

National Food Crime Unit: Working Together with Industry

The NFCU will look to lead, prevent, support, and coordinate an investigation into suspected food crime.

What is the National Food Crime Unit (NFCU)?

The National Food Crime Unit (NFCU) is part of the Food Standards Agency (FSA).

We have the responsibility to deal with serious fraud and related criminality in the food sector and are committed to protecting consumers and the food industry from serious dishonesty within food supply chains, in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. We work closely with the Scottish Food Crime and Incidents Unit within the Scottish Food Standards Agency.

We work to identify criminal threats to the UK food, feed, and drink sectors, focusing our resources in those areas identified as presenting the biggest risks and working with partners to get the best results.

Note: The National Crime Agency (NCA) retains primacy for dealing with reported food product contamination. The practices and relationships you have with them around that remain the same.

What is Food Crime?

Food crime is serious fraud that impacts on either the safety or the authenticity of food. At the NFCU, we have identified [seven types of food crime](#):

- **Theft** – Steal or dishonestly obtain food products for personal gain.
- **Unlawful processing** – Process food using unauthorised methods or premises.
- **Waste diversion** – Divert by-products, food, drink, or feed intended for disposal back into the food chain.
- **Adulteration** – Use incorrect ingredients to lower costs or fake higher quality.
- **Substitution** – Replace food or product contents with lower-quality ingredients without correct labelling.
- **Misrepresentation** – Incorrectly state a products quality, origin, or safety.
- **Document fraud** – Use false documents to sell fraudulent or substandard products.

How we work

We look to work with industry to ensure that they are best informed and prepared to identify, assess fraud, and effect counter measures around it.

Our vision, working with Scotland colleagues, is for the UK to be free from, and to be a hostile environment to, serious fraud within food supply chains. We aim to be regarded by consumers, government, and industry as proactive, innovative, and professional.

We aim to deliver this by applying simple problem-solving methodology.

Pursuing offenders

The NFCU will look to lead, support, or coordinate an investigation into suspected food crime. In making that decision the Head of the NFCU will consider the geographical scope and scale of the suspected offending and the nature and extent of the actual, potential, or intended harm to:

- the public
- a food business operator
- confidence in the UK food industry
- the strategic priorities of the NFCU as set out in its annual control strategy.

Preventing Food Crime Occurring

The food crime threat can be reduced by lawfully disrupting offending when identified either by our own actions or with partners. We also look to identify points at which individuals may start to commit offences and work to intervene to halt any further deterioration in their behaviour. This aims to stop issues of low-level non-compliance with food laws developing through dishonesty into serious fraud.

Protecting those at risk

Vulnerabilities to food crime can also be countered through protective measures. Making food production, manufacturing, and retail hostile environments for offenders to operate within is a key component of any holistic approach to crime prevention. Where fraudulent practice is identified, we need to know. This enables appropriate steps to be taken against identified offenders to protect the public and industry. We look to work with industry to help identify where there may be vulnerabilities to fraud and develop innovative solutions that protect businesses.

Preparing Resilience to Food Crime

By building the capacity and capability of partners across the regulatory and law enforcement landscape and food industry, we will get better coverage and understanding of food crime. Gathering information is key to knowing what is happening so that we can identify where to and how to act.

We want to work with, and ensure, the UK food industry is as secure as it can be. Assisting us will help achieve a reduction in food crime by:

- gathering and using food crime information to progress investigations enquiries
- initiating and supporting action conducted by other law enforcement bodies, such as local authorities or the police service
- raising awareness of food crime throughout industry and highlighting the risk it poses and how this risk can be mitigated. We will work with businesses in identifying vulnerabilities and how to address them.

Ensuring Consumer Trust:

- providing regular strategic assessments which illustrate our understanding of the threat to the UK from food crime
- making sure identified threats are prioritised based on the greatest risk of harm to consumers, industry, and the wider public interest
- establishing and maintaining a high public profile for food crime matters
- demonstrating leadership of the response to food crime in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

What is the threat from food crime?

