

FSA and Official Controls: Research with food business operators

Area of research interest: [Behaviour and perception](#)

Study duration: 2020-02-01

Planned completion: 1 April 2020

Project code: FS305040

Conducted by: Community Research and 2CV Research

Background

Food Business Operators (FBOs) in the meat, wine and dairy sectors all have a direct relationship with the Food Standards Agency (FSA) via its Official Controls (OCs), including inspections, enforcement, advice and guidance.

The FSA has anecdotal evidence on the views of these FBOs regarding the FSA and its OCs, but wished to build a firmer basis of evidence on FBOs' views in these three sectors. This insight would be used to improve relationships and inform future engagement with FBOs.

This research project aimed to investigate and explore:

- FBOs' understanding of the FSA's remit;
- FBOs' views of the FSA and its services;
- How FBOs prefer the FSA to communicate with them; and
- Barriers to compliance, and how FBOs could be supported to be more compliant.

In addition to the insight on FBO attitudes in relation to the FSA, a secondary objective was to evaluate the methods used to engage with these audiences. Previous efforts to conduct research with meat FBOs had achieved mixed results, and the FSA wished to ascertain how best to engage with different FBOs, should the research be repeated in the future.

Research Approach

A mixed method approach was chosen as the most appropriate for this project. Qualitative interviews with meat and wine FBOs and quantitative interviews with dairy, meat and wine FBOs.

Qualitative research

A mixture of face-to-face and telephone interviews were conducted with 54 businesses in total.

These interviews followed a semi-structured discussion guide which allowed participants to provide detailed feedback, while focussing on specific themes. Participants were also asked a number of quantitative style questions that could be used to supplement the quantitative data.

Quantitative research

There are many more dairy FBOs in England and Wales, and therefore it was possible to achieve 327 interviews which robust number of quantitative interviews with this audience.

Quantitative interviews were also conducted with some meat and wine FBOs. Although the qualitative interviews were required to provide the depth of insight required, it was felt that it would be useful to have some quantitative measure from the research across all three sectors that could be used as a baseline

Key Findings

- The research found that most FBOs were broadly positive about the FSA. Nearly three quarters rated their overall experience of working with the FSA as good or very good.
- Wine FBOs were most positive overall; 48% said that their experience of working with the FSA was very good (compared with 23% of meat and 24% of dairy FBOs).
- While most FBOs said that they were clear about what the FSA's overall purpose was, there was less clarity about its specific remit or about how it was funded.
- When considering what they valued about the FSA, FBOs were most likely to describe it as helpful, professional and knowledgeable. They felt that it performed an important role, and they valued the advice and information it provided. FSA staff (particularly wine inspectors) were considered knowledgeable.
- The negative words most commonly used to describe the FSA were frustrating, challenging and inconsistent. FBOs felt that there was a lack of consistency when it came to the interpretation of FSA guidelines, and that advice and instructions were not always clearly communicated.

Research report
PDF

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