

Principal risks and uncertainties

The Food Standards Agency has taken, and continues to take on ownership of new risks.

The food system is evolving rapidly with developments such as: new technologies around food production; logistics; shifting consumer habits; and a massive growth in online sales. We are also establishing ourselves and evolving following EU Exit: we are taking on new responsibilities within the UK and seeking to continue to be influential on an international scale. These both mean that FSA has taken, and continues to take on, ownership of new risks.

Delivering food you can trust

Keeping people safe and reducing/eliminating food risk is a fundamental purpose of the FSA. Doing this relies upon:

- the FSA understanding the complex food landscape and the risks that may arise
- having the scientific capability to make professional and timely risk assessments
- having the policy capability to provide appropriate risk management advice

To deliver our mission 'food you can trust' whilst managing reducing resources and external uncertainty, we have an appetite to take considered risks and exploit opportunities and innovation. Our approach to innovate can differ depending on the nature of the risk, therefore, we align risks to themes which can be seen below:

- food we can trust
- reputational/credibility
- compliance/legal regulation
- operational/policy delivery
- financial/value for money

The FSA works to protect public health and consumers' wider interests in relation to food. This means that risk considerations are always front of mind across the whole department. Our work protects people, reduces the economic burden of foodborne illness, and supports the UK economy and trade by ensuring that our food has a strong reputation for safety and authenticity both in the UK and abroad.

We set out our approach to managing risk as part of the FSA Governance Statement 2021/22. FSA risks are Identified, Assessed, Managed, Reviewed and Recorded at the appropriate level across the FSA.

Risk management in the FSA is a continuous process, enabling us to make informed decisions and ensure we are operating within our agreed risk appetite. Alongside this, we review our strategic risks, quarterly (and monthly by exception), ensuring that the level of risk exposure is monitored closely in the changing environment we operate in.

Our vision - four goals

- food is safe
- food is what it says it is
- consumers can make informed choices about what to eat
- consumers have access to an affordable diet, now and in the future

Being able to identify, assess and act on a food risk to prevent harm to consumers (food is safe and food is what it says it is: stable)

Context

Leaving the EU means the FSA is now responsible for many of the combined risk analysis functions previously performed by the European Food Safety Authority and the European Commission. Have in place a risk analysis process to capture capabilities and process by which risk is identified, assessed and mitigated now that the FSA has increased responsibilities for many of the combined risk analysis functions since leaving the EU.

Mitigations

- evolving and reviewing our risk analysis process, to ensure we maintain a high standard of food safety and consumer protection and ensure regulatory effectiveness.
- established a flexible, responsive, data-enabled science, evidence and surveillance approach to identify emerging risks before they become risks to public health.
- delivering and implementing more robust and proactive planning, listening and horizon scanning, working with consumers and industry representatives to track their views.

Maintaining public confidence and trust in the FSA, sustaining our ability to deliver our strategic objectives to protect consumers (food is safe and food is what it says it is: stable)

Context

People trust us because we use science and evidence to make decisions, and we are seen to be honest, open and inclusive. Maintaining this trust is central to us achieving our outcomes for consumers.

Mitigations

- we ensure we use science and evidence for decision making, and are seen to be open, honest, independent and inclusive.
- utilise structured and proactive stakeholder management to reduce the chance of any loss of trust resulting from public criticism.
- our ABC programmes seeks innovation in regulatory reform and utilises opportunities to discuss and provide assurance to industry bodies.
- we work with consumers and representatives from the food business industry to discover their views and opinions on what constitutes an excellent modern regulator.

Maintaining informative and influential relationships across government and internationally to advance consumer protection (food is safe, food is what it says it is, consumers can make informed choices, consumers have access to an affordable diet: stable)

Context

The FSA has had a new role to play in UK trade policy, both in discussions across Whitehall and in wider international fora. The FSA Board set out a clear set of

principles to guide FSA officials' input to trade policy and trade negotiations in early 2020.

Mitigations

- review stakeholder plans and work with government departments to contribute to and influence thinking on key priorities.
monitor international developments, providing early intelligence and analysis on issues which could have an impact on food safety risks for consumers.
participate in established forums and have a seat in cross-Whitehall chaired meetings on various policy issues.

Being adequately resourced and support our people to deliver the FSA Strategy (food is safe, food is what it says it is, consumers can make informed choices, consumers have access to an affordable diet: stable)

Context

To maximise the benefits to consumers, the FSA has lent even greater importance to minimising both the costs of our own work and that which is delivered by others. Understanding our performance gives us the opportunity to see where we can improve and further achieve value for money over what we do.

