

Consultation on meat hygiene charging closes shortly

As reported in Edition 10 in December, the Food Standards Agency launched a 14-week consultation on 18 December 2008 on proposals to reform the charging system for official controls (inspections) in meat businesses in the UK. Comments and views are requested on the proposals to revise the charging arrangements for official meat controls in approved meat premises (slaughterhouses, game handling establishments and meat cutting plants) and the charge rates that apply to them, and to introduce new charging arrangements that would apply in certain cases where such controls are carried out on-farm. Your views are needed on these proposals but time is running out – the consultation will close on **25 March 2009**. You can find the full consultation package and guidance on how to comment at:

www.food.gov.uk/consultations/consulteng/2008/proposedcharging

Any changes to the current system would be expected to come into force on 29 June 2009.

New EC minimum charges

New EC minimum charges have been applied by the MHS from the January 2009 charging period. The first invoices at the new charge rates were issued during February. It has been suggested in the press that the MHS is profiteering as a result of the depreciation of the £ sterling against the Euro.

The MHS is required by European law to comply with minimum charges set by the EC. These are uplifted in January each year in line with the exchange rate for the first day published in September of the preceding year. As a result of charges levied by the MHS for certain species being very close to the minimum the depreciation of the £ has resulted in some substantial increases. For example, the rate for cattle aged eight months or older has increased by 18% (to £4.06) and the rate for turkeys (except those which are adult and weigh over 5kg) has increased by 20% (to 2 pence). These changes are a legal requirement. There is no element of profiteering by the MHS. Primarily as a result of the Maclean charging mechanism the MHS operates on a deficit basis and so any additional revenue only serves to reduce the deficit between costs and revenue. It should also be noted that the additional revenue has already been built into the proposals for the new charging mechanism to be introduced from 29 June 2009. The recommended proposal for a 9% increase in charges would only raise the additional £3m in revenue sought for 2009/10 when combined with the revenue from the new minimum charges. If the minimum charges were to be set now they would be even higher. Since September 2008 the £ has depreciated further against the Euro. The exchange rate published on 1 September 2008 was 1 Euro to £0.81165 but the rate published on 31 January 2009 was 1 Euro to £0.89785. One of the proposals forming part of the current consultation on charges is to apply revised EC minimum charge rates from the start of each new financial year from 2010, instead of the start of each calendar year as at present. This change would simplify and streamline administrative processes by combining this change with the usual point at which MHS hourly charges are revised.

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Inspection for contamination

For the MHS to deliver an effective and efficient inspection at post mortem, the FBO must take full responsibility for the production of safe meat particularly in respect of any visible contamination of the carcass. The FBO must ensure that visible contamination is removed without delay by trimming or by an alternative means having an equivalent effect.

FBOs should be monitoring contamination incidents as part of their HACCP based controls and taking corrective action.

MHS staff working at the point of post mortem inspection are recording any contamination that has not been dealt with correctly during the dressing process. We hope these results are helping all FBOs to be confident that their training and delivery in relation to dressing and evisceration is effective. FBOs should have arrangements in place to ensure that any contamination arising during processing is removed from the carcass. MHS staff should no longer be carrying out trimming of carcasses.

MHS new operational management structure from February 2009

The MHS's new operational management structure went live on 2 February. A key feature of the Transformed MHS has been the reorganisation of the operational management structure in order to, amongst other things, enhance efficiencies and make more effective use of resources. Supporting this change has been the review of the MHS's arrangements for the provision of contracted OVs and MHIs in fresh meat premises. As reported in Link through 2008, the MHS followed a lengthy tender process to secure the selection of contractors who have the quality and capability to meet our transformed service expectations. In December we reported which organisations would provide services to the transformed operational structure. The last few months have seen existing and new contractors working together to ease the transition process and minimise disruption to FBOs. Many FBOs have seen no change of contractor supplying their premises. All other FBOs, through their MHS Business Manager and direct from contract practices, were made aware of any changes to the contractor serving their premises.

As part of the new operational management structure, from 2 February, the role of the Official Veterinarian (OV), whether contracted or MHS employed, became responsible for the direct line management of Meat Technicians (MTs) and Meat Hygiene Inspectors (MHIs) / Poultry Meat Inspectors (PMIs). The OV continues to be the first point of contact for the FBO. The Lead Vet (LV) oversees the work of several OVs in a cluster (see the enclosed leaflet which introduces you to all of the LVs). The Senior MHI has a key role in supporting the OV in their line management position by providing advice, guidance and ongoing support. The role of the Senior MHI continues to be vital in the operational management structure. It is a flexible role dealing with operational planning and delivery and focuses on core business tasks. The MHS thanks all FBOs for their support during this period of change and we look forward to working with you to identify further efficiencies and improved use of MHS resources.



