

# Our roles

The FSA's different roles in the food system and how each informs the 5-year strategy.

The FSA has a range of statutory powers and duties, and we carry out different roles in the food system.

- We are an [evidence generator](#)
- We are a [policy maker](#)
- We are a [regulator](#)
- We are a [watchdog](#)
- We are a [convenor and collaborator](#)

This chapter doesn't set out a complete work plan for the next five years, but includes some key examples to illustrate the work we expect to do. Our more detailed approach to business planning is described in [implementing the strategy and measuring progress](#).

In most cases, these roles work together to deliver the different parts of our vision.

## An evidence generator



One of the main statutory functions of the FSA is to act as a generator of evidence and analysis on the areas within our remit (set out in section 8 of the [Food Standards Act 1999](#)).

We obtain, review, and publish information. We understand risks and develop our evidence base. We also gather intelligence to inform our approach across other areas of our work, for example targeting our resources where they are most needed.

Most of our work as an evidence generator will concern food safety and authenticity. However, we will also grow our existing evidence base on healthier and more sustainable food. We will focus particularly on the behaviour and experiences of consumers in these areas, and on making sure we are well-equipped to engage with evidence generated by others in these areas.

### What we do

We have a global reputation for science and research. From the rapid assessment of risks to consumer safety, to developing new surveillance techniques to identify risks more quickly, to

understanding consumer behaviour. We publish our evidence in line with our commitment to transparency. This means it is freely available to others making policy and decisions, to inform guidance to businesses and so the public can trust our decisions.

## **Why do we do this**

To ensure that our decisions, and those of others, are informed by the best evidence – so that people can have food you can trust. We want strong data, analysis, insight and research to be influential on the big environmental and health outcomes around food, as well as on food safety and authenticity.

## **Our ambition**

We will create and join up evidence across a range of issues relating to food. We will build our evidence base. We will incorporate evidence about health and sustainability alongside our body of knowledge on food safety and authenticity.

## **Our work in this space**

### **Building our scientific capability**

Official Laboratories (OLs) are responsible for carrying out important analysis of food and feed samples. This analysis is used to run statutory checks at the border for imports, support criminal law enforcement, support local authorities in carrying out their environmental health and trading standards duties, and allow effective responses to major food and feed incidents.

The scale and range of analytical tests has declined in recent years, and following our departure from the EU, we have also lost access to EU Reference Laboratories, which developed analytical methods and undertook knowledge sharing with UK labs. In the coming years, we will reform and improve the system, to address the decline in capacity and build a resilient Official Controls laboratory system.

### **Foodborne Disease Framework**

We have developed our Foodborne Disease Framework to bring together data and surveillance information on the thirteen pathogens with the most detrimental effect on society. The framework is also informed by a Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis tool, developed by the FSA, to calculate which of the pathogens has the most detrimental effect on society (e.g. number of cases per year, cost to society and the level of public concern). Overall, the approach will assist our work in delivering risk reduction plans for each, in line with our principle of being risk-based and proportionate.

### **Dietary health surveillance in Northern Ireland**

In Northern Ireland, where the FSA is responsible for advising ministers on nutrition, we commission and analyse a range of surveys to monitor aspects of diets and purchasing patterns. We use these to inform our work, to share with stakeholders working on these issues and to monitor outcomes in the Northern Ireland obesity prevention strategy. The data is regularly shared with key stakeholders in Northern Ireland to support wider dietary health research and policy development.

### **Assessing alternative proteins**

In the future, we expect to receive regulated product applications for alternative proteins. Enquiries received so far have included cultured (lab grown) meat, plant and algae-based products and edible insects. We want to be proactive, recognising the potential of alternative proteins to benefit dietary health, the environment and the UK economy, while still ensuring food is safe and what it says it is.

We will continue to advise stakeholders and partners about providing high quality evidence to support their applications and help address any concerns. We are also funding research to better understand the possible safety risks and other new issues that may be associated with alternative proteins. We are looking at consumer attitudes to these products and how the safety risks might be different to traditional proteins, to help inform future regulatory decisions and advice to industry.

## **A policy maker**



We have a statutory function to develop policies that relate to food safety or the other interests of consumers in relation to food.

In other policy areas, we will still offer advice or input to policymakers where we have relevant evidence or skills, but other departments will “own” the policy and advise their ministers on it.

As a policy-maker, our focus will primarily be on our core role of food that is safe and is what it says it is, and our nutrition remit in Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland will also require a different approach to policy making, as it is still subject to EU policy decisions under the Northern Ireland Protocol.