The impact of food crime can be very harmful to consumers, food businesses, local communities, the economy, and the UK's reputation abroad.

The UK benefits from some of the safest and most authentic food and drink in the world. However, threats do exist and the more that is done to understand them, the more can be done to prevent harm to consumers.

Food crime has certain characteristics that will always pose challenges for detection, and when seeking to understand and assess its full scale and nature. Food crime is not necessarily identifiable through a food safety incident, which makes discovery by law enforcement extremely challenging.

That is why reporting from industry is key to the work of the NFCU. Every industry partner has a legal and moral obligation to ensure that the UK food industry is protected from any fraudulent activities that could affect businesses and may pose a safety risk to end consumers.

How can the NFCU support industry?

By developing and sharing knowledge of the threats the UK faces.

The NFCU work to keep industry and consumers informed of any risks or threats that we are seeing. We are committed to sharing our knowledge and understanding of food crime to support our partners.

Our support can be shown in many different forms, such as comms campaigns aimed at a particular sector of the food industry or community within the UK. We also produce bulletins for local authorities, and articles for the food industry which are released via many different channels, such as the quarterly NFCU Newsletter.

Prevention Officers and Relationship Managers also work with food industry partners on food fraud by offering bespoke advice, presenting to suppliers/customers, presenting at industry conferences or webinars and developing tools to assist in building their resilience. We encourage regular engagement with industry to better understand any vulnerabilities they may be facing and offer bespoke advice to help reduce such vulnerabilities.

Online Food Fraud Self Assessment Tool

The NFCU have launched their [Online Food Fraud Self-Assessment Tool](#), developed by the NFCU's Prevention team to assist food businesses in identifying the risk from food fraud and providing key advice. The tool can be found on the FSA website and is designed for food business operators in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It is free and easy to use and has been designed to be used by all food businesses regardless of size or sector.

The tool covers topics such as:

- countering fraud in the supply chain
- acting on food fraud
- reviewing counter-fraud processes and effectiveness
- anti-fraud culture

The tool should take no more than 15 minutes to complete and can be completed anonymously.

The team have also developed an In-Depth Fraud Assessment, which enables the team to meet with businesses and take a deeper dive into their fraud risk, and discuss where improvements can be made and highlight what is working.

Tackling Food Crime: A Shared Objective

For industry and consumers alike, effectively dealing with food crime protects the public and the integrity of UK food.

For businesses, tackling food crime ensures that product quality meets consumer expectations, which in turn helps maintain brand reputation and keeps the trust and safety of customers intact.

We are working towards the same goals. We want to ensure that the UK's food industry maintains its reputation for excellence for providing the safest and highest quality food and drink in the world. That is why the NFCU is committed to working with industry and building meaningful relationships in order to tackle food crime.

How Industry support the NFCU?

Tell us when you have broader suspicions of food crime. Inform us of any information that might relate to suspected dishonesty within the food supply chain. This may range from a commodity being sold at a price which just doesn't make financial sense, projected supply issues that could create opportunity through to suppliers continuing to sell product against a backdrop of shortages. Any suspicions can be reported in confidence to the NFCU. Rest assured that any information shared will always be handled professionally, in confidence and sensitively.

Work with a Relationship Manager

Relationship Managers are a dedicated contact within the NFCU who engage with numerous partners across industry to facilitate intelligence sharing between the unit and industry. A Relationship Manager can offer you a specific point of contact that you can trust to share information within an informal setting. Relationship Managers aim to not only build, but also maintain, relationships within industry at all levels. If you wish to engage with a relationship manager initial contact can be made via email: NFCU.Prevention@food.gov.uk.

Promote the NFCU and Food Crime Confidential

The NFCU operates the Food Crime Confidential service: a secure and dedicated reporting facility for those working in and around the food industry to report suspicions of food crime. Promotion of this facility, by and within businesses, demonstrates support for our counter-fraud mission and ensures that awareness is raised across industry.