South Conference discussion group

In the run up to the launch of the new structure, two conferences were held in the north and south of the country for Senior Meat Inspectors, Lead Vets and Business Managers. They were hosted by MHS Business Directors Peter Styler and Geoff Ogle. Martin Evans, MHS Business Manager said "The overall theme of the South conference focused on preparation for the new management structure with an emphasis on resolving issues, improving communications and supporting staff. The conference included a series of workshops which focused on specific areas so that we can help improve our service delivery". Peter Styler, Business Director said of the South conference "Attendees examined specific issues and how we could work together to move forward in a positive way under the new management structure. I was personally very impressed with the enthusiasm shown and the commitment to get things right".

EU Food and Veterinary Office Missions in 2009

The Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) of the EU Commission has notified the Chief Veterinary Officer UK of a General Audit of the United Kingdom in 2009. The FVO are now carrying out general audits of all countries in the EU on a three year cycle. Six of the proposed topics may involve audit of the Competent Authority controls delivered by the Meat Hygiene Service. Food Business Operators should be aware that the EU auditors may choose to visit your premises.

The programme of proposed audits and dates is listed below:

Subject of audit	Competent Authorit(ies)*	Week commencing
Residues and contaminants (animals and animal products)	Defra	16.2.2009
Pesticides	Defra (PSD), FSA	27.4.2009
Public Health – food hygiene	FSA	4.5.2009
Feed and feed hygiene	FSA, Defra	15.6.2009
FMD laboratories	Defra	3.8.2009
Animal Welfare	Defra	7.9.2009
Import / transit controls (animals and animal products)	Defra, FSA	21.9.2009
Food contact materials and additives	FSA	5.10.2009
General follow-up of outstanding issues – Plant Health	Defra (PHD)	12.10.2009
Poultry meat and poultry meat products	FSA, Defra	19.10.2009
Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE)	FSA, Defra	16.11.2009

* An early indication is given of the competent authorities which may be involved in the audits.

Competent Authority compliance with Community Law.

The FVO last audited hygiene controls in GB in 2007 and commented on the frequency of audit/inspection visits, particularly to cutting premises. The report from this Mission recommends that “official controls are carried out regularly, on a risk basis and with appropriate frequency in line with Article 3 of Regulation (EC) 882/2004”. The regulation is shown here:

Reference	Details
Recital 13	The frequency of official controls should be regular and proportionate to the risk, taking into account the results of the checks carried out by feed and food business operators under HACCP based control programmes or quality assurance programmes, where such programmes are designed to meet requirements of feed and food law, animal health and animal welfare rules. <i>Ad hoc</i> controls should be carried out in case of suspicion of non-compliance. Additionally <i>ad hoc</i> controls could be carried out at any time, even where there is no suspicion of non-compliance.
Chapter 1, Article 3, Paragraph 2	Official controls shall be carried out without prior warning, except in cases such as audits where prior notification of the feed or food business operator is necessary. Official controls may also be carried out on an <i>ad hoc</i> basis.

It is therefore a requirement for the MHS to perform some ad hoc unannounced visits to approved premises and we will be introducing these immediately as part of routine work. The cost of these visits will not be charged to the individual premises. However if the findings warrant action to be taken by the FBO, the time taken for enforcement action or for confirmation of compliance, will be charged directly to the operator.

National Control Plan

Under Regulation EC 882/2004, Member states are required to prepare and publish a National Control Plan (NCP) setting out the principles and approach taken by authorities in Member States that have responsibility for monitoring and enforcing compliance with feed and food law and with animal health and welfare i.e. the competent authorities.

The UK Single Integrated National Control Plan is a three year plan prepared jointly by the Food Standards Agency (FSA), the Department for Environment and Rural Affairs (Defra), the Scottish Government Rural Directorate (SGRD), the Welsh Assembly Government for Rural Affairs (RA) and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development for Northern Ireland (DARD). The current version of the NCP is available on the FSA's website:

<http://www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2009/jan/ncpupdate3>

The NCP outlines the official control systems in place in the UK in respect of feed and food law and in respect of animal health and animal welfare as well as controls in respect of plant health. It also sets out what the FSA, Defra (and its Agencies), SGRD, RA and DARD are aiming to achieve by implementing the plan and provides details of the roles and responsibilities of the different authorities and associated bodies that are involved. It also gives an overview of how these authorities coordinate their activities and work together to safeguard public and animal health and to protect consumers.

