

# FSA and Official Controls: Research with Food Business Operators

Area of research interest: [Innovative regulator](#)

Planned completion: 1 November 2022

Project status: Completed

Project code: FS430936

Authors: IFF Research

Conducted by: IFF Research

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## FSA and Official Controls: executive summary

Results available: Results available

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### Introduction and Method

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) is an independent Government body, established in 2000 to protect public health and consumer interests in relation to food.

The FSA is the Central Competent Authority (CCA) responsible for the delivery of official food and feed controls in England, Northern Ireland and Wales.. In Northern Ireland, officials from the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) carry out meat hygiene official controls in approved establishments on behalf of the FSA.

Food Business Operators (FBOs) in the dairy, meat and wine sectors have a direct relationship with the Food Standards Agency (FSA) via its Official Controls, including inspections, enforcement, advice and guidance.

The FSA and local authorities work together deliver shellfish controls. The FSA is responsible for conducting sanitary surveys and awarding the classification status of production and relaying areas. Some FBOs in the shellfish sector have a direct relationship with the FSA in relation to its functions however local authorities are the primary point of contact for the majority.

This research study – collecting the views of FBOs themselves – was intended to support the rollout of the OTP programme, and the implementation of Official Controls. The study entailed a quantitative survey of 400 FBOs based in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, followed by in-depth interviews with 60 FBOs. Fieldwork took place between June and August 2022.

Questionnaire coverage included FBOs' experience of working with the FSA, their understanding of what the FSA does, the impacts of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the UK's exit from the European Union (EU), and their familiarity with the OTP.

The methodology adopted a similar approach to the first wave of the research, conducted in 2020, to enable time series analysis. However, this 2022 wave of the research has expanded to include the views of FBOs in Northern Ireland and those in the shellfish sector.

## **Overall views of the FSA**

Overall, the majority of FBOs reported a positive experience with the FSA, with seven in 10 asserting that they had a good experience of the FSA (70%, including 27% reporting it was 'very good'). Only two per cent reported a poor experience. This represented little change from 2020. Indeed when asked directly how their views had changed over the last two years the majority (78%) stated they had stayed the same; 11% reported an improvement, and four per cent reported they had got worse.

By sector, FBOs in the wine sector were most positive about their experience (91% rating this as good), while those in the meat sector also typically had a positive experience (82%). This is a significant increase from 2020 82% in 2022 increasing from 64% in 2020). FBOs in the dairy sector were typically less positive (63%), however still only two per cent reported a negative experience. FBOs gave a range of reasons for their rating.

Positive views were often underpinned by the support and communication they received from FSA staff. Negative views covered a range of factors, including auditing not being consistent, and staff being slow or unclear in the feedback and reports.

To gain insight into the extent to which FBOs understand the FSA's role and purpose, they were presented with a series of statements to see how clear or unclear their understanding was of each. FBOs typically reported that they understood the FSA's overall purpose, as well as its remit (82% and 76% respectively said that they felt 'clear' or 'very clear' on these aspects). The proportion clear on the FSA's remit increased from 63% in 2020 to 76% in 2022. However they had less clarity regarding how the FSA makes decisions in its dealings with FBOs (46%), the charges they have to pay to the FSA (37%), and how the FSA is funded (29%). Typically FBOs in the meat sector felt they had a better understanding of all these aspects than those in dairy and wine. This might be related to these FBOs having a greater amount of contact with the FSA due to FSA staff being based on site.

## **Communication with the FSA**

There was considerable variation in both the frequency and type of communication FBOs had with the FSA. While two-fifths (41%) of FBOs reported that they had last had contact with the FSA in the last six months, a similar proportion (43%) cited it had been at least six months since their last contact. By sector, communication with the meat sector appeared far more common than with

other sectors as expected due to FSA staff being based on site at meat FBOs. There were no differences by country. Face-to-face meetings were typically the most frequent type of communication (67% cited this), while letters (44%), phone calls (41%) and direct emails (39%) were all relatively common.

The majority (75%) of FBOs were satisfied with the FSA's communication (although only 18% reported that they were 'very' satisfied). Satisfaction was much higher among FBOs in the meat sector (83%) than in the dairy sector (72%), while satisfaction among the wine sector (81%) was more consistent with the overall figure. Reasons for dissatisfaction included a concern that the FSA was not sufficiently proactive in sharing information on key changes to guidelines or legislative changes and that there were often delays responding to queries. This was further borne out in the survey; when asked what types of messages would be most valuable, the most common response was communications relating to changes in regulations (83% cited this).

There were no differences between the 2022 and 2020 findings.

## **Satisfaction with FSA activities**

FBOs were asked about their satisfaction across specific FSA activities, including inspections, unannounced visits, and enforcement of FSA regulations. By sector (excluding those with no experience of the activities):

- FBOs in the dairy sector were most satisfied with inspections (86% satisfied) and the FSA team (83%). Satisfaction was lowest regarding re-approval following a change of activities (66%), although only 17% had actually had experience of this. There was no change in satisfaction levels since 2020.
- FBOs in the meat sector were highly satisfied across nearly all activities. In contrast with the dairy sector, satisfaction was highest in re-approval following a change of activities (96%). At least 8 in 10 FBOs were satisfied with all remaining activities, with the exception of exports to new markets (59% satisfied), although only 24% reported experiencing this activity). Notably, satisfaction levels had increased across three activities since 2020.
- the vast majority of FBOs in the wine sector were satisfied with the FSA activities. Across the four activities surveyed, at least 79% reported that they were satisfied with each, with the FSA wine inspections team returning the highest satisfaction levels (100%).

Typically, FBOs reported that these activities occurred as expected, hence the relatively high satisfaction levels. Causes of dissatisfaction were quite varied; no one factor was most prevalent. However, concerns included a lack of communication and structure regarding unannounced visits, a lack of skills among some assessors, and a lack of consistency in how Official Vets interpret compliance.

## **Ease of complying with FSA guidelines**

Around six in ten (62%) FBOs reported that they found it easy to comply with FSA guidelines, with little difference by subgroups of interest. This represented no change from 2020.

The most common reason for difficulty complying with the FSA guidance related to the clarity of the guidance (44% of those who found it difficult cited this challenge), followed by complicated processes (29%), and increasing burdens on staff time (24%). The qualitative strand also uncovered issues relating to confusion between different standards and how the FSA 'fit in', the inconsistency of the FSA's inspectors, and the costs of compliance.

## **FSA's response to COVID-19**

The majority (72%) of FBOs reported that the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic had no impact on their ability to comply with FSA regulations. Indeed a sizeable group of FBOs in the qualitative interviews reported that the pandemic had actually contributed to growth and new opportunities, with one wine FBO opening a shop so they could cater to the growth in demand from the public.

Just under one in five (18%) FBOs reported that the pandemic had a negative impact on their ability to comply with FSA regulations, with four per cent stating that it had made compliance a lot more difficult for them. The impact appeared most severe in the meat sector where 9% reported the pandemic had made it a lot more difficult, and 19% slightly more difficult to comply.

Among those who felt that it was easier or more difficult to comply with regulations due to the pandemic, three in 10 (30%) reported that the FSA supported their organisation during the restrictions at least to some extent, while a further 54% reported that they did not require any support.

The pandemic does not appear to have had an impact on most FBOs' views of the FSA (82% of those who found compliance easier or more difficult reported that their view of the FSA had not changed as a result). This might be in part because FBOs tended not to expect the FSA to provide pandemic-related support.

## **FSA's response to the EU exit and other events**

FBOs' were asked about their experience with the FSA during the UK's exit from the EU, how well they felt supported during this time and whether their views of the FSA have changed as a result.

The majority of FBOs (70%) felt the UK's exit from the EU had some level of impact on their business. There was some variation by sector, with wine businesses most likely to report an impact (88%), compared to 78% in the meat sector and 64% in dairy. On the whole, businesses typically felt negatively affected by the UK's exit from the EU, although there were a handful of positive reflections. Negative themes included issues with recruitment, increased paperwork, issues relating to customs and increased costs.

Of those who said that leaving the EU had at least some impact, just over half (53%) said their business did not require any support during this time. One in five FBOs (21%) said they felt supported by the FSA to at least some extent, while a quarter (24%) did not feel supported. FBOs in the meat sector were much more likely to feel supported at least to some extent compared to the dairy sector (31% compared to 13%).

The vast majority (83%) of FBOs who were impacted to at least some extent by the EU exit (positively or negatively) said their views of the FSA had not changed. Only six per cent of FBOs' views improved and eight per cent got worse.

While FBOs were asked whether they had been impacted by any other events, outside of the EU Exit and the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, nearly all said they had not.

## **Awareness and views of the Operational Transformation Programme**

Only a minority (22%) of FBOs had heard of the Operational Transformation Programme, with awareness much higher in the meat sector (37% compared with 17% in dairy), and in England (24% compared with 14% in Wales). While it was difficult for most FBOs to express an opinion on the OTP, given the lack of awareness, there was a mixture of caution and optimism. While some felt it might make for a more efficient, targeted approach to regulations and compliance, others were concerned it could lead to more work for them. Additionally a few expressed that they would

have welcomed consultation on the changes (although one was held in the meat sector in 2021: [Consultation on Early Proposals for a Future Delivery Model for FSA-Delivered Official Controls in the Meat Sector](#)).

Since the research was conducted, the FSA has now brought all regulatory transformation activity and thinking into one place. The FSA has transitioned the resource and consideration of work for longer-term reform/legislative planning to sit under its Achieving Business Compliance programme. Work relating to improvements within the existing regulatory framework will now come under a new Operational Modernisation programme in Operations. More information on the OTP changes can be found in the [FSA Board meeting papers for December 2022](#).

## Key findings by sector

### Dairy

While the majority (63%) of the sector was positive about their experience working with the FSA, this was much lower than other sectors. The frequency and breadth of communication within the sector was typically lower than seen elsewhere, and they were also least likely to be satisfied with this communication. Satisfaction with specific FSA activities was generally high, and around six in ten (61%) reported it was easy to comply with FSA guidelines.

Around 20% were affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, and, while 64% were impacted by the UK's exit from the EU, this was lower than in other sectors. Awareness of the OTP was very low.

### Meat

Generally the sector was very positive about their experience of working with the FSA: 82% rated the experience good, an increase from 64% in 2020. They have a positive experience when communicating with the FSA, both in terms of frequency of contact, and satisfaction. Satisfaction with specific FSA activities was also very high, and has increased across a few activities. Around two-thirds (64%) reported it was easy to comply with FSA guidelines, although a minority (5%) reported it was very difficult.

They were typically more likely than other sectors to have encountered challenges as a result of the pandemic, while over three-quarters (78%) reported that they had experienced an impact to their business as a result of the UK's exit from the EU. While awareness of the OTP was low, it was much higher than in other sectors.

### Wine

With a relatively low base size (32) it is difficult to draw out robust conclusions from the research. Typically these businesses were very satisfied with the engagement they had with the FSA, and 75% reported they found it easy to comply with FSA guidelines, although the frequency of communication was relatively mixed. The UK's exit from the EU in particular appeared to impact the sector.

## Conclusions

Typically, FBOs had a positive attitude towards the FSA. They were generally satisfied with their experience of working with the FSA, content with communications they received and the majority found the guidelines easy to comply with. FBOs in the meat sector in particular were highly positive of their experience. However, there were some negative thoughts reported, with a view

among some that the FSA could be more responsive and clearer in its communications, that the approach to inspections needed to be clearer and fairer, and that processes could be simplified.

The most substantial changes in views since 2020 occurred in the meat sector, where overall views of the FSA have improved considerably : (82% rated their experience good, an increase from 64% in 2020), along with satisfaction across a number of specific activities. Views of the FSA have stayed broadly consistent since 2020 in the wine and dairy sectors.

Despite the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the majority of FBOs reported that it had no impact on their ability to comply with FSA regulations (although the impact appeared more severe for those in the meat sector). While some businesses have encountered challenges as a result of the UK's exit from the EU, this does not appear to have affected their views of the FSA.



## FSA and Official Controls: Background

### The Food Standards Agency: role, remit, and responsibilities

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) is an independent Government body, established in 2000, to protect public health and consumer interests in relation to food.

This research aims to support the FSA with its aim to 'make it easy for businesses to maintain food safety and standards' through gaining a greater understanding of the food businesses the FSA regulates.

The FSA is the Central Competent Authority (CCA) responsible for the delivery of official food and feed controls in England, Northern Ireland and Wales. The FSA is responsible for the enforcement of wine regulations in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In England and Wales the FSA is responsible for the delivery of dairy hygiene controls and official controls in approved meat premises, including meat hygiene requirements and regulations on the welfare of animals at slaughter.

Meat Hygiene Inspectors (MHIs) and Official Veterinarians (OVs) conduct hygiene checks, post mortem inspection, capture condition data and collect samples from approved producers of meat (including slaughterhouses and cutting plants) during operational hours subject to business requirement. Official Veterinarians conduct checks on animal products and provide assurance with regulatory compliance of animal welfare. In Northern Ireland, officials from the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) carry out meat hygiene official controls in approved establishments on behalf of the FSA.

Routine inspections for registered milk production premises are conducted either every 6 months, every 2 years or every 10 years. The routine inspection frequency for registered milk production premises depends on a number of factors including the type of product produced and the species producing the milk. In the wine sector, the FSA carry out a programme of inspections, using risk analysis to deliver a targeted and cost-effective service.

The FSA and local authorities together deliver shellfish controls. The FSA is responsible for conducting sanitary surveys and awarding the classification status of production and relaying areas. Some FBOs in the shellfish sector have a direct relationship with the FSA in relation to its functions as a CCA however local authorities are the primary point of contact for the majority.

The approach to regulation in the meat, wine and dairy sectors was, until recently being modernised as part of the FSA's Operational Transformation Programme (OTP).

Since the research was conducted, the FSA has now brought all regulatory transformation activity and thinking into place. The FSA has transitioned the resource and consideration of work for the longer-term reform/legislative planning to sit under the Achieving Business Compliance programme. Work relating to improvements within the existing regulatory framework will now come under a new Operational Modernisation programme in Operations. More information on the OTP changes can be found in the FSA Board meeting papers for December 2022.

## Research background and aims

In 2020, the FSA piloted a mixed method, qualitative and quantitative research project to better understand the views that FBOs in England and Wales had of the FSA and Official Controls ([FSA and Official Controls: Research with food business operators](#)). This research explored several areas including overall views of the FSA, FBOs' understanding of the FSA's role and purpose, what FBOs value about the FSA and criticisms, FBOs experience of certain FSA processes, ease of compliance with FSA guidelines and requirements and their satisfaction with FSA communications.

