

Call for Evidence: The impact of discounts on charges for official controls and other official activities in relation to meat premises

Status: Open

Date launched: 12 September 2024

Closing date: 24 October 2024

This call for evidence will be most relevant to:

- Food business operators (FBOs) in the meat industry whose activities are subject to official controls (OC) and other official activities (OOA) charged for by the FSA
- Trade associations representing such FBOs
- Suppliers and customers of such FBOs and their trade associations
- Associations and groups representing the wider interests of consumers in relation to food, especially of those who consume the products produced by such FBOs or to which they contribute
- Individuals or groups of consumers with an interest in the topic
- Authorities and professional associations representing those who carry out OC and OOA, including enforcement, in meat premises
- Experts in the policy and law of regulatory charging or the meat industry, including departments of UK governments
- Experts with expertise relevant to the meat sector and its relationship with the wider food system

Purpose of the call for evidence

The purpose of the call for evidence is:

- To gather evidence on how discounts applied to charges for OC and OOA for businesses in the meat sector provide benefits to businesses and consumers.

How to respond

Responses to this call for evidence should be [submitted via this online form](#).

The form sets out the evidence required under questions, which may be responded to in text boxes. After the section with the questions, there is also a further text box for further comments.

Details of call for evidence

The role of the FSA

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) is an independent non-ministerial Government department, established in 2000 to protect public health and consumer interests in relation to food.

The FSA is the national authority responsible for food safety and food hygiene across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The FSA's remit includes ensuring minimum standards of meat hygiene are maintained within approved slaughterhouses and meat establishments throughout Great Britain. In Northern Ireland, this role is carried out by the Department of Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA).

The geographical scope of the call for evidence is England, Wales and Northern Ireland. A separate charging and discount scheme operates in Scotland, run by Food Standards Scotland.

Official controls in meat establishments

The FSA inspects food businesses in the meat sector directly, to verify that they are complying with food safety regulations and wider food standards. FSA Official Veterinarians (OV) and Meat Hygiene Inspectors (MHI) work as a team to inspect every animal and carcass in abattoirs, playing an essential function in livestock farming and protecting public health.

The checks carried out by the FSA are called official controls (OC). They ensure that meat is fit for human consumption. Without them, meat products could not be placed on the market in the UK nor exported worldwide. OVs and MHIs make sure that businesses comply with regulations and, with local authorities, enforce the law when necessary. OC are a vital part of delivering food you can trust.

Some examples of OC include checks on:

- The safe slaughter, production and processing of meat
- Animal welfare in abattoirs (carried out by the FSA on behalf of and funded by other government departments in England and Wales)
- Meat being traceable through the supply chain with correct ID marking

Charges and discounts for official controls

OC and OOA are a service provided to businesses by the FSA. The FSA charges businesses for this service to cover the FSA's costs. The FSA does not profit from charging for OC and OOA and discounts are provided to businesses on a sliding scale. The service provides good value for businesses. The meat industry is worth [£10.9 billion to the UK economy](#), set against the total FSA charges to the industry of £39.5m in 2023/24.

The cost of providing this service is subject to the same pressures currently being felt in the wider economy in terms of inflation as well as some more specific factors such as moves to increase the resilience of supply of veterinary personnel following a period of shortages in qualified staff. These changes have the potential to see some significant cost increases in the next financial year which will need to be passed on to businesses and ultimately may affect consumers.

The FSA provides a discount on these costs, set in collaboration with industry bodies, on a sliding scale which corresponds to the number of chargeable hours a business requires (see Tables 1a and 1b below). Larger businesses, who require more hours, receive a lower level of discount overall. Smaller businesses where the cost of OC may make up a greater proportion of their turnover get more support. The rate of discount has been falling on average over the last four years (in 4 of 6 bands), with the exception of those businesses requiring the lowest chargeable hours, but discounts continue to provide considerable support to the industry (see Tables 1a, 1b and 2 below).

Table 1a: Discount rates by band in England and Wales, 2021 to 2024

Discount Band	Discount 2021/22	Discount 2022/23	Discount 2023/24	Discount 2024/25
1 (lowest)	90%	90%	90%	90%
2	75%	75%	75%	75%
3	28%	21%	17%	26%
4	27%	20%	16%	14%
5	25%	19%	15%	4%
6 (highest)	24%	18%	13%	2%

Table 1b: Discount rates by band in Northern Ireland, 2021 to 2024

Discount Band	Discount 2021/22	Discount 2022/23	Discount 2023/24	Discount 2024/25
1 (lowest)	85%	85%	85%	85%
2	70%	70%	70%	70%
3	50%	48%	42%	40%
4	34%	30%	24%	22%
5	18%	14%	7%	6%
6 (highest)	5%	5%	5%	2%

Table 2: Total value of discounts on charges to industry in £m, 2021 to 2023

Year	England and Wales	Northern Ireland
2021/22	£17.4	£2.7
2022/23	£16.7	£2.7
2023/24	£15.5	£2.3

Details of the existing [charging scheme](#), including discount rates, can be found on the FSA website. (Note that charges for enforcement action and some trade related activity are not discounted and cutting plants do not receive a discount.)

