

FSA and Official Controls: Satisfaction with FSA activities

The analysis is split by sector as some activities are unique to certain sectors. Satisfaction measures are based on those who reported any experience of a particular activity.

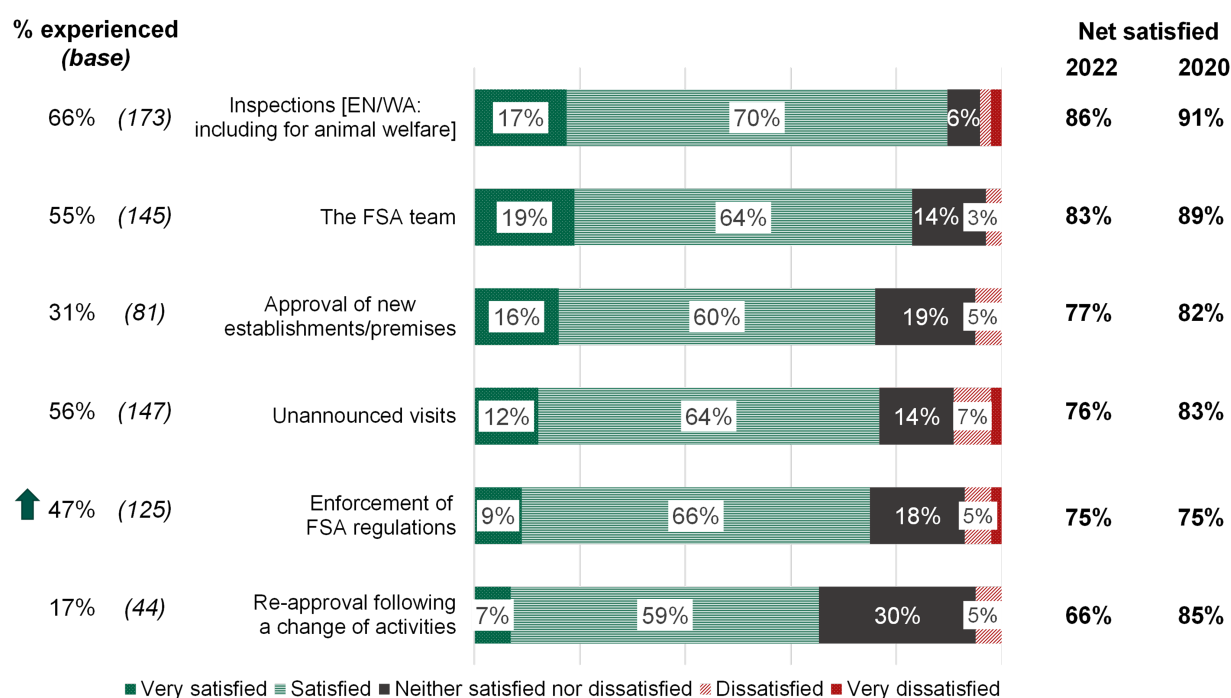
Within the meat sector, references to FSA staff includes Meat Hygiene Inspectors and Official Veterinarians who are directly employed by the FSA or contracted.

Satisfaction with FSA activities in the dairy sector

Whilst experience of each of the activities varied across the sector in 2022, satisfaction was relatively similar for each one. Figure 6.1 shows that in 2022, satisfaction was highest for inspections (86%) and lowest for re-approval following a change in activities (66%).

There was little change in satisfaction between 2022 and 2020, however there was one increase in the proportion of businesses experiencing a particular activity, namely enforcement of FSA regulations (2022: 47%, 2020: 20%). Please note that the question wording of certain activities differs slightly between waves, and across countries.

Figure 6.1 Satisfaction with FSA activities in the dairy sector



C2_X. For each process please say whether you have had experience and if so how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with that experience. Base: Dairy 2022 (264), Dairy 2020 (200). Satisfaction measures are based on those who reported any experience of this activity, hence the base for each activity is different, equivalent to multiplying the ‘% experienced’ figure by the overall Dairy base. Arrows indicate a significant difference from 2020. Don’t know figures have not been

presented in the chart

Reasons for (dis)satisfaction with activities in the dairy sector

The qualitative interviews revealed that for the most part FBOs were content that the activities were conducted in the manner that they expected them to be. The fact that activities typically met expectations but did not exceed them may account for the fact that while many reported they were satisfied in the survey, few reported being 'very' satisfied.

