

Sampling

Sampling and subsequent analysis underpins the work of the FSA and others, such as local authorities and Port Health Authorities, in maintaining the safety and authenticity of the food supply chain.

This work supports import checks and ensuring food is what it says it is. It performs an essential function as part of our strategic surveillance system – providing intelligence and evidence on the safety and authenticity of food and feed on the UK market. This supports enforcement action to protect consumers and enables the FSA to meet its statutory obligations as a regulator.

Objectives 2021/22

Targeted surveillance – testing of specific commodities for hazards which form part of the FSA's work to consider emerging risks. Decisions on which commodities/hazards to target is based on intelligence from a variety of sources.

Official Controls (enforcement sampling) – taken by local authorities but funded by the FSA as part of a directed sampling approach which may be due to adverse results from targeted sampling leading to enforcement action.

Regulatory monitoring – Monitoring compliance with prescribed regulatory standards.

Sampling to inform science and policy – Undertaken, generally on a specific topic, to increase our knowledge. For example, to inform risk assessments or policy.

Progress against objectives

[The FSA's objectives for sampling were set out in the FSA Board paper](#). This set out the FSA's future approach to sampling, with a focus on improving the impact and value for money for sampling by ensuring that priorities are informed by surveillance and intelligence activities.

Through the FSA's cross-government sampling group, we have developed internal processes for prioritisation, and improved the dissemination of sampling outcomes by making use of digital technology such as the Risk Likelihood Dashboard. This targeted and coordinated approach to surveillance sampling at both FSA and cross-government level prevents duplication of sampling activity. In addition, we have undertaken research on international approaches to sampling, established internal guidelines on delivering sampling and drafted internal data standards for recording sampling outcomes.

Sampling results

Summary

- £3,322,409 total spend
- 11,065 samples tested
- 245 non-compliances

Targeted surveillance

- £940,432 total spend
- 4,070 samples tested
- 147 non-compliances

Conclusions

The results help identify areas of risk to food from the intelligence received. Noncompliant results are assessed, and follow-up action taken which includes, sharing results with key stakeholders to improve/investigate non-compliances and, if appropriate, incorporating these foods into Official Controls (enforcement sampling).

The 'basket of foods' approach included in the targeted retail surveillance survey has contributed to the joint FSS/FSA report, [Our Food 2021: An annual review of food standards across the UK](#), published in June 2022. The 89% compliance rate gives reasonable confidence in food standards but highlights the need for ongoing monitoring.

Official controls (enforcement sampling)

- £517,446 total spend
- 1,566 samples tested
- 55 non-compliances

Conclusions

Directed local authority sampling provides funding for Official Control sampling (for which funding is low), maintains sampling capabilities, while ensuring this is targeted and based on intelligence such as targeted surveillance results. Making best use of local authority resources to ensure that food is safe/is what it says it is. Results have led to guidance to businesses, further investigations and enforcement action.

For example, there were successful prosecutions, related to undeclared milk in Indian takeaway meals in Wales, arising from sampling funded by the FSA in 2021.

Regulatory monitoring

- £1,635,167 total spend
- 5,204 samples tested
- 32 non-compliances

Conclusions

Shellfish and associated water sampling allow for the classification of beds, ensuring that shellfish receive the correct level processing ensuring safe consumption, and prevents harvesting from beds with unsafe levels of marine biotoxins and phytoplankton.

The annual radiological monitoring programme checks that discharges from the UK nuclear sites do not cause unacceptable exposure to radioactivity through our food. The latest report covering 2020 showed that doses to the public from all sources of exposure to artificial radioactivity, were below the legal dose limit.

Sampling to inform science and policy

- £229,364 total spend

- 225 samples tested
- 11 non-compliances

Conclusions

Some FSA surveys are specifically undertaken to inform FSA risk assessments and policy, in line with our guiding principles that we are science and evidence led. They also inform the work of our scientific committees.

For example, the results of a survey undertaking chemical analysis of turmeric supplements on the UK market contributed to a Committee on Toxicology discussion paper on the risk of these products to human health and will support future advice on safety.

Back to the [Main report: Activities and Performances 2021/22](#).