The NCP also provides information on mechanisms that are in place or are being developed to help improve the consistency and effectiveness of official controls across all the sectors and for sharing good practice.

Member States are required to prepare and submit to the EC an annual report on the progress on implementing the NCP. The first annual report for the UK was submitted to the Commission in November 2008 and is also available on the FSA's website.

The NCP and the annual reports provide the basis for assessments of the performance of control systems in the UK by the European Commission's Inspection Services (the Food and Veterinary Office – FVO - see page 3 for more on the work of the FVO).

BSE testing

Food Business Operators wishing to process Over 48 Months cattle for human consumption must apply for authorisation to do so. The MHS's Service Level Agreement (SLA) Unit processes applications. An application pack is available by emailing the SLA Unit at slaunit@mhs.gov.uk

Please note that the RMOP, which is part of the application process, should be completed by the FBO in conjunction with their OV.

Brain stem sampling cannot be undertaken unless the FBO provides staff suitably trained by the Veterinary Laboratories Agency to ensure they are competent to carry out the sampling. This training can be arranged through Defra by calling 0207 238 6455. Plant staff already trained for bovine brain stem sampling need not undergo retraining. Note that Defra no longer require notification of the names of staff who have undertaken training for BSE testing.

Health and Safety joint working party

Hosted by the British Meat Processors Association (BMPA), a Joint Working Party (JWP) exists which is comprised of representatives of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the meat industry and the MHS. The group meets every quarter to discuss a wide range of health and safety topics of particular interest to the industry. Noel Sykes, MHS Health and Safety Manager and Chair of the JWP commented "The JWP represents an excellent opportunity for those who work within the industry to meet with the HSE and consider the needs of the industry. Amongst the work we have planned for 2009, we hope to produce new guidance on personal protective equipment and as well as launching a poster highlighting the dangers of escaped cattle".

Also a member of the JWP, Richard Dilworth, Group Safety and Training Manager at Anglo Beef Processors said "Accidents at work not only cause suffering and losses for injured parties and their families but also have a demoralising effect on the rest of a workforce. In terms of loss, larger employers may be paying a six figure sum for insurance cover and even more in uninsured costs. This means a huge amount of turnover is needed just to cover these losses. There are rarely any new risks in our industry and really nothing new in effectively managing these risks. Therefore, whatever health and safety issues anyone has, someone out there has usually had the same problem before you. The JWP brings people together to discuss these issues, provide guidance to industry and encourage networking. Often people go outside the industry for advice which is not industry specific - the work of the JWP should always be the first stop for the meat industry".

If you would like a copy of the 'Health and Safety Guidance notes for the meat industry' already produced by the JWP, please go to www.bmpa.uk.com and click on the Health and Safety section.

If you have any questions about the work of the JWP itself, please email noel.sykes@mhs.gov.uk or call Noel on 01904 456 196.

New MHS identity card

The MHS recently reviewed the security of access for MHS staff to licensed premises. The review highlighted the need to ensure that all MHS staff who require access to FBO premises can prove that they are employed or contracted by the MHS. While most FBOs will already know the majority of employed and contracted MHS staff by sight, the introduction of the new supplier contracts on 2 February 2009 involved the relocation of a number of contracted staff between establishments, particularly OV's. New photo identity cards were rolled out to all operational staff in January/February this year.

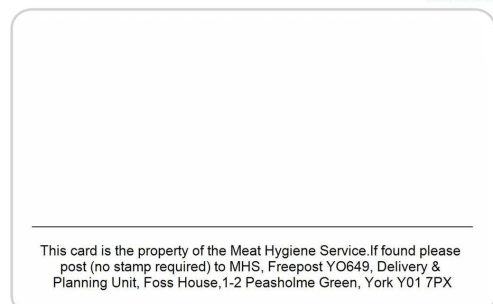
The ID cards have a unique ID card number and an expiry date of three years and also include a unique MHS hologram to eliminate any attempts at counterfeiting. If FBOs do not recognise someone they may ask to see their MHS ID card. The card should be closely inspected to verify that it looks like the example given (see below) and that it shows no signs of alteration.