With two years having passed since that original research, the FSA wanted to revisit these concerns and explore whether there had been any changes in the views of FBOs. As well as tracking any changes in the topics above, the FSA also wanted to understand how changes they are making to Official Controls are being received by FBOs.

Lastly, since the 2020 wave, two key societal events have happened which could have impacted how FBOs view the FSA. First was the transition period for the UK leaving the EU, which ended on the 31st of December 2020. Second was the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and the nationwide restrictions imposed as a result. The FSA wanted to understand FBOs' experience of these events and how these might have changed views of the FSA.

It was in this context that four research objectives were formulated. The aims of the research were to:

1. Understand the views that FBOs have of the FSA and Official Controls;
2. Understand if and why these views change over time;
3. Gain insight and understand the impact of societal events, including COVID-19 and the EU exit, on FBOs views of the FSA;
4. Ensure that comparable research can be conducted in 2024 and 2026, to understand and monitor the effects of FSA initiatives, particularly those introduced as part of the OTP, on FBOs views.



## FSA and Official Controls: methodology

## Overview

A mixed method approach was chosen to meet the study's research objectives. A quantitative survey was conducted with 400 FBOs, across four sectors (dairy, meat including game, wine and shellfish), in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

This was followed by in-depth interviews with 60 FBOs, who agreed to take part in the qualitative strand at the end of the survey. Fieldwork took place between June and August 2022.

This adopted a similar method to the first wave of the research, conducted in 2020. The 2020 research did not include FBOs in Northern Ireland, or those in the shellfish sector.

The full dataset from this survey will be available in the [FSA data catalog](#).

## Sampling

The sample of FBOs was provided by the FSA. Tele-matching was conducted on the sample from Northern Ireland on all sectors, the meat and wine sectors in Wales, and the wine and shellfish sectors in England, achieving 65 more contacts in these areas.

Despite the additional tele-matching work, the sample was relatively limited in certain areas, particularly Northern Ireland (54), as well as the shellfish (22) and wine (163) sectors. This meant a limited level of analysis could be conducted on these areas at later stages of the research.

The sample provided by the FSA was sourced from slightly different places when we look at source by country and sector. The sample provided included: A full list of meat (cutting plants, slaughterhouses and game establishments) and dairy FBOs (registered dairy farms) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland; a sample of wine FBOs (vineyards, warehouses and wholesalers) from each region who have had an inspection in the last few years (the same approach taken in 2020) and a list of shellfish FBOs in England and Northern Ireland which the FSA held contact details for.

The sample available at the start of fieldwork is shown in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1. Sample available at the start of fieldwork**

| Sector           | England | Wales | Northern Ireland | Total by sector |
|------------------|---------|-------|------------------|-----------------|
| Diary            | 6,034   | 1,422 | 0                | 7,456           |
| Meat             | 745     | 48    | 45               | 838             |
| Shellfish        | 12      | 0     | 9                | 21              |
| Wine             | 161     | 2     | 0                | 163             |
| Total by country | 6,952   | 1,472 | 54               | 8,478           |

Targets were set by both country and sector, to ensure sufficient representation across each subgroup. Any sample with a relevant telephone number was considered 'within scope' and where there was ample sample available, for example the dairy sector in England, random selection was applied to reach targets.

Prior to fieldwork starting IFF produced a communication plan. This included communication materials for FSA staff to share with industry, including trade bodies, and FSA staff working in field operations, to make them aware of the research and the requirement for FBOs.



# Survey Methodology

## Questionnaire development

The questionnaire was largely based on the 2020 version to allow for time series analysis. This captured views on the FSA, its communication with FBOs, satisfaction with particular activities and views on compliance. However, updates were made to reflect changing policy considerations, research objectives and the changing environment for FBOs. New sections were added to cover perceptions of the FSA's response to COVID-19 and the UK's exit from the EU, as well as familiarity and views on OTP initiatives.

Both cognitive testing and a pilot phase was used to refine the survey.

## Cognitive testing

Cognitive testing interviews were conducted to ensure that FBOs interpreted and understood the questions and response options within the survey accurately and to check relevance of topic content with the audience.

Although we focused on new or amended questions at this wave. It was not only used as an opportunity to test new sections of the survey, but also decisions were made to update historical aspects of the survey where priorities between keeping consistency and optimising the questionnaire wording had been weighed up.

A total of eight cognitive interviews were conducted, with the questionnaire updated subsequently to account for the feedback received.

## Pilot survey

A short pilot fieldwork exercise was conducted between 13 June and 15 June 2022.

In total 25 interviews were conducted, with responses achieved across a range of subgroups. The questionnaire on the whole performed well, although some minor adjustments were made to optimise the survey for the mainstage. As only minor changes were made at this point, these responses are included in the final dataset.

## Fieldwork

Mainstage quantitative fieldwork took place between 24 June and 18 July 2022. In total 375 interviews were completed, as targeted. The profile of the achieved by country and sector is presented in Table 3.2 below, incorporating both pilot and mainstage completes.

Owing to sample limitations only a handful of responses were achieved in Northern Ireland (6) and the shellfish sector (5).

**Table 3.2. Quantitative survey, breakdown of completes by sector and country**

| Sector                     | England | Wales | Northern Ireland | Total completes by sector |
|----------------------------|---------|-------|------------------|---------------------------|
| Diary                      | 200     | 64    | 0                | 264                       |
| Meat                       | 83      | 10    | 6                | 99                        |
| Shellfish                  | 5       | 0     | 0                | 5                         |
| Wine                       | 32      | 0     | 0                | 32                        |
| Total completed by country | 328     | 74    | 6                | 400                       |

A total of 227 respondents agreed to be recontacted for a follow-up interview. This represented 57% of all completes.

## Analysis

Following the end of fieldwork, open-ended responses were coded to an agreed specification. Excel data tabulations were then produced containing subgroups as cross-breaks to facilitate analysis.

## Qualitative methodology

Qualitative interviews were conducted with 60 FBOs that took part in the survey.

The topic guide contained similar coverage as the survey, but was framed to understand in more detail the context of the businesses, and what informed the answers they provided in the survey. Similar to the 2020 topic guide, it included additional sections on COVID-19, EU exit and the OTP to cover objectives relevant to this wave.

Interviews typically lasted 40 to 45 minutes, with fieldwork occurring between 13 July and 15 August 2022. FBOs were provided a financial incentive as a thank you for taking part. The profile of the achieved responses by country and sector is presented in Table 3.3 below.

**Table 3.3. Qualitative interviews, breakdown of completes by sector and country**

| Sector                     | England | Wales | Northern Ireland | Total completes by sector |
|----------------------------|---------|-------|------------------|---------------------------|
| Dairy                      | 22      | 16    | 0                | 38                        |
| Meat                       | 12      | 1     | 1                | 14                        |
| Shellfish                  | 2       | 0     | 0                | 2                         |
| Wine                       | 6       | 0     | 0                | 6                         |
| Total completes by country | 42      | 17    | 1                | 60                        |

## Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to explore key narratives developing through the interviews, using an Excel-based framework to achieve this. Key subgroups were also included to support analysis by sector and country in particular.

## Reporting conventions

Throughout the report the term 'FBOs' for Food Business Operators is used to refer to the sample and target audience.

Charts have been set up using an accessible colour and pattern template. Arrows indicate a significant difference from 2020, while an asterisk '\*\*' indicates a significant difference between one sector and all other sectors in 2022.

All differences between sub-groups and previous waves of the research stated in this report are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level unless otherwise stated.

When considering time series analysis, it is important to consider the slightly different composition of the sample. The 2022 data contains some responses from Northern Ireland FBOs and those in the shellfish sector, which were not obtained in 2020. Furthermore, in 2022 there was a slightly higher proportion of responses from those in the dairy sector and a lower proportion of responses from those in the wine sector, compared to 2020. 'Don't know' options were provided as a new

answer category for some questions in 2022, which may affect the comparability of these questions.

Key subgroups of interest are business sector and country, although other subgroup areas of interest are presented for relevant measures. Owing to the limited sample available for Northern Ireland and Shellfish, findings within these subgroups have not been presented in this report (although they do appear in the overall survey findings and in the data tables accompanying this report). Furthermore, findings pertaining to the wine sector should be treated with caution owing to the low base size (32).



## FSA and Official Controls: Overall views and understanding of the FSA

This leads on to an exploration of FBOs' understanding of what FSA does, and why. Finally the chapter draws out particular strengths of the FSA, as well as areas for improvement.

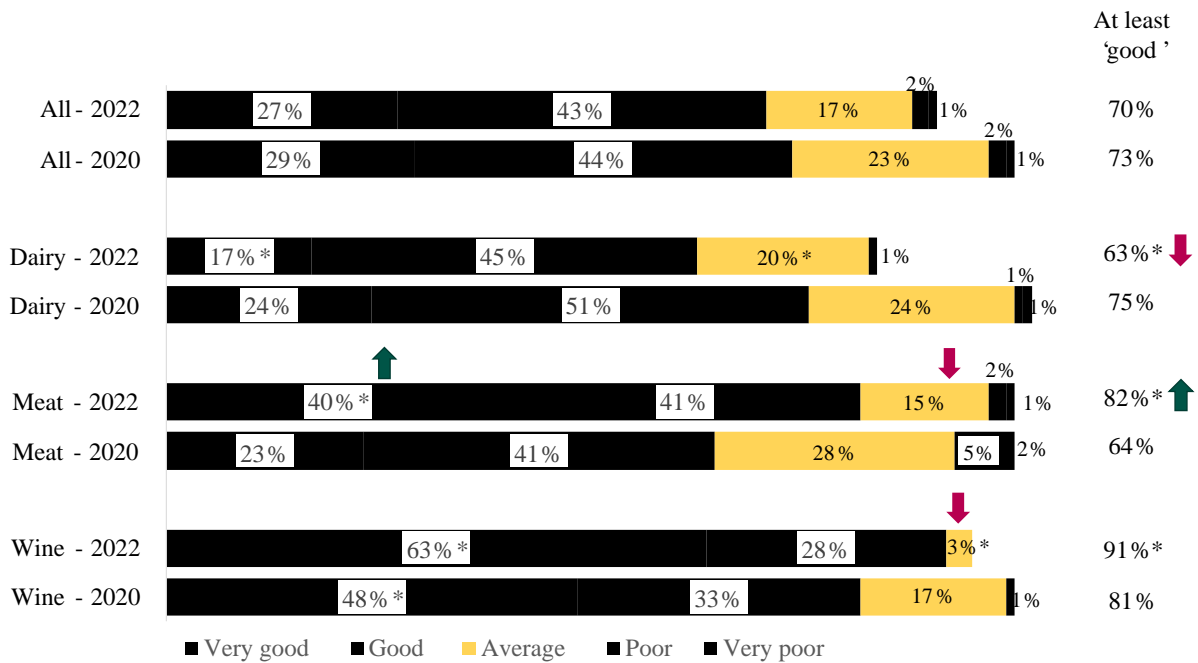
### Overall views of the FSA

Overall, the majority of FBOs typically reported a positive experience with the FSA. Around seven in 10 (70%) said their overall experience with the FSA was good (27% reporting it was 'very good'), 17% found it average and only two per cent said that it was poor. Compared to 2020 the proportion of respondents who said their experience was good decreased by three percentage points, although this reduction was not statistically significant. It is also important to note that in 2022 respondents were allowed to answer 'Don't know' at this question, but this option was not provided in 2020. Just over one in ten (12%) gave this response.

As seen in Figure 4.1, FBOs in the wine sector were most likely to have a good experience when working with the FSA; 91% rated this experience at least 'good', compared to only 63% of FBOs in the dairy sector. In comparison to 2020, a higher percentage of FBOs in the wine sector found their experience with the FSA 'good' in 2022 (91% compared to 81% in 2020).

There were no significant differences by country with 70% of England and 66% of Wales FBOs reporting that their overall experience was good.

#### Figure 4.1 Overall experience of working with the FSA

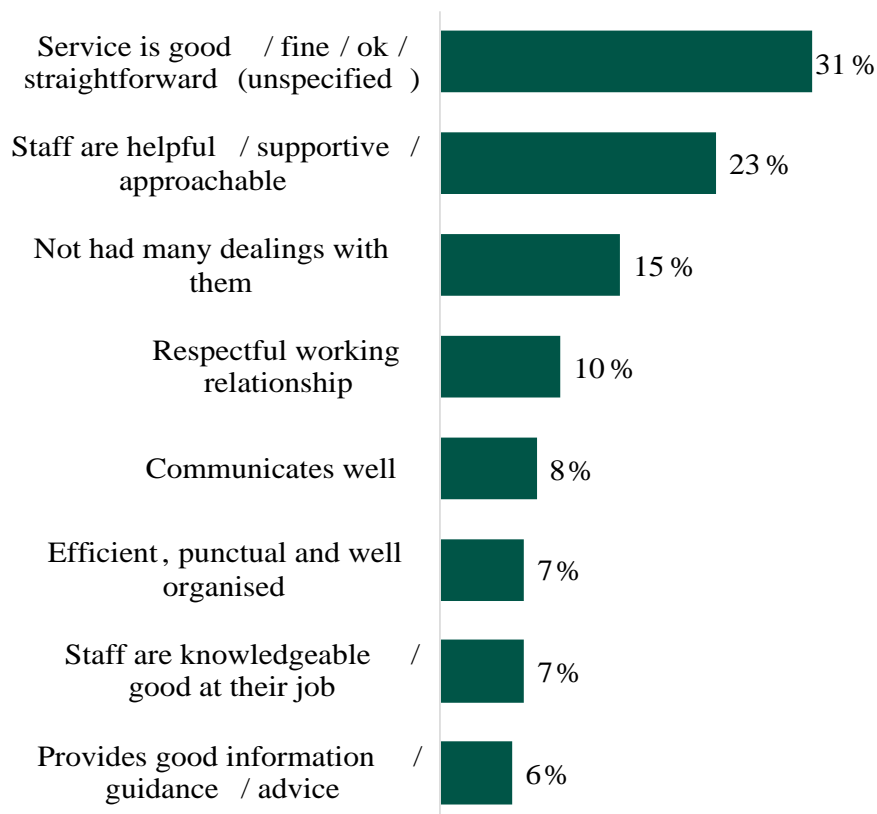


A1. Overall experience of working with the FSA. Base: All businesses 2022 / 2020 (400 / 381); Dairy (264 / 200), Meat (99 / 93), Wine (32 / 87). \* indicates a significant difference with other sectors. Don't know responses from 2022 have not been presented in the chart, but at an overall level were 12% (46).

