

# The Future Delivery Model Citizen Panels

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## About this research

The FSA is looking at modernising the way it regulates the meat, dairy and wine sectors through a series of changes brought together under the Future Delivery Model (FDM). To support the development of the FDM, the FSA ran a public consultation, wider stakeholder activities and commissioned Ipsos MORI to conduct qualitative research with the public to help them understand consumer views of the FDM.

This report summarises the findings from qualitative research conducted with 77 participants from England, Wales and Northern Ireland who took part in seven reconvened workshops between the 12th and the 22nd of July 2021. Each workshop lasted two hours. Across the two weeks of fieldwork, each participant spent four hours in discussions about current and future food regulation.

Our methodology was designed to capture public views on the initial FDM proposals. Discussions were focused on regulation in the meat industry, alongside wider conversations about food regulation and the role of the FSA.

## Consumer awareness of current food regulation

Generally, awareness of regulation in the meat industry was low. Participants had not given much thought to where meat comes from prior to the workshops. Knowledge was often linked to previous experiences of working or living near a farm or from watching documentaries on television.

Participants expected the FSA to be involved in all the stages of the food journey and to play a role in monitoring animal welfare standards. In initial conversations, participants emphasised the importance of regulations that focus on ensuring the quality of meat and business adherence to safe hygiene practices. They also voiced concerns about food businesses cutting corners, often referring to personal experiences of abattoirs and news stories such as those relating to horse meat in ready meals.

When introduced to the Official Controls, participants were reassured by the extent and thoroughness of the checks involved in the process. They were often surprised by the FSA's continuous presence in food businesses and emphasised how they found this reassuring.

Reflecting on the Official Controls, questions were raised about the inspection, sampling and enforcement processes. For example, participants questioned the ability of Meat Hygiene Inspectors to fully check carcasses in a short period of time. They were also curious about the extensiveness of the sampling approach.

Participants widely supported the idea of the FSA conducting unannounced inspections, seeing this as a more effective way of understanding the reality and behaviour of food businesses.

## Consumer views on the Future Delivery model

Participants questioned the FSA's motivations for changing a system that was seen as being thorough and effective in ensuring food is safe for consumption. They highlighted concerns about the potential for food standards to drop, particularly if there was a reduced FSA presence in some food businesses. In contrast, participants were in favour of enhanced transparency, which they felt would empower consumers to make more informed choices.

After hearing the case for change, many participants felt more supportive of the FDM and recognised the need to modernise and adapt approaches based on new technologies. They could see the potential benefits and described the reassurances they wanted in place to give them confidence in the new model. However, a number of participants remained concerned about a potential reduction in standards and therefore wanted to maintain the current Official Controls process.

### Four of the seven FDM elements were explored in more detail in the workshops:

- **Tailored presence:** While participants were able to identify benefits such as potential improvements in poor performing businesses, they were concerned about compliant businesses becoming complacent and the impact this would have on food safety standards. They felt reassurances needed to be put in place to avoid a reduction in standards, voicing support for increasing the number of unannounced inspections across all businesses
- **Clearer accountability:** Participants expressed concerns about a potential conflict of interest if staff from food businesses played a role in carcass inspections. They emphasised the importance of the FSA providing training to all individuals stepping into this role. This was seen as a way to prevent a deterioration of standards and encourage businesses to take more ownership and responsibility for their work
- **Robust assurance regime:** There was a recognition that increased collaboration and data sharing with other organisations could help identify supply chain issues. However, participants emphasised the importance of the FSA's independence and wanted the FSA to remain accountable for setting standards across the industry
- **Transparent compliance:** Participants were most positive about this element. They felt it would give consumers access to information that could help them to make more informed purchasing decisions. This could take the form of labelling on items or an online directory, with an emphasis placed on the need for the FSA to explain what ratings meant and update scores regularly. However, there was also some concern that this could lead to unequal access to quality meat and increase food waste. Participants also recognised that greater transparency could incentivise improvements due to the potential impact on business reputations.

## How to read this report

This report provides a summary of the insights from the Food Standards Agency's (FSA's) Citizens Panels conducted during July 2021. Our findings have been organised in the following structure:

- in Chapter 1 we summarise the background and methodology of the study
- in Chapter 2 we present participants' understanding of where food comes from, their awareness and expectations of food regulation and the FSA's role. We also summarise participants' spontaneous reactions to the current Official Controls process
- in Chapter 3 we detail participants' reactions towards the Future Delivery Model (FDM) before and after introducing the case of change. We also describe participants' views, concerns and the reassurances they would like to see in place for each of the four elements of the FDM
- finally, in Chapter 4 we summarise participants' overall attitudes and key reflections on the FDM

## **Note on the language used throughout the report**

Throughout this report we have referred to “participants” as the individuals that have taken part in our research. We have also used several abbreviations reflecting the topic of discussion:

- FSA – The Food Standards Agency
- FBO – Food Business Operator
- RSPCA – Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
- Ofsted – Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
- Defra – Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
- FDM – The Future Delivery Model
- MHI – Meat Hygiene Inspector
- OV – Official Veterinarian

Anonymised verbatim quotes have been used to help illustrate key findings, but these quotes do not necessarily summarise the views of all participants that we spoke to.

## **Limitations to the research**

While every attempt has been made to recruit a varied sample of participants and design a robust methodology, possible limitations to the research include:

**The research topic.** Talking about food regulation, including the processes involved in the meat industry, is not something participants would normally discuss. The workshops explored complex regulatory structures and exposed participants to new information they were not aware of. To support meaningful discussions, participants were presented with simplified versions of the Official Controls process, and stimulus materials designed to provide them with the information they needed to engage in the topic. They were given the opportunity to ask questions. However, it is possible that participants' attitudes reflect misunderstandings about the processes involved and it is important to note that participants are not experts in food regulations.

**Generalisability.** The findings summarised reflect the self-reported views shared by the participants. Qualitative research is designed to be exploratory and provide insight into people's perceptions, feelings and behaviours. The findings are therefore not intended to be representative of the views of all people who may share similar characteristics.