[Regarding 'approval of new premises'] "It's something you've got to do, isn't it? I can't get excited and call it very satisfactory. They came and did their job." (Dairy, England)

[Regarding 'unannounced visits'] "You know it's got to be done, it keeps you on your toes, it keeps you up to a standard, you can't let standards drop." (Dairy, Wales)

As shown in the survey, FBOs appeared most satisfied with 'inspections' and the 'FSA team'. Positive experiences with inspections typically related to the quality and communication of the inspector themselves, with those satisfied highlighting their professionalism, timeliness, knowledge and thoroughness. FBOs were particularly content where inspectors appeared to understand their business processes and priorities.

"He [the inspector] knew the business. He told us exactly what we needed to do and he was very knowledgeable." (Dairy, England)

For those who were less satisfied with 'inspections', dissatisfaction typically stemmed from the charges they had to pay, and the consistency of inspections. Concerning charges, one dairy FBO reported how they had to do several very similar tests and pay for each one but that the FSA took longer and charged more than the other organisations they needed to test for. Another dairy FBO felt that some of the assessors did not possess the same skills, and that this could lead to frustrating interactions. Finally, one FBO in Wales reported they found inspections quite confusing in terms of who has what role in communicating and conducting the inspection, highlighting the overlap between Welsh Government local offices and the local councils.

The main cause for dissatisfaction with the 'FSA team' related to the lack of interaction that the FBO had with them. They would have liked a little more interaction than just on inspections and unannounced visits, so they were more confident in their compliance.

Concerning 'unannounced visits' in the dairy sector, FBOs typically reflected that these were important to maintain standards and were a fair way of checking processes. Businesses felt that – where minor issues were found – the FSA treated these in a fair and proportionate manner.

"Sometimes an unannounced visit can find things not quite as they should be in terms of cleanliness, but the FSA have always been fair and us them a fortnight to remedy, and then come back to check." (Dairy, England)

A few FBOs mentioned how they would like to know rough ideas of how frequently and what sort of time an unannounced visit might happen and what might be covered in the visit. They want to be able to plan for how long it will take out of their day so they can be prepared for that. Sometimes the visits lasted longer than they assumed and disrupted them at critical moments in their business causing for stress and delays.

"A bit of dialogue beforehand... You've got no idea if they're going to come this year, next year." (Dairy, England)

Similar to other activities, satisfaction with the 'enforcement of regulations' was relatively high. Key factors informing this included that the enforcement was often accompanied by clear

guidance, and with a specific, but achievable timeframe to work towards.

The one FBO who was unhappy with 're-approval following a change of activities' felt that the process was too long and that they had already provided some of the information they were asked to submit. This duplication of effort they felt was unnecessary and wasted their time.

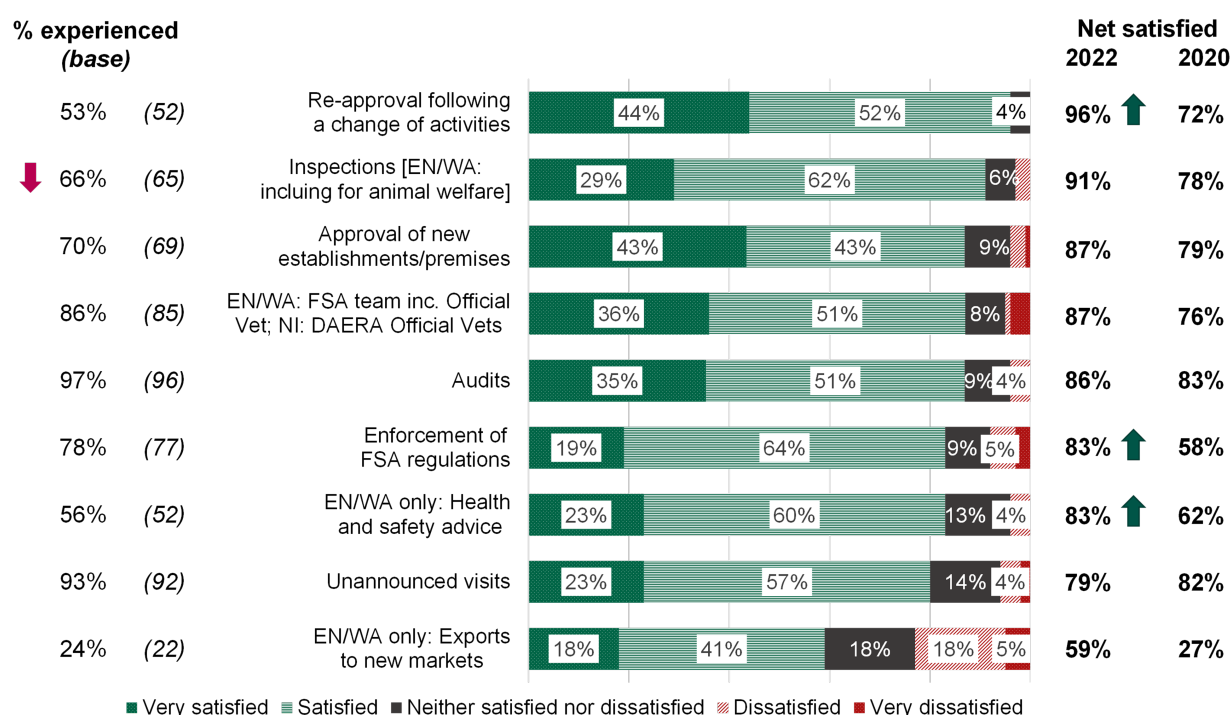
"It took so long to get recertified again...you have to start again... I wasn't very satisfied with that."
(Dairy, Wales)