When asked why they gave the response they did, the majority of FBOs reported that they felt the service they received was satisfactory, or that the staff were helpful and supportive (31% and 23% respectively). Negative responses underpinning a poor rating related to reasons such as the auditing not being consistent (5%) and feedback on reports being slow and unclear (4%), as shown in Figure 4.2.

**Figure 4.2 Reasons behind FBOs' rating of their experience of the FSA**

## Why FBOs felt satisfied



A2. Why did you give this response? Base: All businesses who were able to rate their experience of working with the FSA (354). Top 8 responses are shown.

Those in the dairy sector were more likely to say that the service was good compared to those in the meat sector (37% v 21% respectively). However, FBOs in the wine and meat sectors were more likely than those in the dairy sector to say that the 'staff were helpful and supportive' (50% and 33% respectively compared to 15% in dairy).

Negative responses underpinning a poor rating were explored in the depth interviews and related to reasons such as the auditing not being consistent (5%), feedback on reports being slow and unclear (4%), complicated processes (3%), information/ guidelines not being clear (3%) or helpful and poor communication (3%).

Six per cent of meat and dairy FBOs felt that auditing was inconsistent (auditing does not take place for wine FBOs). This was more prominent in the meat sector (14%) compared to dairy (2%) however auditing is more limited within the dairy sector. "I had an issue with some of my auditing, I had to set up validation for a process they had no guidelines for, it went on for 3 years and cost me so much money with testing. After those 3 years, the vet talked to her manager and said we didn't need to do that, so after we had spent so much time and money after 3 years to be told we didn't need to do that." (Meat, Wales)

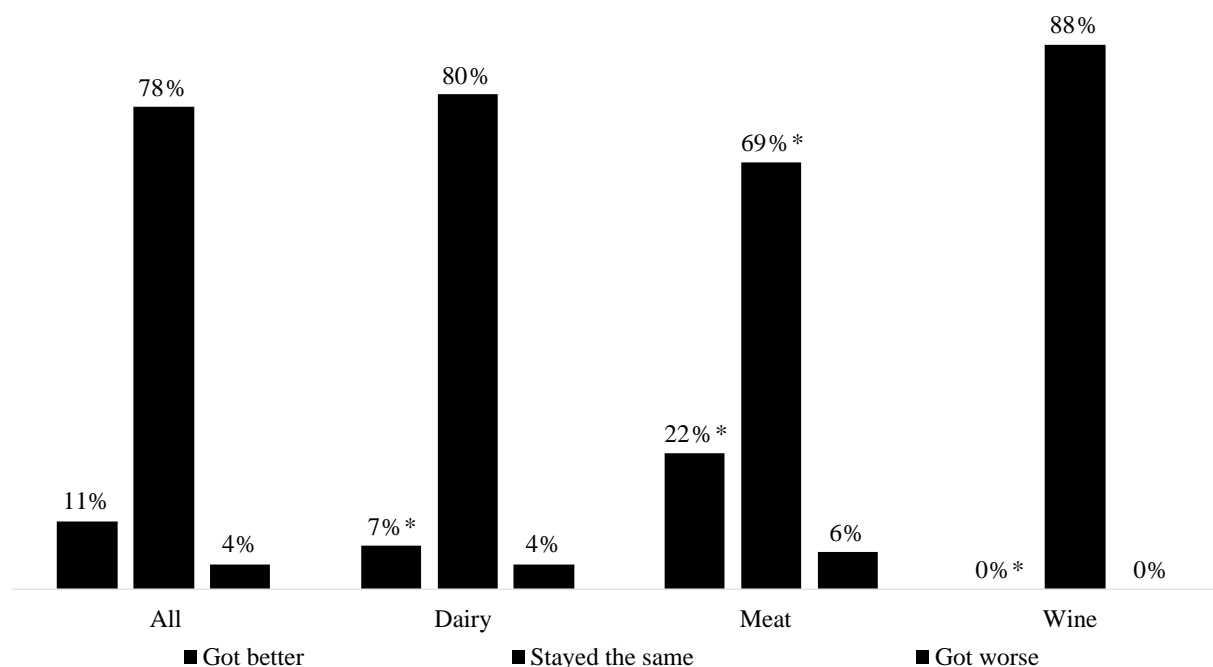
## How views have changed of the FSA

Over the last two years, the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and the UK's exit from the EU, to name a couple of events, have contributed to a quickly evolving landscape for FBOs.

FBOs were asked if and how their views of the FSA had changed over this period. Despite the changing contexts, the majority (78%) said their views had stayed the same, while 11% reported

their views had improved. Only four per cent said their view had got worse. This question was also asked in 2020, where a slightly higher proportion reported an improved view of the FSA (20%), although the proportion stating it had stayed the same was about the same as in 2022 (75%). An earlier section of this chapter illustrated that in 2022 70% rated their experience of working with the FSA as 'good', while in 2020 this figure was 73%. This may be due to the introduction of 'don't know' as an option in the 2022 survey, which 12% of FBOs selected.

**Figure 4.3 How FBO views of the FSA have changes over the last two years**



A3. How have your views of the FSA changed over the last 2 years? Base: All businesses (400); Dairy (264), Meat (99), Wine (32). Arrows indicate a significant difference from 2020. '\*' indicates a significant difference from all other sectors. Don't know figures have not been presented in the chart

FBOs in the meat sector were the most likely to say their views had improved (22%); this compared to 0% in the wine sector. It is important to note, however, that FBOs in the wine sector were generally highly positive of the FSA, as shown earlier in this chapter (for example, 91% reported a good experience).

FBOs in Wales were slightly more likely to report that their views of the FSA had got worse over the period (8% compared with 3% in England). Further to this, those that had contact with the FSA in the last month were the most likely to say their views had improved (19%).

## Understanding of the FSA's role and purpose

To gain an insight of the extent to which FBOs understand the FSA's role and purpose, they were presented with a series of statements to see how clear or unclear their understanding was of each. These covered:

- the FSA's overall purpose (for example, why the FSA exists)
- the FSA's remit (for example, what the FSA does)
- how the FSA makes decisions in its dealings with FBOs
- what charges FBOs have to pay to the FSA

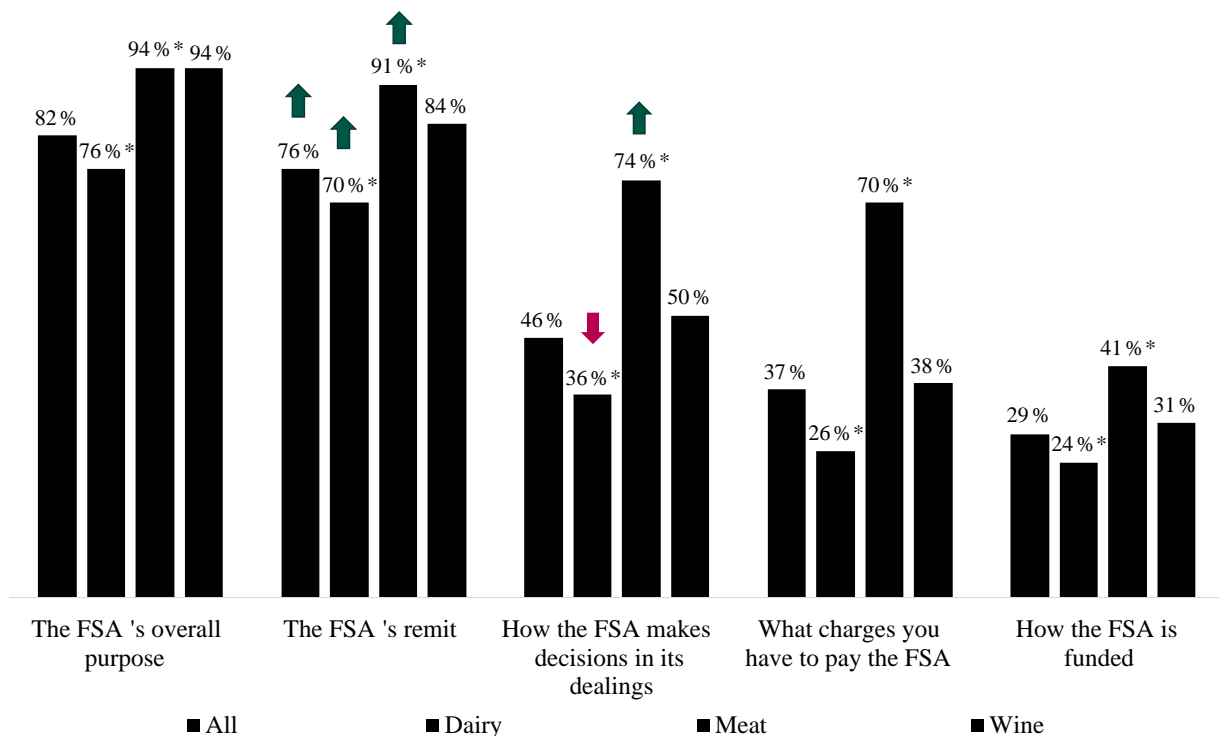
- how the FSA is funded

FBOs were asked to answer on a 5-point scale of 'very clear', 'clear', 'neither clear nor unclear', 'unclear' and very 'unclear'. For reporting purposes we have combined the first two codes in the scale.

FBOs reported that they were most clear on the FSA's overall purpose, as well as its remit (82% and 76% respectively). They were less clear on how the FSA is funded and what charges they must pay (29% and 37%). These trends have remained mostly consistent with figures from 2020, although the proportion understanding the FSA's remit has increased from 63% to 76%.

By sector FBOs in the meat sector were typically clearer on the FSA's role and purpose as seen in Figure 4.4. This may be because FBOs in the meat sector are the most likely to have had some form of contact with the FSA due to the MHIs and OV's having a permanent presence on site compared to other sectors (97% had at least some contact with the FSA in the last year compared to 78% of dairy).

**Figure 4.4 Levels of clarity on the FSA's role and purpose**



C1\_X. How clear or unclear are you about the following... Base: All businesses (400); Dairy (264), Meat (99), Wine (32). Arrows indicate a significant difference from 2020. '\*' indicates a significant difference from all other sectors.

It can also be seen across all the statements that if an FBO had a good experience with the FSA they were most likely to have a clear understanding of all the statements put to them. For example, there was a clearer understanding of the FSA's purpose (88%) and its remit (83%) among those that had a good experience with the FSA compared to those that rated their experience as poor (50% for both purpose and remit).

There was also an association between recent contact and clarity of the FSA role. FBOs who had contact with the FSA in the last month were clearer on the FSA's overall purpose and its remit (93% and 86% respectively) compared to those that had never had contact (67% and 62% respectively). There was very little difference by country.

## What the FSA does well and what it can improve on

FBOs were asked to state one thing they thought the FSA did well when dealing with food businesses. The majority of the FBOs did not feel there was necessarily one thing that stood out and hence did not provide an answer. Among those that did provide a response (175 respondents), a range of answers was given. The four most common themes included:

- Staff are helpful / supportive / approachable
- Staff communicate well
- the FSA ensures FBOs maintain high standards to protect the public
- the FSA provides good information / guidance / advice

Staff being helpful and supportive typically related to their offering advice to FBOs on different policies and legislations. Good communication tended to relate to being clear on appointments and the timing of inspections (though as we show in Chapter 6 some felt there could be improvement here).

“FSA staff have been helpful with any questions I have, and the guidance they give to keep abreast of legislation is also very good.” (Meat, England)

The FSA's role in conducting food safety checks through for example, inspections was felt to be important in maintaining high standards.

“I think [the FSA] does well at being clear about what standards are expected and enforcing those standards. I think it does a good job by making sure that the food is safe for the consumer.” (Dairy, England)

“They keep the quality of food up I hope, we like to know what we're feeding the cattle.” (Dairy, Wales)

Finally the FSA were seen to be providing good information and guidance to FBOs. Particularly notable was the support provided regarding the UK's exit from the EU, with FSA staff helping them on decisions on how to improve.

“Relating to Brexit - FSA did a pretty reasonable job of interpreting the politicians.” (Wine, England)

“Any time I have a problem they advise me what to do. If they don't have an answer they check and do call me back with it and are very good at sending links to check things for myself.” (Meat, England).

Food businesses were also asked to say one thing they think the FSA could improve on. While FBOs were typically relatively positive about their experience of working with the FSA they tended to have more to say on this aspect compared to what they felt was working well (although still half reported they did not know what the FSA could do to improve).

Most commonly, FBOs focused on the importance of improving communication. While this was cited as a strength by some, this is not consistent across all FBOs. Below we have picked out key areas for improvement, according to FBOs, and in order of commonality:

- improved communication
- more helpful and clear information / guidelines / advice
- a more rigorous but sensible and fair approach
- simplify processes / reduce bureaucracy
- greater consistency in auditing
- timely updates regarding changes / market specific issues



- a more respectful / collaborative approach
- greater awareness and understanding of operations / current market challenges

With regards to improved communication, FBOs felt that the FSA could use more platforms to reach out to them, such as via email and through Farmers Weekly communications. In particular they felt these would be suitable forums to publicise any regulatory changes. For example, a handful of FBOs recalled that they read Farmers Weekly and have not seen anything about the OTP within it. Along with this, they felt the FSA could be more responsive so that issues can be resolved more quickly. Tying into this FBOs also stated that the information that they do receive could be clearer and more helpful, given the complexity of some of the regulations and guidance. Indeed there was a suggestion that FBOs would benefit more from having an identified contact at the FSA to discuss regulation changes with, rather than just being directed to a website.

“They need to communicate more because I haven't heard of OTP and I read Farmers Weekly every week and haven't heard of it.” (Dairy, England)

“They need simpler guidance. The meat industry guidance was removed and put in archives on their website. Businesses like ours still rely on this to comply with the legislation and this is unfortunate that this has been removed. It would be great if this legislation information could come back to help us to comply with the regulations.” (Meat, England)

Some FBOs considered that the inspections and auditing process were not conducted in a fair manner. FBOs wanted the FSA to provide help on the things they had failed on so they could be resolved as quickly as possible. A handful found that the processes were too difficult and bureaucratic to follow, with all the processes and legislation needing to be simplified. They also found that there were differences in what the FSA might tell them to do and what other organisations like Red Tractor might say.

“I'd suggest probably to not enforce things before they've given us a chance to put things in place if need be. If something is wrong, we need time to put things in place which most meat companies do anyway. We need a bit more time.” (Meat, England)

“They can come in line with Red Tractor farm assurance because I had a visit from them and then the FSA and they were both saying different things. They don't talk the same language. The way things are going I won't be farming much longer. I don't need all the regulations. We get no thanks for it at all.” (Dairy, England)

Along with more simplified processes and a more consistent approach, FBOs mostly in the meat sector also stated there needed to be better consistency with auditing as it could vary depending on what staff member came to do the audit.