Embed Fraud Resilience Mechanisms

To detect concerns relating to possible food criminality, it is essential that food businesses understand what fraudulent behaviour might look like for them. This enables businesses to better detect and respond to threats and risks identified through implementation of a fraud resilience strategy.

The Institute of Food Safety, Integrity, and Protection has published a [Fraud Resilience Good Practice Guide](#) for the food and drink sectors. This publication helps partners to review and enhance their existing protocols, and in turn support the reporting of concerns to the NFCU.

Work with the Prevention Team

The prevention teams' main purpose is to help protect businesses and consumers by reducing the likelihood and impact of food crime. We encourage Industry to work with the team to gain a better understanding of their current/potential vulnerabilities and how to combat them. The team are constantly working on new innovative preventative tools such as the food fraud resilience online tool to help tackle food crime.

Protecting your information

We understand the importance of protecting information provided by a food business and the risk to their reputation if this were to be handled incorrectly. Protecting this information enables the NFCU to pursue stronger, more impactful outcomes by defending consumers and businesses from criminal activity.

The information we would like you to supply is contained in Annex A of this document. The methodology is tried and tested in the UK criminal justice system. We want to work with partners in a confidential manner to protect the public from the consequences of food crime.

The following processes will apply when handling information:

- we will record it, retain it, review and develop it to enable us to identify any necessary lines of enquiry around the reported conduct. In line with CIPA.
- we will store it on protected systems, processed in a manner that ensures appropriate security of the personal data, including protection against unauthorised or unlawful processing and against accidental loss, destruction or damage, using appropriate technical or organisational measures ('integrity and confidentiality'). UK GDPR
- where information provided is used as the start of an investigation, investigators will work to gather evidential proof of any offences collected for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes, to protect information from becoming evidence that is available to the defence. It will be processed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner in relation to the data subject ('lawfulness, fairness and transparency')
- all information, regardless of type, content, perceived initial sensitivity or relevance gathered during the course of an investigation will be revealed to the Prosecutor, who will assess this information in line with CPIA for potential disclosure. We will endeavour to safeguard any sensitive information through appropriate CPIA safeguarding processes.

The NFCU's Industry Charter

The NFCU is committed to working with the food and drink industry to ensure consumers and food businesses in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are protected from serious dishonesty within food supply chains.

The following commitments underpin how we will work with you to do this:

- all information provided by you to us will always be treated with professionalism and discretion, and will be protected against inappropriate disclosure
- we will share our understanding of the nature and the scale of food crime with partners, to support them in building and maintaining resilience to such threats
- we will work with food businesses to investigate allegations of food crime and to design out fraud opportunity

Contact Us

If your business has been the victim of food crime, or have other food crime-related suspicions or concerns to share with us, please contact us:

Food Crime Confidential: Freephone 0800 028 1180. For calls from non-UK mobiles or calls from overseas please use 0207 276 8787.

E-mail: FoodCrime@food.gov.uk

Web form: [Report a food crime](#) (food.gov.uk)

To discuss closer working opportunities with us, or to request access to the intelligence assessments we produce, please contact the NFCU Relationship Management team at NFCU.Prevention@food.gov.uk.

Annex A: The NFCU Information Requirement

When did this take place?

Times and dates

Where did this take place?

This can include a description of the layout of a building, significant rooms, out buildings et cetera? – is it a business premises, private dwelling, public place et cetera? (Address including postcode?)

Who is involved?

Company, supplier, courier, private individual, employee

Name, Description, date of birth, Address, Telephone Number and Email

What vehicles used?

Registration Plate, make colour, markings (company names et cetera) anything distinctive. Refrigerated vans, lorries, cars et cetera.

What is the activity being done?

Substitution, Waste diversion, Adulteration, Theft, Document Fraud, Unlawful Processing. Misrepresentation (include all that apply)

How is the activity being done?

Modus Operandi, techniques involved. As much detail as is relevant

Who is gaining from this?

How are they gaining money?

Who is losing from this?

Extent of loss financially and risk to public health?