If an FBO has any doubts about the card or about the reason for the individual's visit, they should contact their MHS Lead OV or Business Manager.

FRONT



REVERSE



Website for ante- and post-mortem data

We are pleased to announce that from April 2009, we will be launching a new website service for poultry slaughterhouse operators to access results of MHS ante and post-mortem inspections, with these results also being available electronically for poultry producers at a later date. The website service coincides with our launching of a new desktop solution for MHS staff to input inspection results for poultry directly into our IT data centre. The new system for MHS staff has been designed to be quick and easy to use and will provide an enhanced level of reporting for poultry slaughterhouse operators.

How do I use the MHS website or access my inspection results?

From April, if you are a poultry slaughterhouse operator you will be able to collect MHS inspection results using our website service at <https://core.mhs.gov.uk> for all the poultry processed at your slaughterhouse. As well as being able to access individual feedback reports by producer, you will also be able to view summary reports for your whole days production. These reports will be provided in a format which will allow you to extract and manipulate the data that you need – for example, if you want to analyse levels and reasons for rejection by producer or by finding.

At the same time, poultry producers will also be able to receive inspection results electronically for their poultry, initially by email but later via the website. For the first time, we will also be able to provide inspection results by individual production house.

How do I register?

If you are a slaughterhouse operator, we will shortly be writing to you to ask you to provide email contact details so that we can register you onto the website. We will let poultry producers know as soon as the website is available to them.

What if I am a slaughterhouse operator and already have electronic systems in place?

We appreciate that many slaughterhouse operators already have electronic systems in place in their businesses, for example, where MHS teams record inspection results online. We are keen to work with you to ensure that we can pull and push data from these systems and our own data centre. Alternatively, you may be interested in introducing online systems in the future. See the article on the Innova Safeguard system on page 7 for the options available to you.

Is the website secure?

Our website is secure – if you are a slaughterhouse operator you will only be able to access inspection results for poultry processed at your slaughterhouse. Similarly, producers will only receive inspection results for their poultry.

Website development.

We will shortly be introducing a number of improvements to our website service, including improved login arrangements (for example, a single login for slaughterhouse operators allowing easy access to applications, with the option of accounts for multiple users in your business) and extending the service to poultry producers. If you have any thoughts on what you would like to see included on the website in the future, use the feedback button on the MHS website to let us know. We look forward to hearing from you!

Want to know more?

If you would like to find out more about the new MHS website service please get in touch with Liz Olney by e-mailing Liz.Olney@mhs.gov.uk

Innova SafeGuard system

In 2007/08 the MHS undertook a project to consider the feasibility of data capture devices in Food Business Operators' (FBOs') premises and to extend this service to share electronic data with a range of stakeholders. We have now begun the next phase of the project, which will ensure flexibility and choice for our diverse stakeholder groups including FBOs, industry representatives and other Government departments.

The MHS has recently agreed to partner with Amicus ITS and Marel to use the Innova Safeguard system to collect ante and post mortem inspection data. The MHS will be using the system on its plant-based PCs. However the same system can offer live data capture on the production line through touch-screen and hand-held data collection devices. Such devices can be installed using an FBO's existing network utilising a managed interface between their IT network and the Innova SafeGuard system. This offers the opportunity for inspection data to be transferred electronically between the MHS data centre and the FBO's own system. Making use of electronic systems provides the opportunity for making the farm-to-fork information cycle work effectively and for prompt feedback on MHS findings at ante- and post-mortem inspection. If you would like to find out more about Innova SafeGuard, please contact Amicus ITS on 02380 429429 or email information@amicusits.co.uk.

MHS Chip PCs in premises



The MHS has successfully completed a year long project to upgrade the IT equipment used by MHS Meat Inspectors and Veterinarians. We have taken advantage of Chip PC technology which, when combined with the latest developments in broadband communications, provides a system which offers:

- Improved performance, because all the processing takes place in the centralised MHS Data Centre and enables us to automate more of our front-line processes, improve the quality of information we hold and continue to eliminate slow paper-based systems from our service.
- Reduced administrative overheads, as any issues with data or applications can be fixed directly from MHS headquarters. This means inspectors will be able to spend less time problem solving or escorting IT engineers on site and more time on the line delivering a service to the FBO.
- Improved security as these devices are not attacked by viruses and no information is stored locally, but is all held, and backed up, in our Data Centre. In other words, the new systems offer greater assurance that the confidentiality, integrity and availability of the information we hold about you is protected.