“There's no consistency at all, absolutely none. It's a different inspector each year and they all bring their different challenges, they concentrate on different parts. It needs to be standardised.” (Meat, Wales)



## FSA and Official Controls: Communication with the FSA

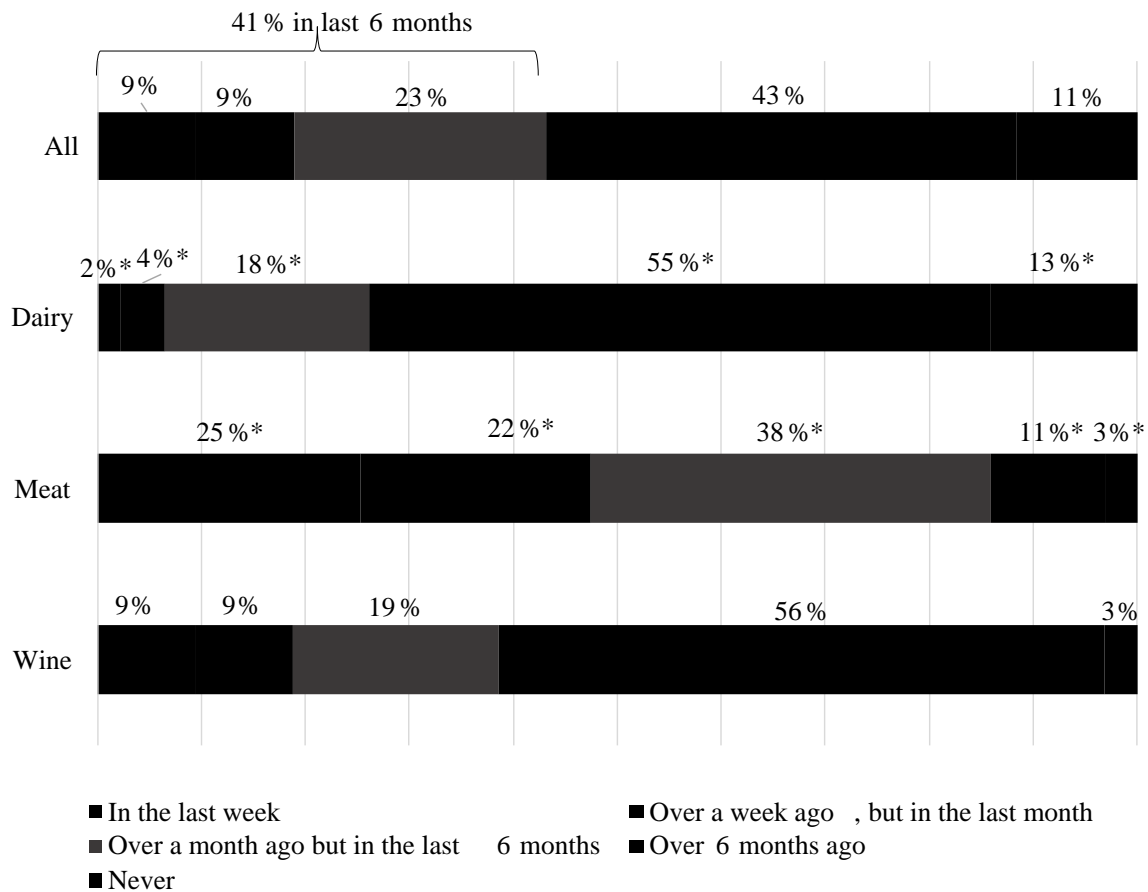
Due to the differences in regulatory approach, FBOs in the meat sector will have daily contact with the FSA through Meat Hygiene Inspectors and Official Veterinarians based on-site while routine inspections in the wine and dairy sectors are less frequent.

## Last contact with the FSA

All FBOs participating were asked when they last had contact with the FSA. Frequency of communication varied: two-fifths (41%) had received contact from the FSA in the last 6 months, while a similar proportion (43%) had received contact from the FSA longer than 6 months ago. A minority had never have contact with or had not heard from the FSA (11%), as shown in Figure 5.1. These proportions were consistent with 2020.

FSA contact with FBOs in the meat sector was far more frequent than in other sectors as expected due to Meat Hygiene Inspectors and Official Veterinarians being based on site. For example, a quarter (25%) of FBOs in the meat sector reported that they had last had contact with the FSA in the last week. This compared to 9% of FBOs in the wine sector and just 2% in dairy. Indeed, at least half of FBOs in the dairy sector (55%) and wine sector (56%) reported that it had been over six months since they last had contact with the FSA. This reflects the pattern in the 2020 results. There were no country differences.

**Figure 5.1 Last contact with the FSA**



B1. When did you last have contact with or hear from the FSA? Base: All businesses (400); Dairy (264), Meat (99), Wine (32). “\*” indicates a significant difference from all other sectors. Don’t know figures have not been presented in the chart

In terms of the type of communication, face-to-face meetings were most common (67%), followed by letters (44%) and phone calls (41%). The proportion of FBOs who had had face-to-face meetings with the FSA had increased from 59% in 2020 to 67% in 2022. Meanwhile, the receipt of letters specifically addressed to the FBO went down from 53% in 2020 to 44% in 2022.

There was considerable variation by sector. As shown in Table 5.1, FBOs in the meat sector in particular were more likely to receive a range of forms of communication than FBOs in other sectors (in particular those in dairy). However, across all sectors, face-to-face meetings were still the most common type of communication.

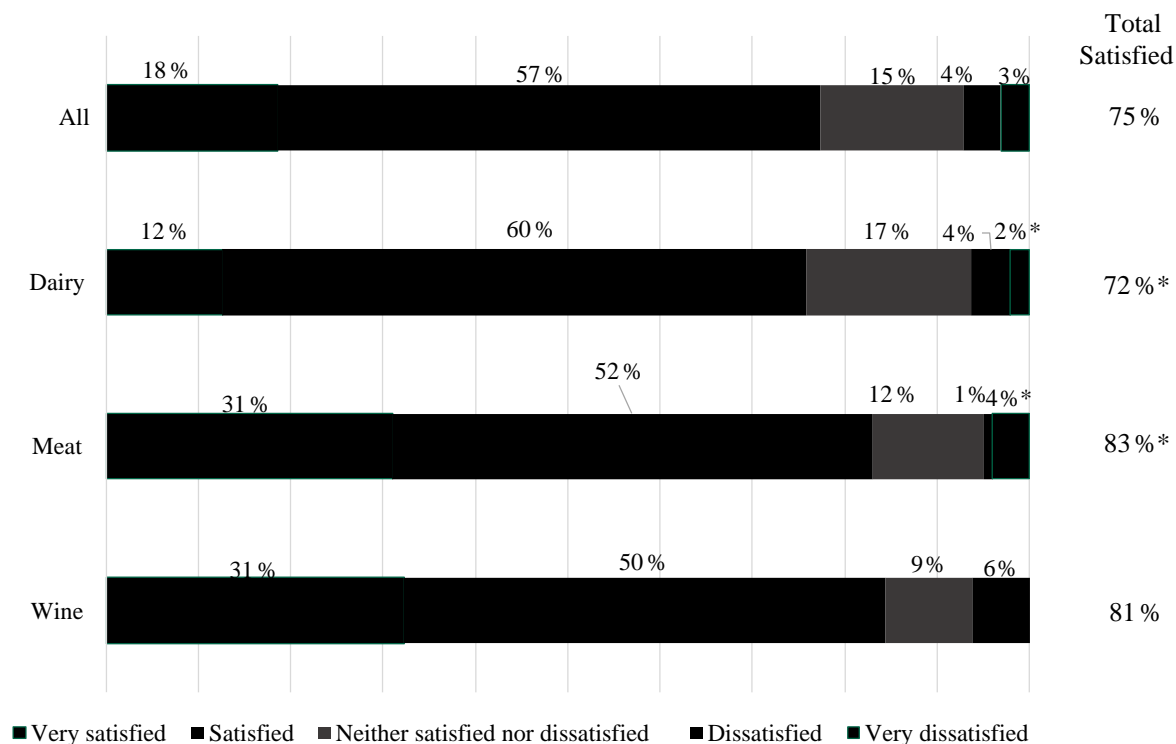
**Table 5.1 Types of communication received from the FSA**

| Sector                          | All            | Dairy | Meat | Wine |
|---------------------------------|----------------|-------|------|------|
| Face to face meetings           | 67% (increase) | *56%  | *90% | *94% |
| Letter specially for the FBO    | 44% (decrease) | *39%  | *67% | *22% |
| Phone calls                     | 41%            | *28%  | *69% | *63% |
| Emails specifically for the FBO | 39%            | *20%  | *79% | *63% |
| Emails from mailing list        | 32%            | *17%  | *69% | 38%  |
| Newsletters                     | 29%            | 28%   | *38% | 6%   |
| Social media feeds              | 8%             | 6%    | 11%  | 6%   |

Base: All businesses (400); Dairy (264), Meat (99), Wine (32). Arrows indicate a significant difference from 2020. ‘\*’ indicates a significant difference from all other sectors. Codes where the overall proportion is under 8% are not shown.

All FBOs were asked how satisfied they were with the FSA’s communication with them. Overall, three quarters (75%) were satisfied with the communications they receive from the FSA (18% ‘very’ satisfied), and just six per cent were dissatisfied. There were no differences between 2022 and 2020. By sector, there was higher satisfaction in the meat (83%) and wine (81%) sectors when compared to the dairy sector (72%), as shown in Figure 5.2. There was very little difference by country.

**Figure 5.2 Satisfaction with the communication received from the FSA**



D4. Overall how satisfied would you say you are with FSA's communication with you? Base: All businesses (400); Dairy (264), Meat (99), Wine (32). ‘\*’ indicates a significant difference from all other sectors. Don't know figures have not been presented in the chart

## Reasons for dissatisfaction with communications

The qualitative interviews revealed some of the key reasons for dissatisfaction with the FSA's communications. It is important to note that only a small minority (6%) of FBOs were dissatisfied with the communication they had.

Firstly, many FBOs were happy that 'no news is good news' in relation to their contact with the FSA. They felt that most of their communication was face-to-face, and that this was sufficient for them. However, there were also FBOs that were unhappy with the lack of proactivity by the FSA in terms of sharing information on key changes to guidelines or legislative changes that will affect FBOs. In some cases, FBOs noted how this compared poorly to some of the other bodies they work with in regulations.

"The FSA could be more proactive in getting across to farmers what changes they want them to implement are and why." (Dairy, England)

"I would like an email once a year with updates on what their plan is specifically with the dairy industry [e.g.] things they've noticed, problems they've had" (Dairy, England)

The second most common reason for dissatisfaction with the FSA's communication was due to the delay in the FSA getting back to FBOs on queries they have.

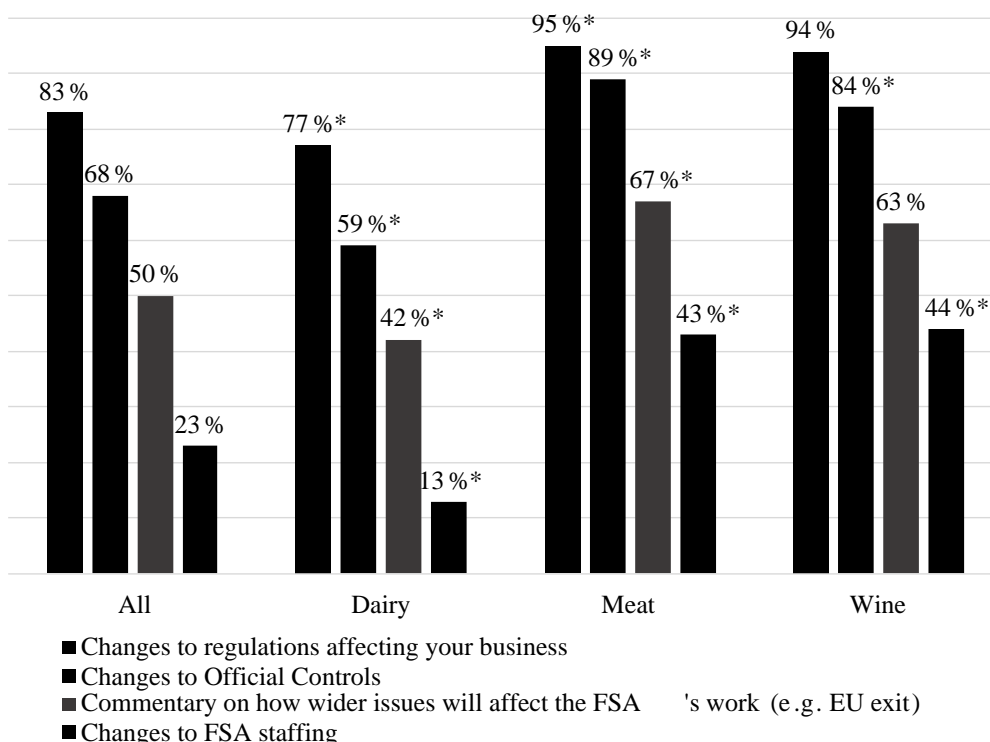
"They have a shortage of staff. This time of year things slip, so it takes 10 days before they come back to you." (Meat, Wales)

## Types of messages and information that FBOs value

In the 2022 survey, FBOs were asked what types of messages and information they value receiving from the FSA. They were presented with a list, which included changes to regulations affecting their business, changes to Official Controls etc, commentary on how wider issues will affect the FSA's work and changes to FSA staffing.

Overall, communication that focussed on specific regulations was typically deemed most valuable. The vast majority (83%) reported that messages concerning changes to relevant regulations was valuable, while over two-thirds (68%) also noted the importance of communications about the change to Official Controls. Messages pertaining to wider issues and noting changes to FSA staffing were less widely valued (50% and 23% respectively). As shown in Figure 5.3, these figures differed somewhat by sector, although the order of preference remained consistent.

**Figure 5.3 Types of information and messages from the FSA and the extent they are valued**



D5. What types of messages and information do you value from the FSA? Base: All businesses (400); Dairy (264), Meat (99), Wine (32). ‘\*’ indicates a significant difference from all other sectors. This chart only includes the top 4 results.



## FSA and Official Controls: Satisfaction with FSA activities

The analysis is split by sector as some activities are unique to certain sectors. Satisfaction measures are based on those who reported any experience of a particular activity.