Satisfaction with FSA activities in the meat sector

Much like the dairy sector, the majority of FBOs in the meat sector were satisfied with FSA activities, with at least 8 in 10 who had experienced the activity being satisfied. As can be seen in Figure 6.2, the activities with the highest satisfaction were 're-approval following a change in activities' (96%) and 'inspections' (91%). The only exception was 'exports to new markets', where satisfaction was 59%, although it should be noted that only 24% reported that they had experience of this activity.

Compared to the 2020 data, satisfaction rose in three activities and remained constant in six. The three areas with increased levels of satisfaction were 'enforcement of FSA regulations' (2022: 83%; 2020: 57%), 'health and safety advice' (2022: 83%; 2020: 61%), and 're-approval following a change of activities' (2022: 96%; 2020: 72%). Additionally, the amount of FBOs who had experienced inspections decreased (2022: 66%; 2020: 86%).

Figure 6.2 Satisfaction with FSA activities in the meat sector



C2_X. For each process please say whether you have had experience and if so how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with that experience. Base: Meat 2022 (99) Meat 2020 (88). Satisfaction measures are based on those who reported any experience of this activity, hence the base for each activity is different, equivalent to multiplying the '% experienced' figure by the overall Meat base. Arrows indicate a significant difference from 2020. Don't know figures have not been presented in the chart

Reasons for (dis)satisfaction with activities in the meat sector

As with the dairy sector, most FBOs in the meat sector recognised the importance of these activities, and were generally satisfied with the way these were conducted. For many it was an everyday element of their business operations and they knew what to expect.

[Regarding 'unannounced visits'] "They come in, do the job, go home." (Meat, England)

However, across a number of activities, meat FBOs reflected on their high satisfaction with the communication they received from the FSA, especially on the quality of advice and information they received. For example, one FBO reported that they found it easy to ask questions of the FSA at times where their enforcement requirements were unclear, while another mentioned that for the 'audit' the FSA called in advance, communicated clearly and then conducted the audit in a professional manner.

Areas where the FSA were of particular value included in the 'approval of new establishments/premises' where a number of FBOs reported that the FSA had given them helpful advice and provided support in a proactive manner, and in 'exports to new markets' where the Official Vet had helped them overcome difficulties relating to the different market regulations and requirements.

[Regarding 'Approval of new establishments/premises'] "The FSA advised and supported us and were proactive in providing assistance to get us to where we needed to be." (Meat, England)

Much like in the dairy sector, the most common cause of dissatisfaction was from a few FBOs who felt that unannounced visits need more structure, similar to the other regulation bodies they work with, who give them clearer windows and guidance on what will happen. This would allow them to know how long a visit would last and what was required of them, rather than being interrupted when vital or time dependent activities are happening in their business.

"It lacks structure. Unannounced audits are the way the world is going, there's no issue with that. But they don't seem to give you any windows...with the customers they'll say, 'You're now in your unannounced visit window for the next three months'...there's no system." (Meat, Northern Ireland)

There were also concerns about the rights of the FSA to conduct unannounced inspections on private property and at the timings of some inspections, which were sometimes held in extraordinary circumstances when the FBO was busy during a period of extremely high demand due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Some causes for dissatisfaction appeared to be quite specific to the context of individual FBOs. One FBO was quite specific on the 24 hour rule, which governs that when game comes from a plant/factory they have 24 hours to get it inspected. They explained how if this meat arrived on a Friday, they wouldn't be able to get it inspected over the weekend and so it would have to be disposed which is wasteful and costly to them.

