

FSA Chair's speech to the FSA's Annual Parliamentary Reception - Wednesday 2 July 2025

FSA Chair Professor Susan Jebb welcomed Parliamentarians and a range of stakeholders from across the food sector to a reception at the House of Commons on Wednesday 2 July. The event was organised to mark the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the FSA, and also the publication of its latest annual report on food standards.

Good afternoon and welcome to Members of Parliament, Ministers, our partners from the food sector, colleagues, and friends. Thank you all for joining us.

Today we're marking two significant milestones: the 25th anniversary of the Food Standards Agency and the launch of [our latest annual report on food standards in the UK](#), which we produce in collaboration with Food Standards Scotland. It's a chance for us to reflect on the FSA's journey and look ahead to the future.

The FSA was established in 2000, when confidence in British food, and those that regulated it, was at a low ebb.

Since then, the FSA has worked with the food industry and our colleagues in local and national governments to rebuild consumer confidence in food. Our principal mission has been to ensure we all have food we can trust - to protect public health and the interests of consumers. And by doing that, we can also protect our food industry and our economy too.

I am proud of the leadership the FSA has provided. But I also know that the improvements that have been made have only been made possible by the collective effort of everyone across the food sector.

Let me share some examples.

We introduced the Food Hygiene Ratings Scheme in 2010 - those green and black stickers you see in the windows of your favourite cafes and restaurants. This initiative has given people confidence in choosing where to buy food and has incentivised businesses to maintain high standards.

In 2019, we implemented Natasha's Law, requiring full ingredient labelling on pre-packed foods for direct sale. For the two million people living with food allergies in the UK, trust in food has an extra, life-threatening dimension, which is why better protections for them have been a priority for us.

We established the National Food Crime Unit to investigate and prevent serious food crime. The NFCU has launched 43 investigations and made almost 450 disruptions to food crime in the last five years.

Encouraging healthier eating has also been part of the FSA's story. In 2004, we began government work to encourage the reformulation of foods to reduce salt. In 2010, we introduced the traffic light nutritional labelling scheme, giving consumers the information they need to understand which products are healthier and we developed the Nutrient Profiling Model that underpins a range of food products.

I'm pleased to say that today we have a £240 billion domestic food market in the UK underpinned by trusted, effective regulation. This provides confidence to consumers and trading partners worldwide. We regulate an industry that employs more than 4 million people across the UK - an enormous responsibility that we take very seriously.

Five years ago, the UK left the EU. Our trading relationships and regulatory landscape changed overnight and as a regulator, we had to adjust to a new way of working - and an enlarged role - as we took on new responsibilities from Europe. People were concerned that the high standards that we enjoy in the UK could be compromised outside of the EU.

One of the measures that we put in place to address these concerns was to begin this annual report - an independent, evidence-based assessment of food standards across all four nations of the UK.

The good news is that food standards have been maintained. But there have been challenges - not from EU Exit but from the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and the economic impacts that these events delivered.

The UK food system is operating under considerable pressure, but the high standards it continues to deliver are testament to the resilience and commitment of everyone working across the food sector. Feeding 68 million people every day, providing choice and quality, while keeping food safe, is no mean feat.

But there are ongoing issues that we need to address. Local authority resources remain stretched, with substantial inspection backlogs for businesses and a decline in food sampling rates, which have fallen below pre-pandemic levels making it harder to detect risks in the system and prevent incidents occurring.

We've also seen broader societal issues affecting our food system. One in five households across the UK report that they find it difficult to access affordable, nutritious food and our report, together with recent data from the National Diet and Nutrition Survey, shows we are still a long way from most people meeting dietary health goals.

There was some good news in this year's report, too. Recruitment and retention of Official Veterinarians has improved, following the downturn we saw after EU Exit, though challenges persist in building a sustainable recruitment pipeline.

There has also been progress in implementing the Border Target Operating Model, including implementing documentary and physical checks at our borders on products coming from the EU. But there is still more work to be done before we have complete data from the system to fully assess compliance.

With recent Government announcements on closer cooperation between the EU and UK, including on sanitary and phytosanitary matters, it is likely that the regulatory landscape will change again. Whatever the future may hold, my commitment today is that the FSA's responsibility to consumers - and to public health - will be steadfast.

As we look to the future, I see both challenges and opportunities. We live in an increasingly unpredictable world. Technology, data, and AI are changing the way food businesses and food regulators work.

There's innovation in food products, food packaging and animal feed. From vertical farms to cell-cultivated products, we're seeing advances that can help address global challenges like sustainability and food security and our science and technology capability in these areas can boost the UK economy too.

But we must ensure our regulatory framework keeps pace. Our job at the FSA is to make sure food is safe, and we should never compromise on that, but we need to do it in a way that's streamlined and effective. Authorisation processes should be a way of supporting products safely to market, not a bottleneck for new ideas.

These technological advancements could also revolutionise how we monitor and enforce food standards, allowing for more efficient use of our resources and more targeted interventions where they're most needed. But we must ensure that these new tools are deployed ethically and effectively.

The food system of tomorrow needs to be more resilient, healthier, and more equitable than the one we have today. This is not something any single organisation can address alone: it requires our continued collective effort. I'm delighted that through the new food strategy the government is committed to looking at these issues in a joined-up way.

I also welcome DHSC's announcement that the 10 Year NHS Plan will include mandatory reporting and targets across large food businesses as part of a new "healthy food standard". Needless to say, the FSA stands ready to support the Government in this important work.

So, as we celebrate 25 years of the FSA, I want to express my sincere gratitude to everyone who has contributed to improving food standards in the UK. I'm immensely proud to Chair the FSA and of all the work our staff do. But I think of the FSA as much bigger than that - it's the collective efforts of everyone in this room, and beyond, that makes the FSA what it is - it's our FSA.

I'm confident that by continuing to work together - government, industry, and citizens - we can not only withstand the pressures to come but seize the opportunities to build a food system that is safe, healthy, and sustainable for generations to come.

Thank you and enjoy the rest of the event.