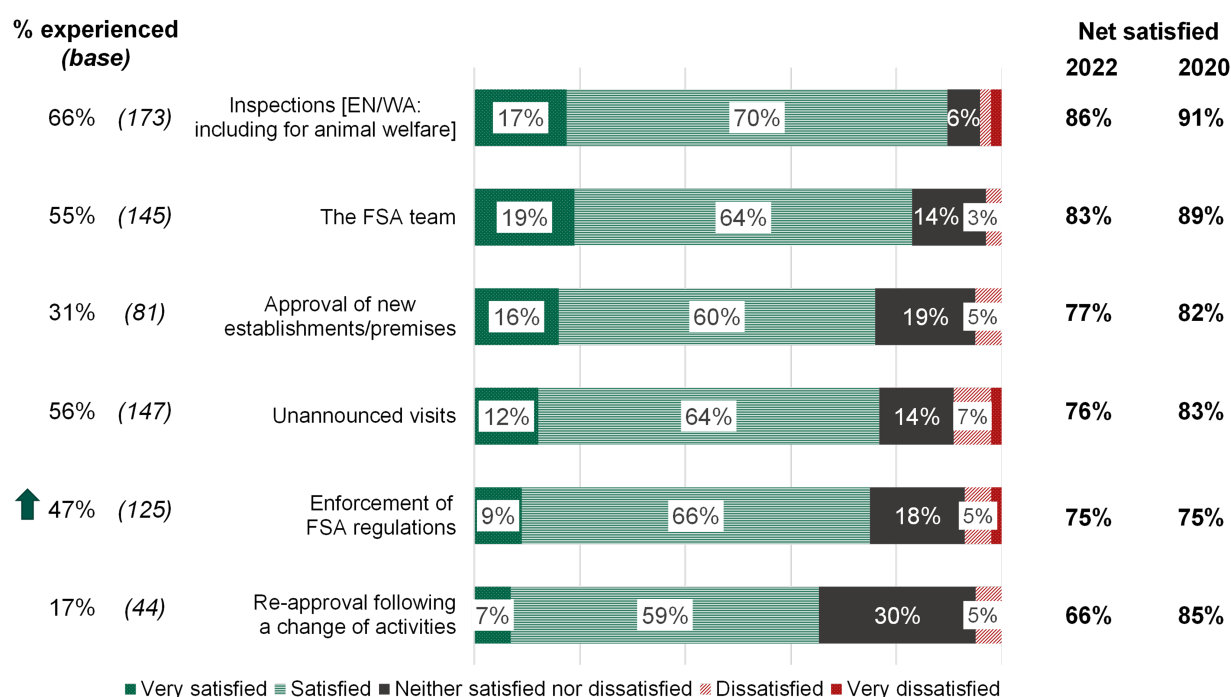
Within the meat sector, references to FSA staff includes Meat Hygiene Inspectors and Official Veterinarians who are directly employed by the FSA or contracted.

## Satisfaction with FSA activities in the dairy sector

Whilst experience of each of the activities varied across the sector in 2022, satisfaction was relatively similar for each one. Figure 6.1 shows that in 2022, satisfaction was highest for inspections (86%) and lowest for re-approval following a change in activities (66%).

There was little change in satisfaction between 2022 and 2020, however there was one increase in the proportion of businesses experiencing a particular activity, namely enforcement of FSA regulations (2022: 47%, 2020: 20%). Please note that the question wording of certain activities differs slightly between waves, and across countries.

**Figure 6.1 Satisfaction with FSA activities in the dairy sector**



C2\_X. For each process please say whether you have had experience and if so how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with that experience. Base: Dairy 2022 (264), Dairy 2020 (200). Satisfaction measures are based on those who reported any experience of this activity, hence the base for each activity is different, equivalent to multiplying the ‘% experienced’ figure by the overall Dairy base. Arrows indicate a significant difference from 2020. Don’t know figures have not been presented in the chart

## Reasons for (dis)satisfaction with activities in the dairy sector

The qualitative interviews revealed that for the most part FBOs were content that the activities were conducted in the manner that they expected them to be. The fact that activities typically met expectations but did not exceed them may account for the fact that while many reported they were satisfied in the survey, few reported being ‘very’ satisfied.

[Regarding ‘approval of new premises’] "It's something you've got to do, isn't it? I can't get excited and call it very satisfactory. They came and did their job." (Dairy, England)

[Regarding 'unannounced visits'] "You know it's got to be done, it keeps you on your toes, it keeps you up to a standard, you can't let standards drop." (Dairy, Wales)

As shown in the survey, FBOs appeared most satisfied with 'inspections' and the 'FSA team'. Positive experiences with inspections typically related to the quality and communication of the inspector themselves, with those satisfied highlighting their professionalism, timeliness, knowledge and thoroughness. FBOs were particularly content where inspectors appeared to understand their business processes and priorities.

"He [the inspector] knew the business. He told us exactly what we needed to do and he was very knowledgeable." (Dairy, England)

For those who were less satisfied with 'inspections', dissatisfaction typically stemmed from the charges they had to pay, and the consistency of inspections. Concerning charges, one dairy FBO reported how they had to do several very similar tests and pay for each one but that the FSA took longer and charged more than the other organisations they needed to test for. Another dairy FBO felt that some of the assessors did not possess the same skills, and that this could lead to frustrating interactions. Finally, one FBO in Wales reported they found inspections quite confusing in terms of who has what role in communicating and conducting the inspection, highlighting the overlap between Welsh Government local offices and the local councils.

The main cause for dissatisfaction with the 'FSA team' related to the lack of interaction that the FBO had with them. They would have liked a little more interaction than just on inspections and unannounced visits, so they were more confident in their compliance.

Concerning 'unannounced visits' in the dairy sector, FBOs typically reflected that these were important to maintain standards and were a fair way of checking processes. Businesses felt that – where minor issues were found – the FSA treated these in a fair and proportionate manner.

"Sometimes an unannounced visit can find things not quite as they should be in terms of cleanliness, but the FSA have always been fair and us them a fortnight to remedy, and then come back to check." (Dairy, England)

A few FBOs mentioned how they would like to know rough ideas of how frequently and what sort of time an unannounced visit might happen and what might be covered in the visit. They want to be able to plan for how long it will take out of their day so they can be prepared for that. Sometimes the visits lasted longer than they assumed and disrupted them at critical moments in their business causing for stress and delays.

"A bit of dialogue beforehand... You've got no idea if they're going to come this year, next year." (Dairy, England)

Similar to other activities, satisfaction with the 'enforcement of regulations' was relatively high. Key factors informing this included that the enforcement was often accompanied by clear guidance, and with a specific, but achievable timeframe to work towards.

The one FBO who was unhappy with 're-approval following a change of activities' felt that the process was too long and that they had already provided some of the information they were asked to submit. This duplication of effort they felt was unnecessary and wasted their time.

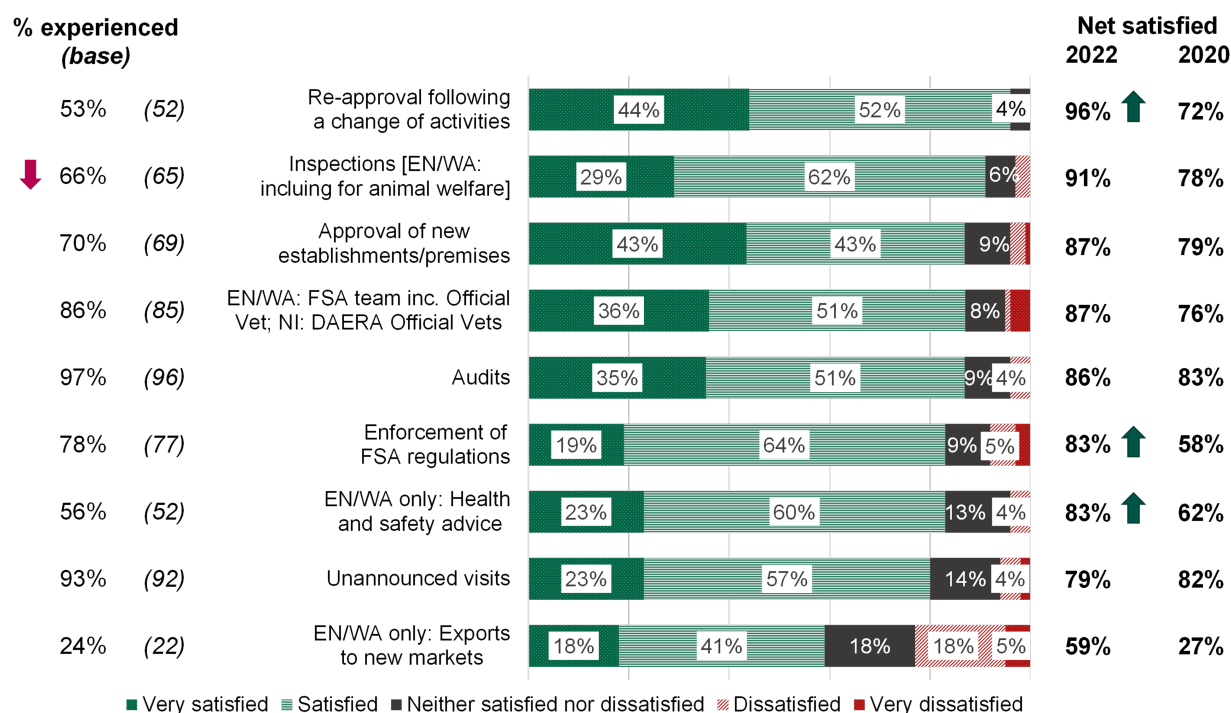
"It took so long to get recertified again... you have to start again... I wasn't very satisfied with that." (Dairy, Wales)

## **Satisfaction with FSA activities in the meat sector**

Much like the dairy sector, the majority of FBOs in the meat sector were satisfied with FSA activities, with at least 8 in 10 who had experienced the activity being satisfied. As can be seen in Figure 6.2, the activities with the highest satisfaction were 're-approval following a change in activities' (96%) and 'inspections' (91%). The only exception was 'exports to new markets', where satisfaction was 59%, although it should be noted that only 24% reported that they had experience of this activity.

Compared to the 2020 data, satisfaction rose in three activities and remained constant in six. The three areas with increased levels of satisfaction were 'enforcement of FSA regulations' (2022: 83%; 2020: 57%), 'health and safety advice' (2022: 83%; 2020: 61%), and 're-approval following a change of activities' (2022: 96%; 2020: 72%). Additionally, the amount of FBOs who had experienced inspections decreased (2022: 66%; 2020: 86%).

**Figure 6.2 Satisfaction with FSA activities in the meat sector**



C2\_X. For each process please say whether you have had experience and if so how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with that experience. Base: Meat 2022 (99) Meat 2020 (88). Satisfaction measures are based on those who reported any experience of this activity, hence the base for each activity is different, equivalent to multiplying the 'percentage experienced' figure by the overall Meat base. Arrows indicate a significant difference from 2020. Don't know figures have not been presented in the chart

### Reasons for (dis)satisfaction with activities in the meat sector

As with the dairy sector, most FBOs in the meat sector recognised the importance of these activities, and were generally satisfied with the way these were conducted. For many it was an everyday element of their business operations and they knew what to expect.

[Regarding 'unannounced visits'] "They come in, do the job, go home." (Meat, England)

However, across a number of activities, meat FBOs reflected on their high satisfaction with the communication they received from the FSA, especially on the quality of advice and information they received. For example, one FBO reported that they found it easy to ask questions of the FSA at times where their enforcement requirements were unclear, while another mentioned that for the



'audit' the FSA called in advance, communicated clearly and then conducted the audit in a professional manner.

Areas where the FSA were of particular value included in the 'approval of new establishments/premises' where a number of FBOs reported that the FSA had given them helpful advice and provided support in a proactive manner, and in 'exports to new markets' where the Official Vet had helped them overcome difficulties relating to the different market regulations and requirements.

[Regarding 'Approval of new establishments/premises'] "The FSA advised and supported us and were proactive in providing assistance to get us to where we needed to be." (Meat, England)

Much like in the dairy sector, the most common cause of dissatisfaction was from a few FBOs who felt that unannounced visits need more structure, similar to the other regulation bodies they work with, who give them clearer windows and guidance on what will happen. This would allow them to know how long a visit would last and what was required of them, rather than being interrupted when vital or time dependent activities are happening in their business.

"It lacks structure. Unannounced audits are the way the world is going, there's no issue with that. But they don't seem to give you any windows...with the customers they'll say, 'You're now in your unannounced visit window for the next three months'...there's no system." (Meat, Northern Ireland)

There were also concerns about the rights of the FSA to conduct unannounced inspections on private property and at the timings of some inspections, which were sometimes held in extraordinary circumstances when the FBO was busy during a period of extremely high demand due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Some causes for dissatisfaction appeared to be quite specific to the context of individual FBOs. One FBO was quite specific on the 24 hour rule, which governs that when game comes from a plant/factory they have 24 hours to get it inspected. They explained how if this meat arrived on a Friday, they wouldn't be able to get it inspected over the weekend and so it would have to be disposed which is wasteful and costly to them.

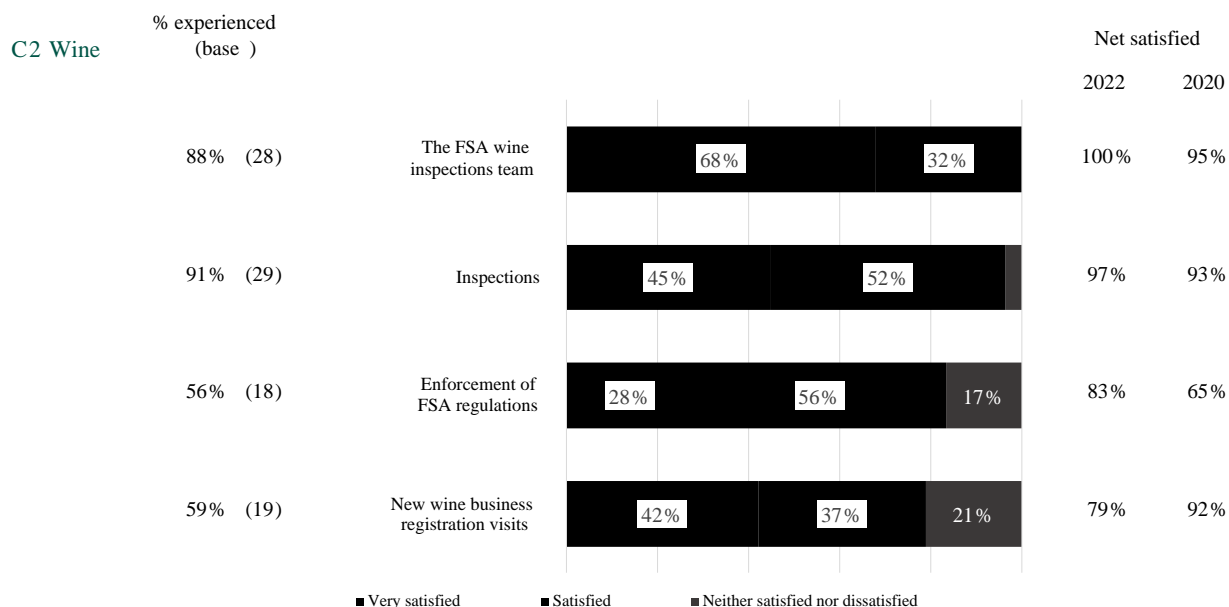
"The 24 hour rules means that you have to have inspections every day if meat was coming in every day. It's an EU law but in the EU they do not enforce it in game plants." (Meat, England)

In Northern Ireland, one FBO commented that the DAERA Official Vets and official auxiliaries are inconsistent in the way they interpret compliance. They felt they are often "too black and white" and don't "look at how compliance looks in the real world".

