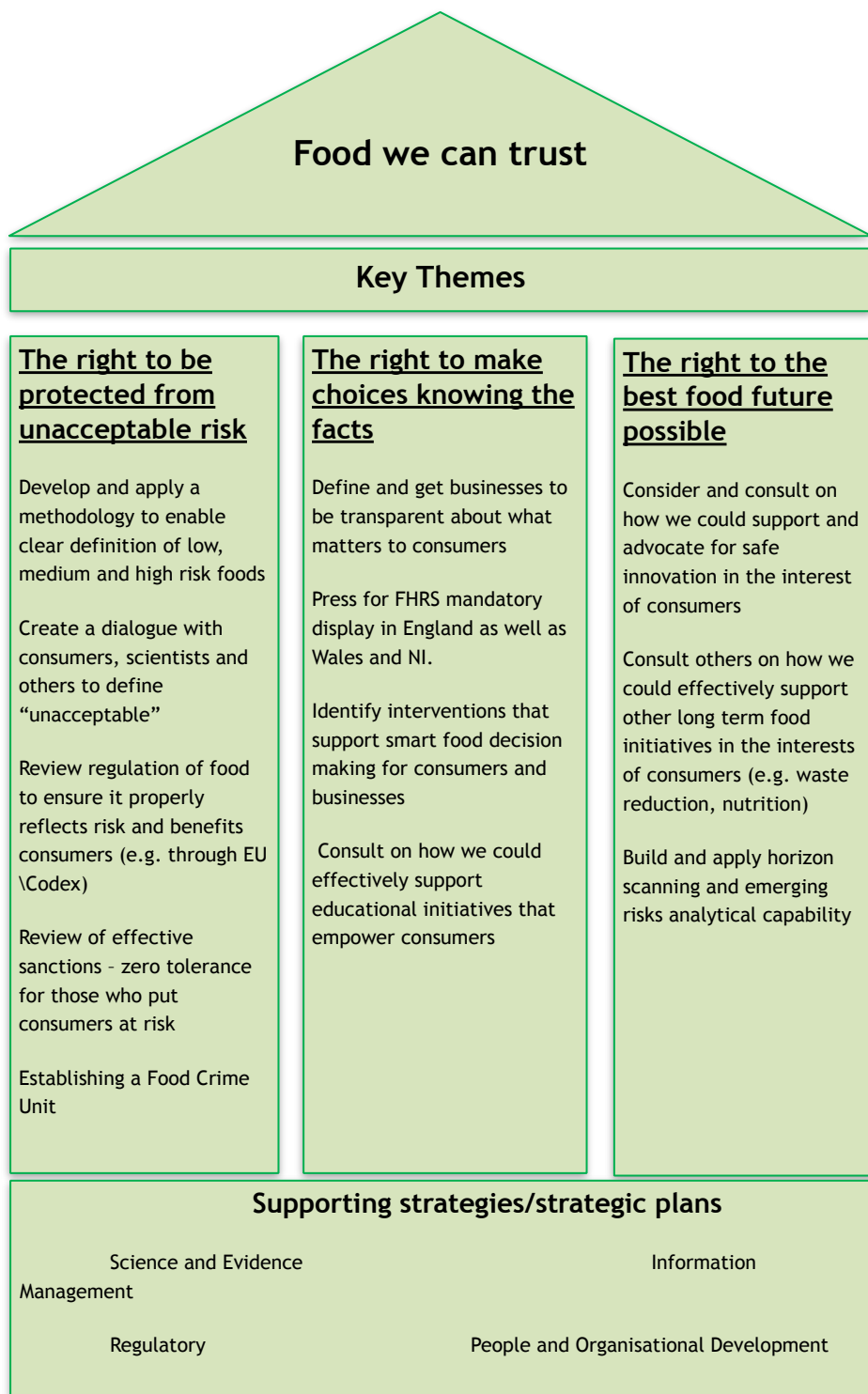
We will seek to identify and use appropriate behavioural models that actively engage consumers and food businesses, to support them to make smarter food choices.

We will seek to better support consumers to help ensure they can make decisions about their food in an informed manner, and to enable them to influence decision makers whose actions affect their interests. To support this we will improve our understanding of different groups of consumers, recognising there is no single typical ‘national consumer’.

Currently we are a UK wide body with representation in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. However, from 2015 Scotland will have a new food body and we will ensure we manage a smooth transition to the new arrangements and continue to work closely with Scotland to maintain consumer protection. We recognise the benefits for consumers from the FSA sharing skills and expertise across England, Northern Ireland and Wales, and believe that while each will have their own issues to deal with, in the context of a highly globalised food system, there is real benefit in us continuing to operate as a single entity. We will demonstrate this in the way we work.

DELIVERING THE STRATEGY 2015 - 20

As an organisation we will ensure that we have the right structure and mix of skills to achieve our outcomes and we will continue to improve our efficiency and effectiveness.



We will work in collaboration and consultation with others to build a strategic plan, identifying the main initiatives and activities that will support the delivery of the strategy. This will refine and may change some of the content identified above.

Delivering this strategy will require energy, commitment and innovation. The FSA will need to work in partnership with a range of other organisations and individuals. Our commitment to put consumers first in everything we do will be at the core of our work as we play our part in delivering food we can trust today and tomorrow.

For further information and advice about food, or to download this publication, visit the Food Standards Agency's website:
food.gov.uk

Connect with us



Like us on Facebook

food.gov.uk/facebook



Join our conversation

[@foodgov](https://twitter.com/foodgov)

food.gov.uk/twitter



Watch us on YouTube

food.gov.uk/youtube



Get our news by RSS

food.gov.uk/rss



Get our news by email

food.gov.uk/email

To order further copies of this or other publications produced by the Agency, contact Food Standards Agency Publications:

Tel 0845 606 0667
Fax 01375 484556
E-mail foodstandards@ecgroup.co.uk

Scan our QR vCard to easily store our contact details in your smart phone



© Crown Copyright 2015

The content of this publication is subject to Crown copyright protection unless otherwise indicated.

You may re-use the information in this publication (not including the Food Standards Agency logos and photographs that are the copyright of a third party) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence at: nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/
Any enquiries regarding the use and re-use of this information resource should be emailed to: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk

Published by the Food Standards Agency April 2015



When you have finished with this publication please recycle it