

Food allergy symposium brings industry, enforcement and consumers together for the first time

The event, held in London, saw over 100 delegates from key food industry sectors, local authority enforcement, clinical allergists and allergy consumer groups. The aim was to gather and galvanise partners from both inside and outside Government to showcase best practice, raise awareness and deliver change that would improve the lives of the food hypersensitive consumer.

Events of the day

Delegates heard first-hand experiences from people living with or caring for those with food allergy, as they described the impact of quality of life and the need for empathy and kindness. Experts spoke on a range of subjects including understanding the causes and diagnosis of allergies and the importance of reporting and acting on incidents to keep people safe.

Speaker panels dealt with thought provoking and lively questions, while interactive workshops gave attendees the chance to discuss important issues such as who was responsible for keeping people safe when eating out, systems for managing allergen information, reporting of allergen incidents and the enforcement of allergen control.

A common objective

FSA Chair Heather Hancock said:

'This symposium is a milestone in setting a shared agenda for how we tackle the challenges of food allergies and intolerances. I was especially encouraged by the sense of common purpose that ran through the whole event. The messages and priorities were clear and based on deep insight and expertise. We will be building these into our plans and are committed to a collaborative approach to improving life for people with food allergies and intolerances.'

An allergy advocate and mother to a child with multiple food allergies, Alexa Baracaia said she would like to see many more events of this nature where open and honest discussions could be had.

'It was hugely heartening to see so many making an active commitment to improving the life of the food allergic - there was a genuine desire to get things right. At the end of the day, better allergy provision comes down to clear and empathetic communication. That's really all we ask, and today felt like a big stepping-stone towards that goal.'

An insightful approach to serving customers safely was offered by Rupi Zani, Director of Safety and Wellbeing at Pizza Express – a food business that is well thought of by the allergy community. She said:

'I was very pleased to see so many industry, enforcement and consumer representatives come together with the great desire to improve eating out for the food hypersensitive consumer. I am definitely looking forward to more collaborative working in this space.'

Christina Heeley, from Barnsley Council's Regulatory Service, presented a ground-breaking project carried out with Barnsley Hospital, for reporting incidents of food-based allergic reactions. She said:

'It was a great event and very useful to have a platform where we could share the good work being carried out and have our voice heard, as part of the discussion.'

An FSA priority

Food hypersensitivity is a priority for the FSA because it is a significant food-related health issue that has a severe and enduring impact. Initial work to estimate and quantify this impact suggests that food hypersensitivity has a greater economic and financial impact than for all foodborne diseases.

You can find out more about our allergy programme in our board paper.

PDF

[View FSA 20-01-08 - Food Hypersensitivity Strategy as PDF\(Open in a new window\)](#) (183.17 KB)

We will also be sharing outputs from the workshops, shortly.