### **What we do**

We advise ministers on food safety, food authenticity and consumer interests in relation to food in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The policy areas we advise on are different in each nation. Ministers then make the laws and rules for all businesses involved in the production and sale of food. This is underpinned by risk assessments of new developments and using science and evidence.

### **Why we do this**

To make sure the body of guidance, rules and regulations that exist – nationally, internationally and at a devolved level – deliver food you can trust.

## **Our ambition**

We will make robust recommendations and support ministers to take informed decisions on rules relating to food, based on evidence and independent assessments. We will carry out this work in line with our principles to act in a proportionate and risk-based manner and to make it easier for businesses to meet their obligations. We will take a four-country approach to our work, considering England, Wales, Northern Ireland and collaborating with FSS for Scotland. We will identify and grasp opportunities for regulatory reform, so our approach adapts to the changing food system.

## **Our areas of policy responsibility**

Across **England, Wales** and **Northern Ireland**:

- Food and feed safety and hygiene
- This includes food hypersensitivity

In **Wales** and **Northern Ireland**:

- Compositional standards and labelling\*

In **Northern Ireland** only:

- Nutritional standards and labelling
- Dietary health and surveillance

(\*In England the FSA implements and enforces rules for these areas, but does not lead policy development).

Important

We have more guidance on devolved responsibilities and collaborative working across the UK in [four-country working](#).

## **Our work in this space**

### **Authorising Regulated Products**

The FSA and FSS are now responsible for making recommendations to ministers on authorisations for regulated food and feed products before they can enter the market in Great Britain. We also plan to review and modernise the inherited legislation from the EU to streamline the authorisation approach. This will make it clearer and easier, which will promote UK innovation and economic growth, making it easier for businesses to meet their obligations and do the right thing for consumers.

### **Securing National Food Crime Unit legal powers**

The FSA's National Food Crime Unit (NFCU) is responsible for tackling serious, organised, and complex cases of food crime. We will publicly consult on proposals for enhanced powers for the NFCU to support investigations and relieve the burden on police and trading standards colleagues.

### **Working across the UK Government, Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Executive following EU Exit**

We are increasing our capability to support the government's work on trade opportunities for the UK outside of the EU. We provide risk assessments of countries that want to start importing to the UK, supporting Free Trade Agreement negotiations and demonstrating our own food safety arrangements to countries we export to.

The NI Protocol and the devolved nature of food policy decisions also mean that, now Great Britain is outside the EU's harmonised system, divergence has already started to occur between the regulatory systems of different UK nations. We are committed to working with other parts of government to seek consensus in the advice we provide to ministers in each country.

However, there may be occasions where the advice we give to ministers includes potential for divergence between different countries. Our approach to these questions is to keep safety, and public health risks identified through risk assessment, as the central factor in our decisions, while acknowledging the wider context and the impact our proposals may have on other consumer interests.

## A regulator



We have specific responsibility as a direct regulator within the meat, dairy and wine sectors, enforcing rules including food safety, integrity and wholesomeness. We also monitor and enforce compliance with animal welfare rules in slaughterhouses on behalf of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) in England and the Welsh Government in Wales. In Northern Ireland, this work is carried out for the FSA by DAERA.

We guide, advise and train the local authorities and port health authorities who enforce the rules for the food and feed businesses that the FSA does not directly regulate.

We are also supporting local authorities and port health authorities to build their capability for the introduction of checks on imported food and feed from the EU following the UK's exit.

Our statutory responsibilities as a regulator are focused on making sure that food is safe and is what it says it is. However, we will explore how we can make sure that we appropriately consider the health or environmental impacts of food in our work assuring food safety and authenticity.

## What we do

We regulate the food system in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. We directly deliver controls in meat, primary dairy and wine production. We work with local authorities who inspect local businesses selling food – setting the inspection framework, providing advice and guidance. We do the same for port health authorities, who inspect food imports. We provide guidance to food businesses. We use surveillance to identify risks to consumers and spot potential food safety

incidents, and we respond to these when they happen.

## Why we do this

To make sure that food businesses are compliant with the rules and to support them to follow best practice, so that consumers have food you can trust.

## Our ambition

We will act in line with our principle to be proportionate and risk-based, tailoring our approach to different businesses and the level of risk they present to consumers. We will invest our resources to regulate and assure food businesses in smarter ways, making it easier for businesses to meet their obligations and do the right thing for consumers. We will work with and through other influential actors on the food system, such as digital aggregators.