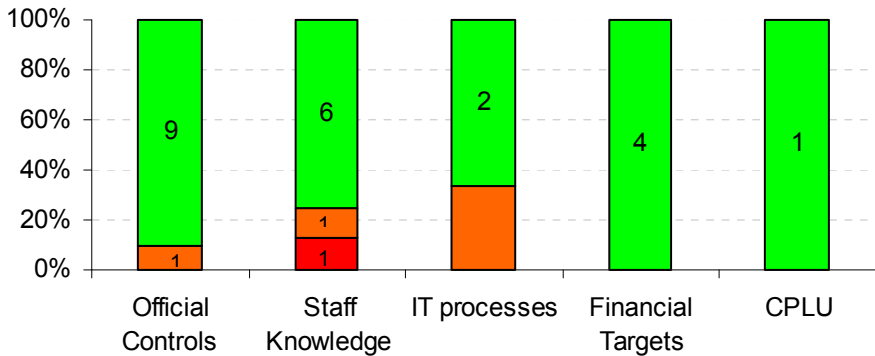
This IT system has also taken into account the fact that sometimes phone lines have faults. If this occurs, the Chip PC has been designed to read a locally accessible copy of the Manual of Official Controls. Whilst online this copy is systematically monitored so that if a new document is released it will be sent to the Chip PC so the user always sees the most up to date version of the MOC even if the phone line is not available.

The system also reduces overall power consumption and provides improvements in all the areas the MHS requires for our business operations over the coming months and years. In short, the new IT system installed in establishments is fast, secure and manageable. We have already received very positive feedback from users on the improved speed of the Chip PCs and we are confident that they will help support the ongoing improvements in service delivery to FBOs.

MHS performance to December 2008

At the end of the third quarter of 2008/09, MHS performance was on track to substantially achieve our Corporate Objectives, as detailed in the MHS Corporate Business Plan 2008/09-2010/11.

MHS Performance against Corporate Objective 2008/09 Period Ending December 2008



The MHS is continuing to significantly reduce costs. At the end of December, our financial position was good, with both net and gross costs below budget. The Cost Per Livestock Unit was also under budget - £12.16 against a target of £12.84¹.

¹ The CPLU is calculated by dividing total gross MHS costs (for all industry and government activity) by the total livestock units processed.

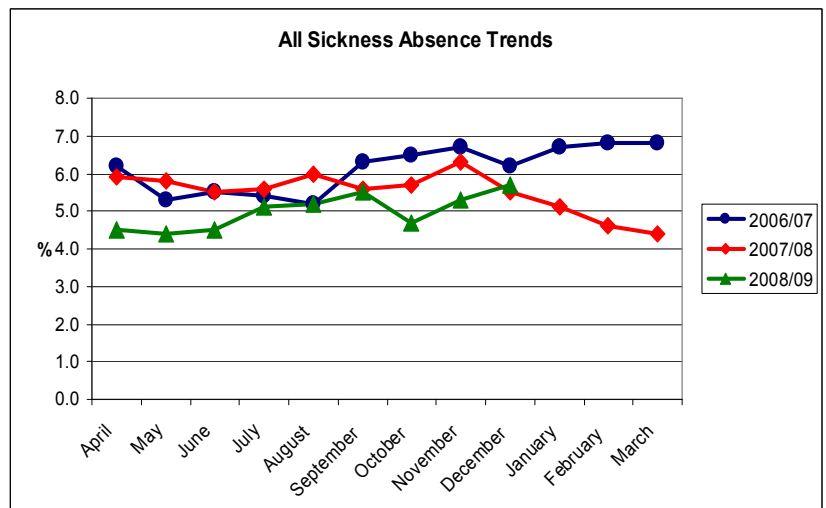
NB: the numbers which appear in the columns indicate the number of corporate indicators which feed into the MHS's five corporate objectives.

To end December, there were two OTM breaches and two SRM breaches. In June a sheep carcass was detained as it contained the spinal cord, and a further breach in December was reported where one ovine side was detected and detained with complete spinal cord intact. Both the FBO and MHS staff at the abattoirs involved were reminded of their responsibilities regarding SRM control and health mark application. During the period to December 2008, just over 12 million sheep were slaughtered.