As our approach becomes focused on delivering impact from our expertise and influencing others, we become increasingly dependent on the quality, skills, motivation and alignment of our people.

Mitigations

- our budget was agreed in the government-wide Spending Review 2021 and have set our Business Planning priorities for 2022/23.
we have developed our people plan and a strategy to create an environment in which our people are highly capable, effectively supported, and consistently choose to make outstanding contributions to protecting, informing and empowering consumers, to ensure that it reflects the requirements of the FSA post-EU Exit and our strategy.
implemented measures to reduce recruitment time and address gaps while we fill permanent vacancies.
planned the FSA's estates strategy and to further build on our digital infrastructure.
we have refreshed and enhanced our flexible working offer to widen FSA's access to talent and support the government's Places for Growth Agenda.

Working effectively and cohesively across multiple UK nations and administrations to ensure consumers are well protected despite potential divergence between systems (food is safe, food is what it says it is, consumers can make informed choices, consumers have access to an affordable diet: stable)

Context

Now the UK is outside the EU's harmonised system, divergence can occur between the regulatory systems of different UK nations. The FSA needs to have strong, collaborative working processes across the UK to help anticipate and respond appropriately to cases of divergence.

Mitigations

- we work with UK regulatory partners, Wales and Northern Ireland governments and with Food Standards Scotland and the Scottish government to ensure that the UK regulatory regime continues to provide strong protection for consumers.
the FSA is involved in three cross-government UK Frameworks, provisionally agreed in 2021, that commit to joint ways of working and seeking consensus on changes across the UK, while recognising that businesses trading across the UK require consistency and that consumers require consistent levels of protection.
the FSA continues to maintain effective engagement with UK Ministers to widen understanding, expectations and cocreate requirements. A regular review process is in place to provide opportunity for four-nation consideration of any required changes to way of working.

Being able to provide an adequate response to a major incident (food is safe, food is what it says it is and consumers can make informed choices: decrease)

Context

We must put in place effective contingency and resilience arrangements to manage major food safety incidents to ensure our ability to minimise consumer detriment and maintain consumer confidence in the food sector

Mitigations

- the FSA has well-established contingency and resilience arrangements to respond to a major food safety incident. We adopt a comprehensive approach to strengthening our resilience and emergency preparedness to cover all aspects of our incident response arrangements and continue to enhance our capabilities and capacity to manage a major food incident.
learning is reflected in our updated incident management plan; the continual improvements to our accompanying standard operating procedures and is used to inform our annual exercise and training programme that supports the continual improvement of our incident response capacity, capability, and organisational resilience.
involved in multi-agency exercises that provide an opportunity to emphasise the role of the FSA to those involved, as well as share best practice.
the impact of this approach is measured through our increased capability and capacity to invoke our incident response and emergency protocols efficiently; deliver a proportionate response to a food incident; and enable the organisation to return to our normal operations as quickly as possible.

Supporting Local and Port Authorities in delivering against legislative requirements (food is safe, food is what it says it is and consumers can make informed choices: increase)

Context

Through our regulatory role, the FSA interacts with those producing and selling food to make sure consumer interests are protected, local authorities are responsible for delivering food official controls. We need to ensure we are as effective a regulator as possible and that the local authorities are able to carry out the required activity.

Mitigations

- through the ABC Programme, we aspire to focus more on outcomes, collaborate with local authorities and industry to ensure food regulation is data driven, and that resources are targeted at the areas of highest risk.
reviewed and revised processes for supporting local authority delivery and performance

against FSA expectations.

increased the capacity and capability of the Imports Delivery Team to enable an increase in support to the port health community.

implemented a recovery roadmap to help local authorities navigate and recover from the exceptional circumstances posed by COVID-19.

Managing our delivery partners to support the FSA in delivering Official Controls (food is safe, food is what it says it is and consumers can make informed choices: increase)

Context

The FSA's approach to direct delivery of regulatory controls involves a split between FSA-employed people and contractors via a Service Delivery Partner (SDP).

Mitigations

- through contract management arrangements, the FSA needs to continually monitor the capacity and capability of the SDP to undertake their contractual arrangements and use Key Performance Indicators to identify non-compliances and service failures (for which there are financial penalties).
the Operational Transformation Programme has been developed to support the FSA in evolving the food regulatory system, while keeping consumer trust and safety at the heart of everything we do.
implemented and continue to monitor the Royal College of Veterinary Standards policy decision to allow temporary registration of vets.