## Our work in this space

### Achieving Business Compliance

Our **Achieving Business Compliance (ABC) programme** will modernise the way food businesses are regulated by the FSA and local authorities, by developing new ways to maintain effective regulatory oversight over a more diverse and complex food system.

Our ABC programme will develop a set of smarter regulatory approaches which will make it easier for businesses to provide safe and trusted food for consumers, target regulatory resources at the areas which pose the greatest risk and improve compliance across the system by working with and through others.

The programme includes three workstreams:

1. **Targeted and proportionate regulation.** We are designing a more targeted and proportionate approach to local authority regulation of food businesses.
2. **Enterprise-level approaches.** We will design new regulatory models for a set of large businesses that are compliant with regulation and influential in the food chain.
3. **Assurance of online food sales.** We will assess the potential risks to consumers from buying food online, and the regulatory levers available to address these.

### Operational Transformation

The regulatory model for the Official Controls we deliver directly needs to keep pace with industry innovation. Similar to the ABC programme described above, we will regulate in a smarter way while continuing to ensure trust and food safety. We will be innovative, and risk based and proportionate and ensure a cost-effective future delivery model.

Our **Operational Transformation programme** will:

- Develop a modernised, proportionate approach to inspections
- Improve process and delivery to increase compliance, refocus limited resources in the areas of highest risk.

We will look to make improvements within the current legislative framework, but will also seek legislative change where needed.

### Food Hygiene Rating Scheme

The FSA operates the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS) in partnership with local authorities across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The scheme provides information to the public on the hygiene standards in food premises at the time of local authority inspections to check compliance with legal requirements. The scheme is an important public health protection measure: high ratings are linked with a lower incidence of foodborne disease.

People can access ratings at [food.gov.uk/ratings](https://www.food.gov.uk/ratings), via smartphone apps, and through open data. Businesses are also given distinctive black and green stickers showing their rating for display at their premises.

Businesses in Wales and Northern Ireland are required by law to display their rating stickers at their premises, and proposals to legislate for online display are being progressed. In England, display is currently voluntary, but we are committed to pressing the case for mandatory display both at premises and online to align with Wales and Northern Ireland.

## **Feed Delivery Programme**

The FSA is responsible for commissioning the delivery of feed Official Controls through local authority partners. The UK's departure from the EU along with the need for the feed sector to contribute to sustainable food production has created the environment for a swiftly changing landscape in feed supply chains.

For example, there have been developments in the use of insect proteins and feed additive applications, which their developers hope will have positive environmental impacts. The FSA has a role to play to ensure that feed regulation is sufficiently agile to respond to the fast pace of innovation.

We will work with our stakeholders to ensure safety and continued public health protection. We will support our local authority delivery partners by:

- Making best use of the capability and capacity of enforcement partners.
- Developing tools and mechanisms to speed up the identification of feed imports, thereby focusing resource on matters of most impact.
- Updating our Official Control directions and guidance to provide timely clarity where fast paced developments require this.

## **Shellfish Site Classification**

The FSA is responsible for the classification of shellfish harvesting areas which is a pre-requisite for shellfish production. Sites are classified depending on the level of contamination indicated by E.coli testing. The UK's departure from the EU placed additional focus on this sector and on the classification programme.

We are refining our approaches to delivering shellfish official controls, working within the current legal framework to support businesses as they adapt to new export requirements and making sure any changes are evidence-based and public health is protected. We will continue to work with our stakeholders to modernise the way these controls are delivered.

## **A watchdog**



The FSA can look across the food system and monitor developments or progress toward actions that support public health, or the other interests of consumers in relation to food. We will use our powers to publish advice and information.

We do this by: publishing reports on food standards, assessing the scale of food crime threats, and publishing independent advice to governments when we judge that there are risks to public safety or consumer interests. We will seek to use this watchdog role to drive changes in policy, consumer behaviour and business behaviour.

We will review and report on standards and consumer interests in relation to food in the UK, jointly with FSS.

We will gather and share intelligence on food crime, and then investigate and disrupt it as part of our regulator role.

We will speak out publicly about areas of consumer interest, when we have evidence or expertise to add.

## **What we do**

We review and report on food standards and consumer interests in relation to food, using horizon scanning, intelligence and surveillance. We speak out publicly about areas of consumer interest, when we have evidence or expertise that could make a difference.