Two OTM breaches occurred in November and December where two OTM bovines were processed at separate establishments which were not approved for OTM slaughter. Both bovines were over thirty months (by 2 days and 138 days) and processed as UTM. Investigations have been carried out to establish details of these incidents. During the period to December 2008, 1.64 million bovines were slaughtered.

The effectiveness of post mortem of all species is being measured through effectiveness surveys. Surveys of pigs, poultry and sheep have all been completed and the data forwarded to FSA for analysis. The cattle survey was due to be completed by the end of February 2009. This survey process will be introduced as a management tool to be used primarily by OVs, LVs and BMs to help identify where improvements can be made. The data will be collated on a GB wide basis.

Sickness absence has reduced over the past few years, however the MHS continues to be committed to reducing absences further. The number of staff on long term sickness absence has fallen by 30%. In line with other government departments, the MHS have approximately one third of staff who have not had any sickness absence during the last financial year.



MHS performance (continued)

The MHS is committed to eliminating discrimination and encouraging diversity amongst our workforce and encourages equality and fairness in all our employment practices. The MHS does not discriminate on grounds of gender, marital status, race, ethnic origin, colour, nationality, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, religion or age. The MHS has been encouraging staff to complete the in-house e-learning course on diversity. To December, 60.8% of all HEO staff and above (against a target of 100%) and 48.4% of operational staff (against a target for this year of 40%) have successfully completed the course.

Work is continuing to determine the options available to deliver an improved front line system for the electronic capture of ante and post mortem data, and the capability to share information with FBOs electronically. For further information, please see the articles on pages 6 and 7.

Whilst we are pleased with performance so far for 2008/2009, and the MHS is on track to substantially meet our 5 objectives, we are not complacent and are continuing to work with stakeholders to meet or better, our transformation targets.

New PIA qualification

A new Level 2 Award for Proficiency in Poultry Meat Inspection will soon be available. The award has been developed by Sector Skills Council 'Improve', working in partnership with the Meat Hygiene Service, Food Standards Agency, British Poultry Council, Awarding Organisations and sector employers.

The training and qualification has been tailored to reflect the different types of birds the PIA will work with:

- broilers and hens
- turkeys
- ducks and geese
- non-hunted game birds

Most of the training and the assessment for the qualification will be practical and can take place at the slaughterhouse.

Companies interested in the new qualification should contact the Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH) on 0203 177 1600 and Food & Drink Qualifications (FDQ) on 01908 231 062.

Before 2006, PIAs were trained and assessed by the plant veterinarian. Since 2006, new PIAs have had to obtain an external qualification in order to receive an authorisation. Under Regulation (EC) No 1021/2008 the UK authorities must be satisfied with an individual's competence to carry out post-mortem checks on the species they are to work with.

All PIAs will be subject to ongoing performance assessment by the Official Veterinarian.

Individuals already holding an authorisation will not need to obtain the new qualification, whether they stay with the same employer or move to another company, unless different species are involved. The MHS holds a record of the names, plants and species worked with of the authorised PIAs.

Industry survey

While Food Business Operators can contact their OV or Business Manager or any other member of staff at any time with feedback on MHS performance, the MHS makes a point of regularly asking FBOs to comment by way of our annual survey. The survey asks for your views on staff performance, enforcement and, more recently, the Transformation Programme.

Previous results have been shared with our operational management staff and then used to make improvements to service delivery in specific regions or plants. Results have also been used to improve our complaints process and communications.

Each year, at the end of the survey, we ask FBOs to rate their overall satisfaction with MHS services by giving a score between 1 and 10 with 10 being more favourable. Last year the score rose to 7.2, up from 6.4 the previous year.

Feedback from FBOs allows us to direct resources appropriately and to make changes where they are needed most.

We will shortly be distributing a new survey. Please look out for it in the post and take the time to complete and return it to us.

Thank you.

The Pennington report

18.3.09. As we go to print, Professor Pennington is due to publish his report from the Inquiry into the major outbreak of E-coli 0157 which occurred in South Wales in September 2005. The MHS will welcome any lessons learned to help support us in our aim to improve food safety.

Contact us

We want Link to be a useful and informative publication. Please contact us with any suggestions, comments or ideas for articles. If you would like to receive Link in a different format, please let us know. You can contact us at link@mhs.gov.uk or call 01904 455558. This is your opportunity to tell us about the issues most important to you. We look forward to hearing from you.

MHS Communications.



The Meat Hygiene Service is an executive agency of the Food Standards Agency

