

Our history: Protecting your plate since 2000

Here are just a few highlights from the first 20 years of the Food Standards Agency

From our creation in the year 2000 through to last year's recommendation on full ingredient and allergen labelling on food that is prepacked for direct sale (PPDS), here are seven key moments in the first 20 years of the Food Standards Agency.

2000: Creation of the FSA

The FSA was created as an independent government department working across England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland to protect public health and consumers' wider interests in relation to food. It was established after several high-profile outbreaks and deaths from foodborne illness.

At launch, the FSA made a commitment to operate openly and transparently, with Board meetings held in public and a Code of Practice on Openness, which is still with us today. This committed the FSA to publish all the advice it gives to other parts of government – ground-breaking for its time, and still so now.

2005: Launching 'Safer Food, Better Business'

In 2005 we launched ['Safer Food, Better Business'](#) to help small and micro businesses to adopt good food safety procedures.

Designed to meet the needs of different types of businesses – including small catering companies, small retail companies, restaurants and takeaways – this guidance continues to be a core part of our offering and most restaurant kitchens now have a printed copy. In 2019 alone there were almost 800,000 unique page views to the 'Safer Food, Better Business' page of the FSA website and more than 700,000 downloads of the guidance.

In Northern Ireland, catering businesses use [the Safe Catering guide](#) to help them comply with food legislation. This food safety management tool offers practical and comprehensive advice to caterers to help them produce a food safety management plan based on the principles of HACCP.

2007: Initiating front of pack nutritional labelling

The FSA led on the early development of a voluntary front of pack nutritional labelling on prepacked foods. The label shows, at a glance, whether food is high (red), medium (amber) or low (green) in fat, saturated fat, sugars and salt, as well as the total energy (calories and kilojoules) provided.

The labelling, now in widespread use, was designed to encourage consumers to look for and demand healthier food and give an incentive to businesses to produce that food.

We continue to influence the scheme and a recent consumer campaign in Northern Ireland entitled '[Check the Label](#)' encouraged consumers to use front of pack labelling by highlighting the nutritional value of commonly purchased foods.

2010: Improving hygiene standards in food businesses

In 2010, we launched the voluntary [Food Hygiene Rating Scheme](#) to provide the public with information about the hygiene standards in food businesses.

We operate the scheme in partnership with local authorities. They give businesses a hygiene rating, from 0 at the bottom to 5 at the top.

The scheme became statutory in [Wales](#) from November 2013 and in October 2016 in [Northern Ireland](#) making it mandatory for businesses to display their ratings.

Hygiene standards have improved - businesses achieving the top rating of 5 went up from 53% in 2013 to 72% in 2019. Research shows that businesses with higher ratings are less likely to be responsible for outbreaks of foodborne illness.

2014: Reducing Campylobacter poisoning

In 2014, [campylobacter](#) was the most common cause of bacterial food poisoning in the UK, affecting more than a quarter of a million people each year.

To tackle this, the FSA launched Acting on Campylobacter Together (ACT). This included working with farmers, slaughterhouses, and retailers to reduce the presence of campylobacter and possibility of cross-contamination and educating consumers and caterers on good hygiene practices.

2018: Piloting use of blockchain technology

In 2018, we successfully completed [a pilot using blockchain technology in a cattle slaughterhouse](#). It was the first time blockchain had been used as a regulatory tool to drive and verify compliance in the food chain.

Blockchain takes records from each stage along the supply chain – from the arrival of the animal at the slaughterhouse, to the packaged meat – and puts them in a block.

Each block is 'chained' to the next block, using an encrypted signature. This allows it to be shared and checked by anyone with permission (from farmers to slaughterhouses), rather than having a single central system controlled by one organisation.

Blockchain could increase the transparency of the supply chain, as information about a particular animal can easily be shared across the chain. It is tamperproof, as it involves multiple copies of data. It improves traceability, as the identification of a product's journey helps assure quality. It is timesaving, as blockchain improves operations by reducing unnecessary activities, such as data duplication.

2019: Improving the quality of life for people living with food hypersensitivities

In 2019, the government carried out an Allergen Labelling Review following the death of teenager Natasha Ednan-Laperouse. Natasha died from an allergic reaction to sesame in a baguette, which was not labelled with allergen information.

The FSA Board recommended full ingredient and allergen labelling on food that is [prepacked for direct sale \(PPDS\)](#) – food packed on the premises before a customer orders it, like some salads or sandwiches.

The government agreed with this recommendation. A new legal requirement was introduced effective from October 2021 requiring businesses to provide a full ingredient list on PPDS food with the allergens emphasised, giving people with food hypersensitivities the ability to make safe choices when buying food.

[Download our brochure](#). Learn more about how we have worked to protect your plate over the last 20 years and our vision for the future.