## **Satisfaction with FSA activities in the wine sector**

Satisfaction in the wine sector was consistently high across the various activities, ranging from 79% to 100%. FBOs were most satisfied with the FSA inspections team (100%) and inspections (97%), although it is worth noting the low base sizes (28 and 29 respectively had experience of these). In part due to low base sizes there was no difference between 2020 and 2022 satisfaction levels.

**Figure 6.3 Satisfaction with FSA activities in the wine sector**



C2\_X. For each process please say whether you have had experience and if so how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with that experience. Base: Wine 2022 (32) Wine 2020 (72). Satisfaction measures are based on those who reported any experience of this activity, hence the base for each activity is different, equivalent to multiplying the ‘% experienced’ figure by the overall Wine base. Don’t know figures have not been presented in the chart

### Reasons for (dis)satisfaction with activities in the wine sector

Of the three qualitative interviews that were conducted with wine FBOs, all were positive about the FSA’s activities in this space, reporting for example that the FSA Team were “knowledgeable, understanding and good at communication”, and considering inspections to be “organised, fair, and prompt”.

Despite this, one FBO was concerned about the consistency in requirements that the FSA requires for setting up the business compared with some of the other regulatory bodies. They felt there were a lot of discrepancies for example between Wine GB and the FSA list. They felt they were wasting time trying to give similar information to bodies who could instead co-ordinate more.

### Satisfaction with FSA activities in the shellfish sector

Of the two qualitative interviews that were conducted with shellfish FBOs in England, both were critical of the processes around how decisions are made on water quality and how the grading works (although it is worth noting that the FSA does not have responsibility for water quality). One felt that the wrong systems were in place to determine water quality and that the FSA was not listening to consultation on this issue.



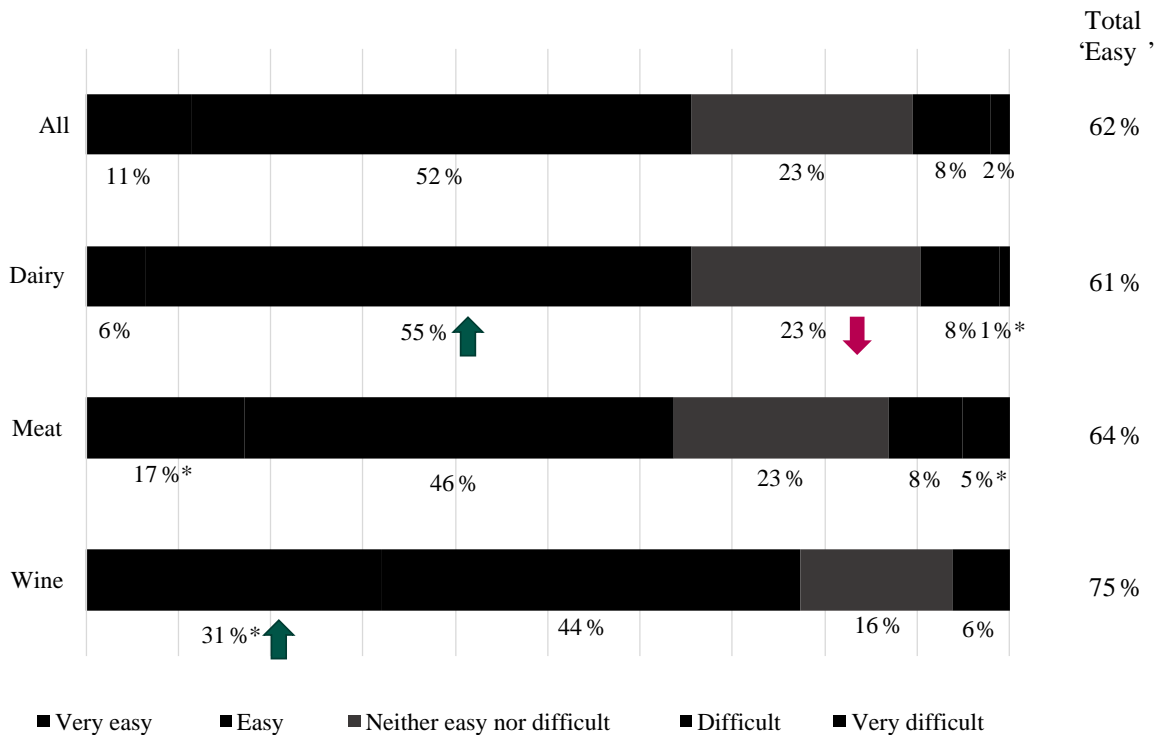
## FSA and Official Controls: Ability to comply with FSA guidelines

## Ease of complying with FSA guidelines

All FBOs were asked how easy or difficult they find complying with FSA guidelines. Around six in ten (62%) stated that they found it easy (11% 'very' easy), and 10% reported finding it difficult. This presents no change from the 2020 findings.

By sector, FBOs in the wine sector were most likely to find compliance very easy (31%) compared to the average and dairy was least likely (6%), as shown in Figure 7.1. Those in the meat sector were also more likely than the average to find compliance very easy (17%) but also had a larger cohort than the average that found compliance very difficult (5%).

**Figure 7.1 Ease or difficulty in complying with FSA guidelines**

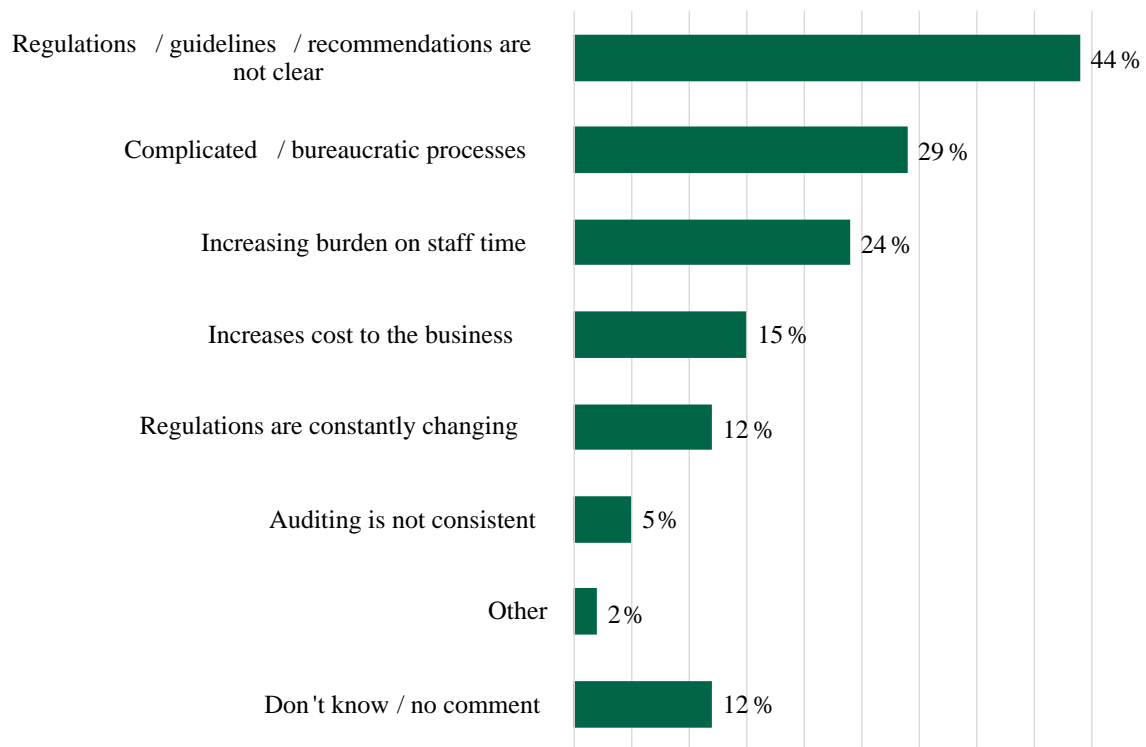


Base : Dairy 2022 (264), Dairy 2020 (200). Arrows indicate significant difference from 2020. \* Indicates significant difference from all other sectors. Don't know figures have not been presented in the chart

## Reasons for difficulty in complying with FSA guidelines

Those FBOs that found it difficult to comply with FSA guidelines were asked to explain why they were finding it difficult. As shown in Figure 7.2, the most common reason for difficulty related to the clarity of the guidance (44%), followed by complicated processes (29%), and increasing burdens on staff time (24%).

**Figure 7.2 Reasons for difficulty in complying with FSA guidelines**



D2. Please can you briefly explain why? Base: All who found compliance with guidelines difficult (41).  
Base : All FBOs (400). Arrows indicate significant difference from 2020. \*Indicates significant difference from all in 2022.

The qualitative interviews provided further information on the difficulties experienced when trying to comply with FSA guidelines. Most commonly mentioned was the confusion between different standards set by other organisations and the duplication of effort this caused FBOs.

"I wouldn't know what the FSA guidelines are ... are they any different than what we have to do for our Red Tractor? I follow those and Arla Garden [guidelines] to the T, but I'm not aware of anything different the FSA want." (Dairy, England)

"I'm fairly clear on everything ... what we have to do for one audit, we have to do for the others ... I think there are too many organisations doing the same thing [audits]." (Dairy, Wales)

There were also concerns regarding the inconsistency of the FSA's inspectors and a feeling from those that find compliance difficult that they are interpreting the guidelines differently.

"It's all dependent on the Official Vet at the time.... There is no one size fits all they all follow their own rules I think". (Meat, England)

A few FBOs also reported the costs of compliance as being the main barrier to compliance.

"I wouldn't say it was easy because it depends on what they want you to comply with... It depends on how much money we are going to have to spend to comply with whatever they want us to comply with at that time." (Meat, England)

Linked, one small FBO in the dairy sector felt that in both the design and application of regulations the FSA could give more consideration to the size of businesses. They felt they did not have the same infrastructure or funds as larger farms to necessarily fully comply, and that they were therefore at a competitive disadvantage.

Lastly, some FBOs experiencing difficulties in compliance stated that the main problem they experienced was keeping accurate and up-to-date records.

"Near enough is not good enough. You have to be precise." (Wine, England)

Reflecting the quantitative survey, most of the qualitative respondents were satisfied and had no improvements to recommend on how compliance could be made easier. The handful of recommendations proposed included:

Continuing the digitisation process, to reduce duplication of work and administration time.

"We used to do it all by paper and files and it was a lot harder work. Now it's computerised it's simpler and easier and you can populate information into different categories automatically to save duplicating the information into several sectors." (Dairy, England)

The FSA providing more clarity on the reasons for new regulations, so that FBOs can understand the importance and implication of the change.

"Compliance is always easier when you can see and understand why you need to comply yourself, if you see something as pointless compliance is a bit more difficult." (Dairy, Wales)

The FSA to raise awareness more widely across government of the barriers to compliance that FBOs face (one FBO noted how they are currently using a trade body to do this but felt the FSA could do more).

The FSA could be better in its communications on how guidelines are changing and clearer on the language they use in official documents.

"I find out that I've had to speak to a couple of other people who are in the same situation as me...they've said, 'Were you aware of, this is the latest thing you've got to do', and I've found myself not knowing about it." (Meat, England)

"Make it easier for people to process; speak plain English." (Meat, England).



## FSA and Official Controls: FSA's response to COVID 19

No time series analysis is possible as the 2020 survey occurred in February and March 2020, before the restrictions were implemented in the UK.

### Impact COVID-19 had on FBOs' ability to comply with regulations

Overall, the majority of FBOs (72%) said that COVID-19 had no impact on their ability to comply with FSA regulations. However, as shown in Figure 8.1, just under one in five (18%) reported that it made it more difficult to comply with regulations (4% citing it had become 'a lot more' difficult). Very few (7%) FBOs said COVID-19 made their ability to comply with food regulations easier.

FBOs in the meat sector were more likely compared to those in the dairy and wine sector to say they found it more difficult (28%, compared to 14% in dairy and 13% in wine). FBOs in the meat sector were also more likely to say they found it 'a lot more difficult' (9%, compared to 2% in dairy

and 3% in wine). There were few differences by country or other sub groups of interest.

### **Figure 8.1 Impact COVID-19 had on FBOs' ability to comply with FSA regulation**

E1. How has Covid-19 affected your organisation's ability to comply with food standards regulations? Would you say it has made things...? Base: All businesses (400); Dairy (264), Meat (99), Wine (32). '\*' indicates a significant difference from all other sectors. Don't know figures have not been presented in the chart.

## **How COVID-19 affected FBOs**

The qualitative interviews enabled FBOs to express in more detail how their organisation was impacted by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Most typically FBOs focussed on the impact of the pandemic more broadly, as opposed to their impact on their ability to comply with FSA regulation.

FBOs in the dairy sector cited either not being impacted by the pandemic, or in some instances being impacted positively. Although there was mention of additional protocols put in place such as 'social distancing' and other logistics, the negative impact of such changes were namely that is slowed down processes. For example, for milking they could only have one person in the building whereas normally they would have two.

"Am I complaining? No. I think we got away quite lucky, compared to a lot of industries. At least we could keep going." (Dairy, England)

Some mentioned the positive impact of the COVID-19 restriction period on their business. For example, for businesses who processed mozzarella cheese and the increase in take away pizza consumption saw an uplift in their sales. Other producers mentioned their sales tripling because people were at home more.

FBOs in the meat sector had more mixed experiences. Some FBOs mentioned almost shutting down because their meat supplied a lot of fast food outlets that closed during restriction time. Others however mentioned little to not impact on their businesses.

