

Introduction of a Campylobacter proficiency testing scheme for food laboratories

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In 2018, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) commissioned UK Health Security Agency's (UKHSA; previously known as Public Health England) Food and Environmental Proficiency Testing Unit (FEPTU) to provide a bespoke external quality assessment (EQA) scheme for the detection and enumeration of Campylobacter spp. from a simulated matrix representing uncooked chicken.

This EQA scheme was available to food laboratories in the UK that provide an accredited test for Campylobacter spp. in foods. At the time there was no reliable test for Campylobacter identification. Not all laboratories consistently took all the distributions that were available, therefore the final numbers reporting a result varied by sample and by distribution.

The Campylobacter spp. strains chosen to simulate food samples varied and contained the common poultry species (jejuni as well as lari and coli). There was variation in the enumerations results reported, even though all laboratories claimed the same method was used. This scheme has been useful to demonstrate the capabilities of laboratories for detecting and enumerating samples for Campylobacter spp.. Only one laboratory obtained a total performance of 100% for all samples examined suggesting that there is room for improvement for all the other laboratories.

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