The Treasury guidance [Managing Public Money](#) sets out the rules for public bodies in relation to charging for services. It states ‘Charges for services provided by public sector organisations normally pass on the full cost of providing them. There is scope for charging more or less than this provided that ministers choose to do so, Parliament consents and there is full disclosure.’ This is to make sure that the government neither profits at the expense of consumers nor makes a loss for taxpayers.

To date, the FSA has provided discounts, the rate of which varies according to the number of hours of OC and OOA the FSA provides to Food Business Operators (FBOs). This subsidy to businesses can only be justified if charging the full cost of the service provided does not meet ministers’ policy objectives. The FSA must therefore be able to justify not charging the full cost of providing the service in terms of protecting public health or protecting the interests of consumers in relation to food. The FSA must also be able to demonstrate that it manages public money carefully and offers clear value for money to the taxpayer, especially at a time when departmental budgets are under pressure. This includes the cost of administration of the discounting scheme.

Purpose of the call for evidence

The aim of this call for evidence is to identify if and how discounts applied to charges for OC and OOA for businesses in the meat sector provide benefits to businesses and consumers, and value for money for Government. Evidence submitted in response to this call will be used to advise Ministers on the appropriate balance of charges and discounts at the strategic level. It will also help the FSA to understand consumers’ and other interested parties’ perceptions of the effects of the discount. Finally, it will provide greater insight into the administration required by those involved in the operation and application of discounts. The results of the call for evidence will be communicated to the FSA Board at the December public Board meeting to help to inform their advice to Ministers on meat charges and discounts.

This work is separate to and does not replace work on setting the charges and discount rates for 2025/6 which is underway and expected to be published in February 2025.

Evidence required

In this section, ‘charges’ and ‘discounts’ refer to the FSA’s charges and discounts for OC and OOA in relation to meat premises.

We are interested in receiving information about:

1. The benefits of offering a discount on charges for:

- Consumers
- FBOs in the meat sector who are charged for OC and OOA
- Retailers, primary producers (e.g. livestock farmers) and other FBOs in the supply chain
- OV, MHIs and other officials involved in the delivery of OC and their enforcement
- Wider society, the food system and others who may benefit

2. Any negative impacts of offering a discount on charges for:

- Consumers
- FBOs in the meat sector who are charged for OC and OOA
- Retailers, primary producers (e.g. livestock farmers) and other FBOs in the supply chain
- OV, MHIs and other officials involved in the delivery of OC and their enforcement
- Wider society, the food system and others who may be subject to negative impacts

3. The administrative burden of managing discounts on FBOs, OV and MHIs as well as any suggestions for simplifying administration.

4. The impact of being unable to provide the discount and what could happen as a result for:

- Consumers
- FBOs in the meat sector who are charged for OC and OOA
- Retailers, primary producers (e.g. livestock farmers) and other FBOs in the supply chain
- Micro-, small- and medium- sized enterprises and smaller premises that benefit the most from discounts and on the consumers they supply
- OV, MHIs and other officials involved in the delivery of OC and their enforcement
- Wider society, the food system and others who may be subject to negative impacts

5. How the discount or other measures could help manage or reduce the impact of the increase in charges in 2025/6 on those who will be affected.

6. Comparisons with discounting and charging for public sector services in other regulated sectors in the UK or in other countries.

Responses

Responses are required by close **24 October 2024**. Please state, in your response, whether you are responding as a private individual or on behalf of an organisation/company (including details of any stakeholders your organisation represents).

[Please submit responses via this online form.](#)

Information will be subject to the FSA's obligations under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and to the extent such information contains personal data it will be processed in accordance with our Privacy notice for consultation. Commercially sensitive information and/or information confidential in nature should be specifically identified in your response. This will be considered in conjunction with the requirements outlined above.

For information on how the FSA handles your personal data, please refer to our [Consultation privacy notice](#).

Further information

If you require a more accessible format of this document please send details to MeatChargingPolicy@food.gov.uk and your request will be considered.

Thank you on behalf of the Food Standards Agency for helping to ensure that our policy development is supported by a robust evidence basis.

Meat Charging Policy