“I think because we are a food industry we kept working the whole time of COVID, so as far as working it didn't have an impact on us; we came to work every day.” (Meat, England)

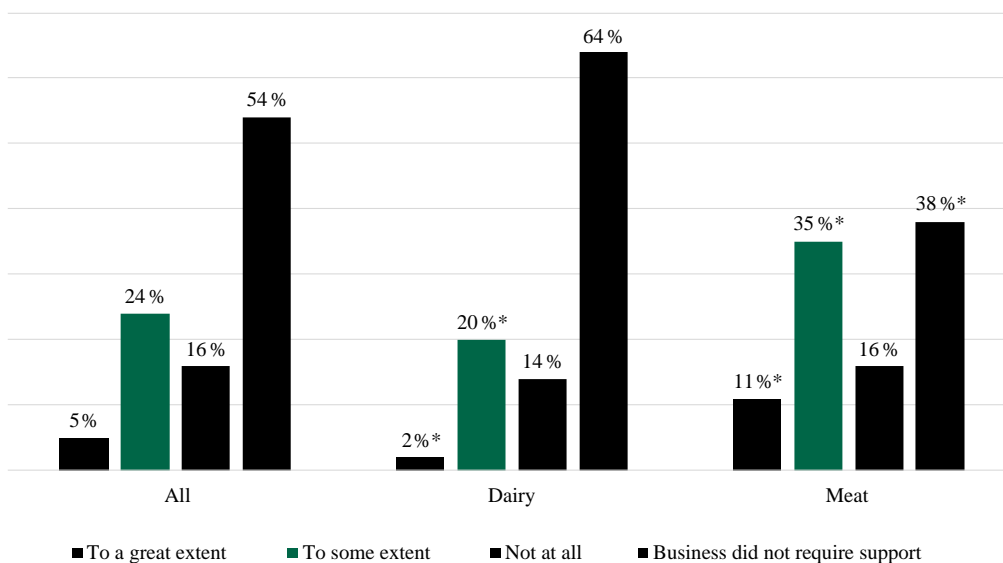
FBOs in the wine sector noted a strong impact on business to business sales because pubs and restaurants had closed down. Some noticed a positive impact on their retail and supermarket sales as a result. One FBO even opened a shop as a result so they could sell directly to the general public.

## Extent to which FBOs felt supported during COVID-19

FBOs who found it either easier or more difficult to comply with regulations during the pandemic were asked how well supported by the FSA they felt during this period. Three in ten (30%) reported feeling supported to at least some extent during the pandemic. The majority of these FBOs said they felt supported to some extent (24%) rather than to a great extent (5%). Just over half of FBOs said they did not require any COVID-19 support from the FSA (54%) and only 16% said they did not feel supported at all.

As shown in Figure 8.2, FBOs in the dairy sector were more likely than those in the meat sector to not need any support (64% compared to 38%). That said, FBOs in the meat sector were more likely than those in dairy to say they felt supported to at least some extent (46% compared to 21%).

**Figure 8.2 Extent to which FBOs felt supported during the COVID-19 pandemic**



E2. To what extent do you feel that the FSA supported your organisation during the restrictions brought in as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic? All businesses who found compliance easier or more difficult (98); Dairy (56), Meat (37). “\*\*” indicates a significant difference from all other sectors. Wine is not included due to the small sample size (4).

FBOs who said they felt unsupported during the pandemic were then asked why they felt unsupported during this time. Low base sizes mean findings here should only be taken indicatively. The most common responses included an absence of timely/ helpful guidance (5 out

of 16 FBOs) and receiving either little or no communications (5 out of 16 FBOs). Another 5 out of 16 did not realise there was any support available. This perhaps suggests that support during the COVID-19 restriction period could have been improved through better communications.

In the qualitative interviews many mentioned they did not receive any support or communications from the FSA, but also that they did not need any. One FBO in the dairy sector mentioned they conducted an inspection via remote camera and the farm had to submit paperwork for evidence of compliance, but that it did not make a difference, just that they used more technology than they would normally.

"[The pandemic] literally had no impact. Our milk got picked up every day, our cattle went to the market, we don't have employees ... we're not reliant on anyone else for anything." (Dairy, England)

Although many mentioned experiencing issues during the period of restrictions in the wine sector, they often mentioned not having many interactions with the FSA during this time also. They did not receive much help or communications, but also questioned whether it was the FSAs remit to do this.

## Impact of COVID-19 on FBOs' views of the FSA

FBOs who found it either easier or more difficult to comply with regulations during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic were also asked how the FSA's response to COVID-19 impacted their views of the FSA, if at all. The vast majority (82%) said the FSA's response in this context had not changed their views of the FSA. This is due in part to the high proportion of FBOs that did not require support from the FSA (63% of FBOs whose views had not changed did not require COVID-19 support from the FSA). Similar proportions said their views either improved (10%) or got worse (8%).

FBOs in the meat sector (who were more likely to need support during the COVID-19 pandemic), were also more likely compared to those in the dairy sector to say their views of the FSA had improved (19% compared to 5%). There were few differences by country or other sub groups of interest.

FBOs who said their views of the FSA either improved or got worse over COVID-19 were then asked why their views changed. Low base sizes mean findings here should only be taken indicatively. The main factor influencing more positive views of the FSA related to the helpfulness of staff. Those whose views had deteriorated most commonly cited slow communication, or a lack of engagement.



## FSA and Official Controls: FSA's response to the EU exit and other events

This area of the study was added in 2022 so there are no comparisons to the previous wave of research.



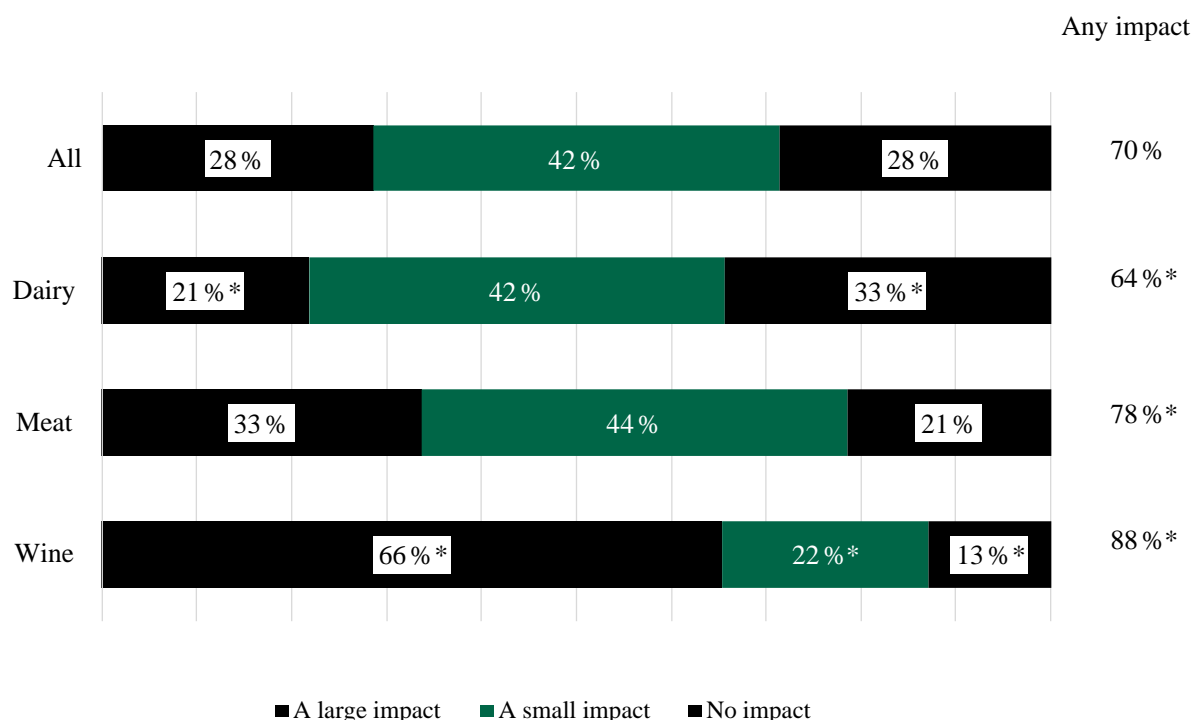
# Impact of UK's exit from the EU on FBOs

The majority of FBOs (70%) felt the UK's exit from the EU had some level of impact on their business; 28% considered this to be a large impact. Just under three in ten (28%) said it had no impact and a very small proportion said they did not know (2%).

As shown in Figure 9.1, FBOs in the wine sector were most likely impacted by the EU exit compared to meat and dairy. Just under nine in ten (88%) experienced some level of impact, compared to 78% in the meat sector and 64% in the dairy sector. Wine FBOs were also twice as likely to experience a large impact (66%, compared to 33% for meat and 21% for dairy).

There were few differences by country or other sub groups of interest.

**Figure 9.1 Impact of EU Exit on FBOs**



F1. What level of impact, if any, has the UK's exit from the EU had for your business? Base: All businesses (400); Dairy (264), Meat (99), Wine (32). "\*" indicates a significant difference from all other sectors. Don't know figures have not been presented in the chart

Qualitative interviews explored in more detail how the UK's exit from the EU impacted FBOs' business. On the whole, businesses typically felt negatively affected by the UK's exit from the EU, although there were a handful of positive reflections.

For some, these issues were exacerbated by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

"It made life a whole lot more painful - logistical, legislative, costs - transport costs...If it wasn't COVID, it was Brexit and vice versa." (Wine, England)

Recruitment was a common issue across sectors, both in anticipation of and subsequent to the UK's exit from the EU. FBOs mentioned staff leaving because they thought they might not be able to stay in the UK and there being a labour supply shortage as well.

"We rely quite largely on a Romanian workforce and we haven't as yet failed to get someone, as we have been able to bring someone from other places in the country. Going forwards this may be an area that could be a problem." (Dairy, England)

Paperwork was also a commonly cited issue. FBOs either felt the burden they faced here had not reduced despite expectations that the UK's exit from the EU would contribute to less 'red tape', while some felt the burden had increased as a result of complications in exporting and importing.

"Obviously more paperwork because when you are moving anything out of the borders...prior to Brexit you didn't have to have paperwork to move things to Ireland ...it is another person's job and learning about all this new legislation and what you are supposed to be doing... that makes a difference as well." (Meat, England)

Increased complications relating to customs and costings was also mentioned.

"Increased costs of everything, that is the main issue. The cost of production has gone up ... we're lucky, our milk is sold mainly to make cheese in the UK." (Dairy, Wales)

"There was another part for a machine and it was stuck in a port because they couldn't get clearance because of the paperwork. It's taking longer to get things into the country." (Dairy, England)

That said, a number of businesses mentioned either no impact or even positive benefits to the UK's exit. One FBO reported that their business was in fact created as a result of the EU exit and changes in legislation. A dairy farmer in Wales mentioned because milk prices had doubled it was good for this business.

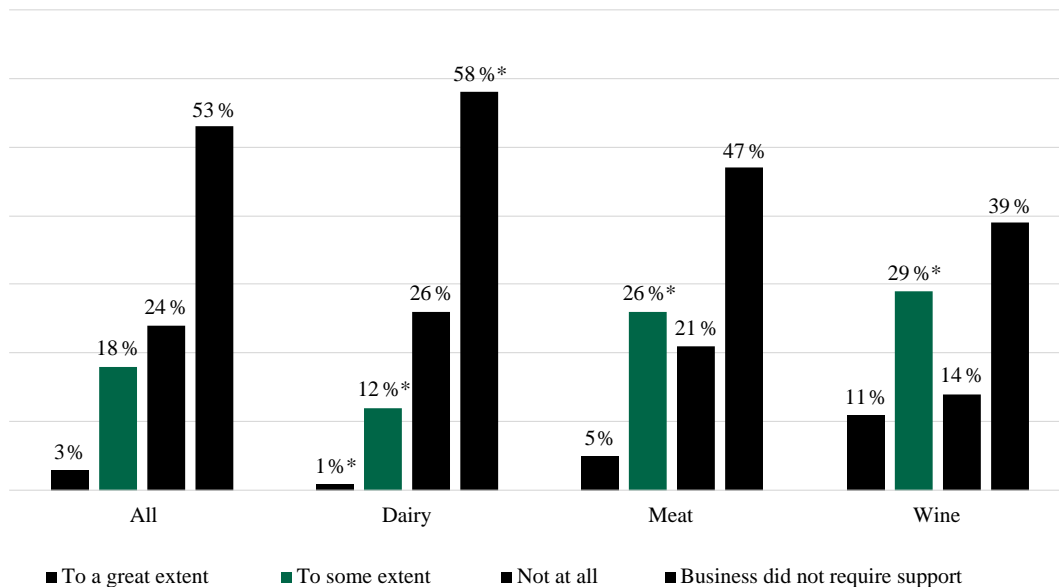
## **Extent to which FBOs felt supported during the UK's exit from the EU**

FBOs who said the EU exit had at least some impact on their business were asked to what extent they felt supported by the FSA during this time. Just over half (53%) of those FBOs said their business did not require any support during this time, a finding that was relatively consistent across sectors.

One in five FBOs (21%) said they felt supported to at least some extent (with 3% reporting feeling supported to a 'great' extent), while 24% did not feel supported at all.

As shown in Figure 9.2, FBOs in the meat sector were much more likely to feel supported at least to some extent compared to the dairy sector (31% compared to 13%).

### **Figure 9.2 Extent to which FBOs felt supported during the UK's exit from the EU**



F2. To what extent do you feel that the FSA supported your organisation during the UK's exit from the EU?

Base: All EU exit has had impact (Overall: 278; Dairy: 168; Meat: 77; Wine: 28). \*Indicates significant difference from all UK's 2022. Don't know figures have not been presented in the chart but at an overall level were 3% (8).

FBOs whose overall experience of the FSA was 'good' were more likely than FBOs whose overall experience was 'average' to say they felt supported to at least some extent (26% compared to 7%). Otherwise, there were few differences by other sub groups of interest.

Qualitative interviews generally tended to report minimal input or support from the FSA during the UK's exit from the EU. The size of the business was mentioned to be relevant by a small dairy farmer, who felt the FSA's support and communication tended to be based on the experiences of large businesses rather than smaller ones.

"[The FSA provided] No support at all with employment, language barriers and visa applications. They only deal with food safety." (Meat, England)

However, one FBO said they found the FSA's communications clear and helpful when interpreting timings around pivotal changes.

## Impact of the FSA's response to the UK's exit from the EU on views of the FSA

FBOs who said the UK's exit from the EU had at least some impact on their business were then asked whether the FSA's response impacted their views of the FSA. The vast majority (83%) of FBOs said their views had not changed. Only six per cent of FBOs' views improved and eight per cent got worse. There was little difference by subgroups of interest.

Most commonly, FBOs whose views of the FSA got worse as a result of the EU exit reflected that the information, guidance and advice provided over this period was unclear.