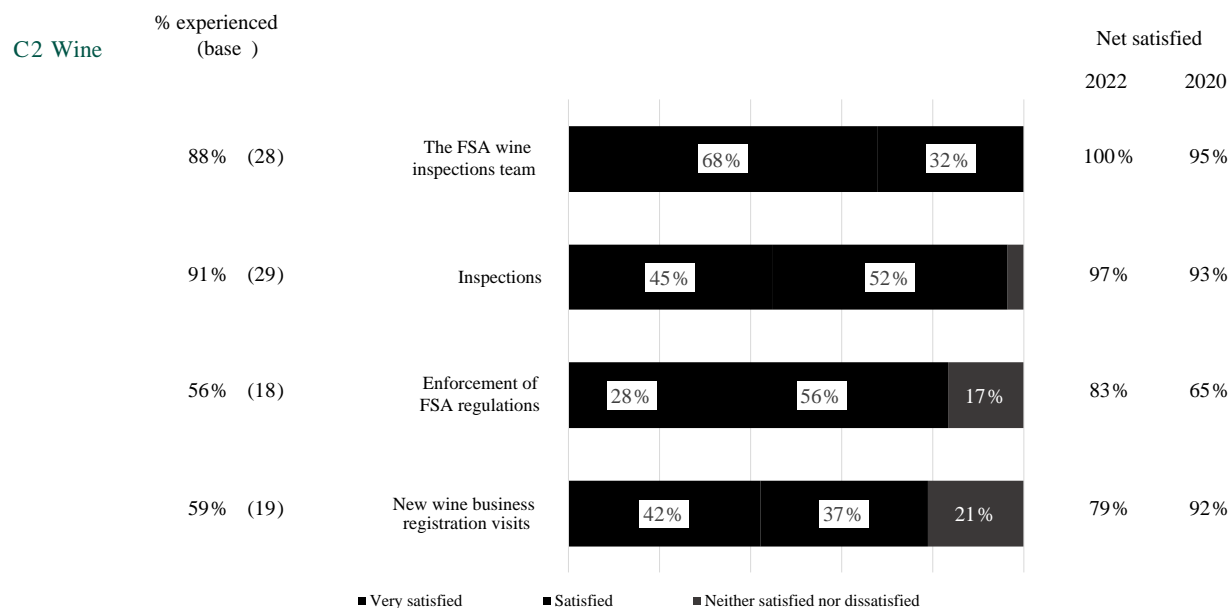
"The 24 hour rules means that you have to have inspections every day if meat was coming in every day. It's an EU law but in the EU they do not enforce it in game plants." (Meat, England)

In Northern Ireland, one FBO commented that the DAERA Official Vets and official auxiliaries are inconsistent in the way they interpret compliance. They felt they are often "too black and white" and don't "look at how compliance looks in the real world".

Satisfaction with FSA activities in the wine sector

Satisfaction in the wine sector was consistently high across the various activities, ranging from 79% to 100%. FBOs were most satisfied with the FSA inspections team (100%) and inspections (97%), although it is worth noting the low base sizes (28 and 29 respectively had experience of these). In part due to low base sizes there was no difference between 2020 and 2022 satisfaction levels.

Figure 6.3 Satisfaction with FSA activities in the wine sector



C2_X. For each process please say whether you have had experience and if so how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with that experience. Base: Wine 2022 (32) Wine 2020 (72). Satisfaction measures are based on those who reported any experience of this activity, hence the base for each activity is different, equivalent to multiplying the ‘% experienced’ figure by the overall Wine base. Don’t know figures have not been presented in the chart

Reasons for (dis)satisfaction with activities in the wine sector

Of the three qualitative interviews that were conducted with wine FBOs, all were positive about the FSA’s activities in this space, reporting for example that the FSA Team were “knowledgeable, understanding and good at communication”, and considering inspections to be “organised, fair, and prompt”.

Despite this, one FBO was concerned about the consistency in requirements that the FSA requires for setting up the business compared with some of the other regulatory bodies. They felt there were a lot of discrepancies for example between Wine GB and the FSA list. They felt they were wasting time trying to give similar information to bodies who could instead co-ordinate more.

Satisfaction with FSA activities in the shellfish sector

Of the two qualitative interviews that were conducted with shellfish FBOs in England, both were critical of the processes around how decisions are made on water quality and how the grading works (although it is worth noting that the FSA does not have responsibility for water quality). One felt that the wrong systems were in place to determine water quality and that the FSA was not listening to consultation on this issue.