## **Why we do this**

As an organisation working across the food system, we can help to spot emerging issues, trends and potential risks to consumers, and make sure that all those who make decisions that affect the food system are aware of them. This helps us, and others to protect the UK's high food standards and make sure everyone can continue to have food you can trust.

## **Our ambition**

We will use our independence, our voice and our evidence to inform and persuade others in line with our principle to be the trusted voice on food standards, protecting consumer interests.

## **Our work in this space**

### **Annual Report to Parliament**



The FSA will publish, jointly with FSS, a new annual report on food standards in 2022. Throughout the UK's preparations for EU Exit, the FSA and FSS were clear that we would work to uphold our high standards of food safety and authenticity once we left the EU. Our annual report has been developed to give consumers an independent, evidence-based report about UK food standards.

The report will cover the state of the nation's plate by providing an overview of people's eating and food purchasing behaviour: where people buy food, where people eat, what they eat and how much they spend on food. It will cover consumers' concerns, interests and priorities when it comes to food. The report will use a wide range of evidence to examine the core question: are food standards being maintained, raised, or lowered across the UK?

### **Food crime strategic assessments**

The FSA's [NFCU](#) and the FSS Scottish Food Crime and Incidents Unit publish periodic strategic assessments of food crime. These assessments describe threats from food crime to the UK and its interests.

For example, the previous assessment concluded that most food crime relates to two broad classes of activity – either the repurposing of materials holding little or no value in the food chain as edible and marketable, or the sale of passable food, drink or feed as a product with greater volume or more desirable attributes.

We use these assessments to develop our priorities and deliver strategies to counter the most harmful threats, and to direct intelligence collection where we have gaps in our coverage or understanding. The next strategic assessment is due to be published in early 2023.

### **A convenor and collaborator**



The FSA is just one of the actors in the food system. To deliver food you can trust, we will need to work with other parts of government, including the UK Government, Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Executive, FSS and local authorities, our delivery partners, industry and consumer associations.

We expect to be playing a convenor or collaborator role for much of our early work on food that is healthier and more sustainable. We do not hold policy responsibility for these areas, aside from nutritional standards and labelling in Northern Ireland, but we expect to work closely with the

departments that hold this, alongside partners outside government. We can bring our evidence and our experience of food policy regulation and consumer insights to help shape the development of their plans to make food healthier and more sustainable.

## **What we do**

We bring together parties to address issues in the food system, working with other parts of government, academia, civil society and businesses to support shared goals and objectives. We share insights and evidence on the interests of citizens to help inform thinking across government.

## **Why we do this**

To make sure that influential actors in the food system are working together, because we all have a role and responsibility to create a food system you can trust.

## **Our ambition**

We will be even more networked with other players in the food system. We act in line with our principle to work with and through others and develop deeper working relationships. This will deliver better outcomes for people and businesses, because we can achieve more together.

## **Our work in this space**

### **Growing our international presence**

The FSA's international strategy is to grow our influence to become a stronger and more influential voice on the world stage. We want to use our expertise to help solve problems faced internationally, and we want to learn from other regulators so that best practice is applied in the UK. We also want to make sure that imported food meets high standards, so will play our part in multilateral conversations about food standards.

The UK is influential in international forums, which set global food and animal and plant health standards, which are also used by the World Trade Organisation. Responsibilities for leading on the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission's different committees are split between government departments.

The FSA leads on food safety committees, such as food hygiene, food additives and contaminants; other committees have leads in other departments. The FSA is also active within World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

### **PATH-SAFE**

The **PATH-SAFE (Pathogen Surveillance in Agriculture, Food and the Environment) project** brings together the FSA, FSS, Defra, DHSC, the Health Security Agency and the Environment Agency to test the application of genomic technologies in the surveillance of foodborne pathogens and antimicrobial resistant microbes in all four nations of the UK.

£19.2m funding provided through the Treasury's Shared Outcomes Fund will support a three-year project to develop a pilot national surveillance network, using the latest DNA-sequencing technology and environmental sampling to improve the detection and tracking of foodborne and antimicrobial resistant pathogens through the whole agri-food system from farm to fork. This is a good example of delivering our principles of working with and through others, and being science

and evidence led.

### **School Food Standards**

We are working closely with colleagues in the Department for Education, Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, and local authorities to assess and improve the level of compliance with the School Food Standards. These standards are mandatory for state-funded schools in England, and set minimum nutrition standards for school food.

Using our knowledge of the food system and experience of working with local authorities, we are running a series of pilots to test how compliance with the standards can be better assured.