

Food crime intelligence reporting: barriers and enablers

Area of research interest: [Food crime](#)

Project code: FS301051

Background

The Food Standards Agency's (FSA) National Food Crime Unit (NFCU) identifies, analyses and responds to serious fraud and related criminality within food supply chains that affects the safety or the authenticity of food, drink and animal feed in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

This project aimed to guide the development of future interventions and governance arrangements to increase the volume and improve the quality of intelligence reported to the NFCU.

Objectives and Approach

Objectives of the literature review and stakeholder interviews were to:

1. Assess the current state of evidence regarding the characteristics and motivations of individuals and organisations that report criminal activity to law enforcement agencies.
2. Identify social, behavioural and institutional factors which help or hinder the reporting of intelligence regarding criminal activity to law enforcement agencies.
3. Identify best practice in facilitating the reporting of criminal intelligence to law enforcement agencies, and in the processing, governance and protection of sensitive information within intelligence reporting arrangements.
4. Examine and evaluate the implications, advantages and disadvantages of involving external intermediaries in facilitating the reporting of criminal intelligence to law enforcement agencies.

Options for behavioural interventions to encourage food crime intelligence reporting to NFCU and its partner agencies were then explored. The research design for one of these options was developed, but efforts to implement were unsuccessful due to an insufficient sample willing to participate in the fieldwork.

Findings

Key barriers to food crime intelligence reporting include:

- An evolving national culture that has progressed towards greater support for whistleblowing, yet remains unfavourable to external and informal reporting.
- A legislative framework that strongly signals support for internal reporting, and provides no protection to those who would report externally at first because they may (rightly) feel that reporting internally would lead to no resolution of the wrongdoing and would rather lead to retaliation.
- Limitations of some informal options for reporting intelligence externally, particularly reporting to the media and industry safe spaces.

- An industry structure, culture and contracting practices that discourage external reporting, by diluting responsibilities across long supply chains, keeping participants in interdependent relationships, and normalising wrongdoing as 'sharp practice'.
- A workforce that is, in large part, characterised by low income, mixed cultural backgrounds, and job insecurity, and therefore is relatively less likely to report intelligence than the workforce one may find in other sectors.

Research report

PDF

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