"I don't feel that the communication between the different bodies is effective regarding the requirements so I don't know if they were all aligned. I don't know if everyone received the same training." (Meat, Northern Ireland)

## Other events since 202 that impacted FBOs views and interactions with the FSA

All FBOs were asked what other events since 2020 had impacted their views and interactions with the FSA. Nearly all (96%) said that there were no events that impacted their view. Avian influenza, the Ukraine-Russia conflict and rising costs were mentioned by a handful of FBOs as issues or events that were affecting them.

Qualitative interviews revealed that FBOs felt they had been impacted by the Ukraine-Russia war more than initially suggested. There was a general sense that more recently the war had increased costs of feed, fertiliser and fuel.

"It hasn't really impacted us [talking about the UK exit from the EU]... the Ukrainian war has impacted more ... fertilizer and feed prices are going up, but this hasn't affected our sales or anything ... [increases after UK exit from the EU] were so minimal I didn't even notice." (Dairy, England)



## FSA and Official Controls: Awareness and views on the Operational Transformation Programme

The aim of the OTP was to move towards a more proportionate risk and evidence-based approach to regulation. The FSA explored introducing new technologies in the audit and approvals processes, the potential to take a more risk-based approach to how the FSA utilises its resources and the potential to use a different regulatory approach following changes to current legislation.

Since the research was conducted, the FSA has now brought all regulatory transformation activity and thinking into one place. The FSA has transitioned the resource and consideration of work for longer-term reform/legislative planning to sit under its Achieving Business Compliance programme. Work relating to improvements within the existing regulatory framework will now come under a new Operational Modernisation programme in Operations. More information on the OTP changes can be found in the FSA Board meeting papers for December 2022.

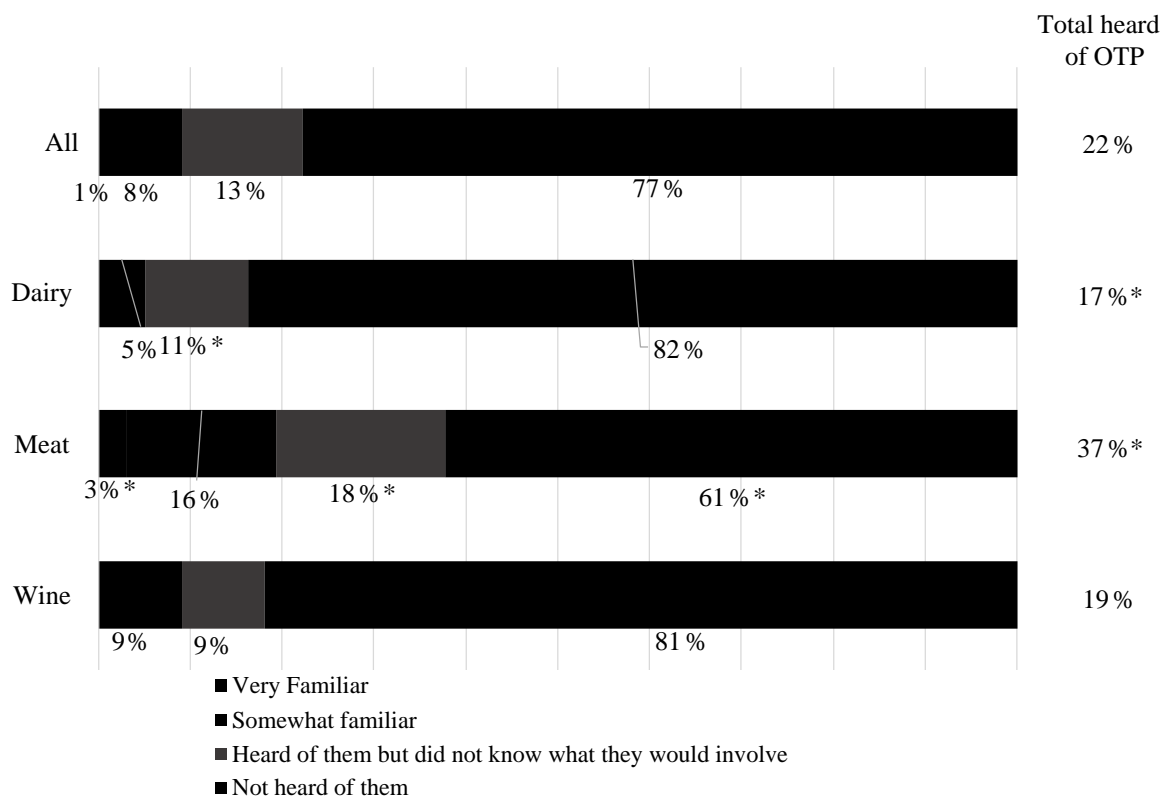
This chapter examines how familiar FBOs were with the OTP, how they have heard of it, and if they think the OTP initiatives would make it easier or more difficult to comply with FSA regulations.

### Familiarity with the OTP

All FBOs were asked how familiar they were with the OTP and the initiatives which are planned to be introduced by the FSA. Just over one-fifth (22%) had heard of the OTP and its initiatives, although only one per cent considered themselves to be very familiar. FBOs in the meat sector were more likely to have heard of the OTP (37%) when compared to the average (22%) and more

likely to be familiar with the OTP (19%) compared to the average (9%), as shown in Figure 10.1.

**Figure 10.1 Awareness of the Operational Transformation Programme and its initiatives**



Base : Dairy 2022 (264), Dairy 2020 (200). Arrows indicate significant difference from 2020. \*Indicates significant difference from all in 2022.  
**G1: How familiar were you of OTP and the initiatives which are planned to be introduced by the FSA?** Base: All businesses except in the shellfish sector (395); Dairy (264), Meat (99), Wine (32). ‘\*’ indicates a significant difference from all other sectors. Don’t know figures have not been presented in the chart.

Those based in England were also more likely to have heard of the OTP (24%), compared to those in Wales (14%). Additionally FBOs who had communicated with the FSA in the last month showed greater levels of awareness than those who had not (38% had heard of the OTP compared with 19%).

## Sources of engagement

FBOs who had heard of the OTP were asked if they had any engagement with the FSA directly or via a trade association about the OTP. Only a small proportion of FBOs who had heard of the OTP reported that they had had engagement with either the FSA (9%), a trade association (7%) or both (5%) about the OTP. In total this accounts for less than 5% of all FBOs who had knowingly received communication about the OTP from these sources.

## Impact of OTP changes

FBOs who had heard of the OTP were asked if they thought the OTP initiatives would make it easier or more difficult to comply with FSA regulations. Half (51%) thought it would be easier (including 3% who thought it would make compliance 'a lot' easier), with around a fifth being neutral (18%) and close to one in 10 (9%) believing it would be more difficult. Those in the meat sector were more likely to consider it to become easier (70%) when compared to those in the dairy sector (41%).

Reflecting the low levels of awareness captured in the quantitative survey, most of the FBOs in the qualitative interviews were unable to articulate the likely impacts of the OTP for their business. However, one FBO did state that there was a lack of consultation and was unclear on what the changes would mean for small game businesses, indicating that the FSA could do more to protect and support them. (It is worth noting that a consultation was held in 2021 with stakeholders in the meat sector; [Consultation on Early Proposals for a Future Delivery Model for FSA-Delivered Official Controls in the Meat Sector](#)).

"Gaming is a small industry and certain departments within DEFRA probably don't consider us worth thinking about. They put in legislation that does not work, and we're having to fight with that. The FSA aren't working with us...we're fighting the FSA." (Meat, England)

One FBO pointed out that it would probably make things marginally easier for them with a reduced number of audits, but they wondered whether consumers would be comfortable with the changes.

Those that had not heard of the OTP were re-read the description provided in the survey and asked if they thought it would impact their ability to comply with FSA regulations. Reactions were mixed, with some thinking it sounded like a good change that could work well.

"Anything that's risk-based is a good thing, because it focuses you on the core things in your business that could cause problems." (Wine, England)

However, others were cautious and worried about how the changes would be implemented, and whether they would be consulted, or were concerned about it involving more work for the FBOs.

"It sounds very good in principle, whether it will work with the current system [where the Official Vets are inconsistent], I don't think so." (Meat, England)

"The wine industry has very intelligent and vocal people and could be used to refine proposal and policy." (Wine, England)

"It does make it more difficult because there is more to do but you are selling produce to the public...there is a reason why we have to do this and why we have to do Red Tractor...it is all joined up." (Dairy, Wales)



## FSA and Official Controls: Conclusions

This report details the second wave of research commissioned by the FSA on FBOs' perceptions of the FSA, Official Controls and more recently the impact of the COVID-19 period of restrictions and the UK's exit from the EU. This report also explores FBOs' familiarity with the OTP. Our conclusions are structured around the three research objectives of relevance to this study.

### The views that FBOs have of the FSA and Official Controls

In the main FBOs, especially those in the meat and wine sectors, have a very positive experience of the FSA. Key factors influencing both positive and negative attitudes towards the FSA typically related to staff communication and support, as well as the approach to inspections and other

visits. For example, those who felt positive about the FSA typically reflected that staff were helpful and supportive and that the FSA ensured high standards were maintained regarding food safety. However, those with a more negative outlook tended to feel that FSA communication could be improved, that the approach to inspections needed to be clearer and fairer, and that processes could be simplified.

In further interpreting the views that FBOs have of FSA it helps to consider their own understanding of what the FSA does. While these are self-reported figures, the majority of FBOs reported they understood both the FSA's overall purpose (i.e. why they exist), and their remit (i.e. what they do). There was less clarity with respect to how the FSA makes decisions in its dealings, and regarding financial concerns. Increasing the transparency of these elements might contribute to a more positive assessment of the FSA among FBOs, as they can better understand the rationale behind for example, approach to inspections, varied communication etc.

Communication with the sector varied quite substantially; some FBOs had communicated with the FSA within a week of the survey, others reported they had never had communication with them. The difference by sector is particularly noticeable, however, with FBOs in the meat sector appearing to have much more frequent communication with the FSA than FBOs in other sectors (this finding is expected as the FSA have more regular contact with stakeholders and FBOs within the meat sector than wine and dairy). Linked, FBOs in the meat sector tended to be more satisfied with the communication they received, while those in the dairy were typically less satisfied.

Linked to the aforementioned complexity of the regulatory processes, six in 10 FBOs reported they found it easy to comply with FSA guidelines, with one in 10 reporting difficulties. This to some extent justified part of the rationale for the OTP. At the stage the research was conducted, however, the majority of FBOs have not heard of the OTP.

## **How have views have changed over time**

On the whole, the views of FBOs have stayed relatively consistent over the last two years, despite the upheaval caused by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, among other things. Key changes as set out below typically related to a positive shift in the views of FBOs within the meat sector:

- around one in ten (11%) reported that their views of the FSA have improved in the last two years, while four per cent reported they had got worse
- there has been a considerable increase in the proportion of FBOs in the meat sector who in 2022 reported a positive experience of working with the FSA (rising from 64% in 2020 to 82% in 2022)
- perhaps underpinning this overall increase in positivity within the meat sector, satisfaction among three activities increased, namely re-approval following a change of activities (from 72% to 96%), enforcement of FSA regulations (57% to 83%), and health and safety advice (61% to 83%)
- the proportion of FBOs who considered themselves to be clear on the FSA's remit increased from 63% in 2020 to 76% in 2022
- the proportion of FBOs reporting they have had face-to-face meetings with the FSA has increased from 59% to 67%, while the proportion receiving letters has reduced from 53% to 44%.

## **The impact of societal events on FBOs views of the FSA**

Despite the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, both economically as well as the restrictions brought in as a response, the majority of FBOs reported that it had no impact on their

ability to comply with FSA regulations (although the impact appeared more severe for those in the meat sector). FBOs mostly said that they did not require support from the FSA during the period of restrictions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, and as a consequence this did not have an impact on their views of the FSA.

Although the questions are not directly comparable in the survey, FBOs were more likely to say they felt the UK's exit from the EU had impacted their business. While some of these impacts were positive, the majority cited resulting issues relating to recruitment challenges, increased paperwork, issues relating to customs and increased costs. Despite reporting negative experiences as a result of these events, many FBOs did not feel this impacted their views on the FSA because they did not consider it to be the FSA's remit or responsibility to respond to the changes.



## Annex A: Survey questionnaire

### A: Overall feeling towards FSA

(ask all)

**1. The FSA is the national authority responsible for food safety and food hygiene across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. You may interact directly with the FSA through audits, approvals, the meat hygiene inspectors and official vets on site or correspondence (letters/emails/calls). You may also receive communication from other organisations including other Government Departments (for example, Defra), local authorities and industry bodies. However, for the purpose of this research, please only tell us about your interactions with the FSA.**

How would you rate your overall experience of working with the FSA? (single code read out)

- very good: 1
- good: 2
- average: 3
- poor: 4
- very poor: 5
- don't know: 6
- refused: 7

Ask if respondent rates overall experience (A1=1 to 5)

#### **2. Why did you give this response?**

Enter response:

OR

Don't know: 1

#### **3. How have your views of the FSA changed over the last two years? (ask all)**



- got better: 1
- Stayed the same: 2
- Got worse: 3
- Don't know: 4

## B: Last contact with FSA

**1. When did you last have contact with or hear from the FSA? This could be in person, through audits or inspections, by phone, in writing or online.**

Add if necessary Northern Ireland: (Meat and dairy): The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs send communications on similar matters, this is independent from FSA communications so please do not consider these when answering this question. (ask all)

Add if necessary Northern Ireland: (Shellfish and wine): Local Authorities also send communications on similar matters, these are independent from FSA communications so please do not consider these when answering this question.

Single code, prompt if necessary.

- today: 1
- not today, but in the last week: 2
- over a week ago, but in the last month: 3
- over a month ago but in the last 6 months: 4
- over 6 months ago: 5
- never: 6
- don't know: 7

## C: Understanding of the FSA

**1. How clear or unclear are you about the following: (single code per row read out)**

| Statement   | Very clear | Clear | Neither clear nor unclear | Unclear | Very unclear |
|---|------------|-------|---------------------------|---------|--------------|
| 1 The FSA's overall purpose - why the FSA exists        | 1          | 2     | 3                         | 4       | 5            |
| 2 The FSA's remit - what the FSA does                   | 1          | 2     | 3                         | 4       | 5            |
| 3 How the FSA is funded                                 | 1          | 2     | 3                         | 4       | 5            |
| 4 What changes you have to pay the FSA                  | 1          | 2     | 3                         | 4       | 5            |
| 5 How the FSAS makes decisions in its dealings with you | 1          | 2     | 3                         | 4       | 5            |

Ask according to what they come under on sample.

**2. We will present you with a list of processes and services that the FSA delivers [NI: directly or that DAERA deliver on behalf of the FSA]. For each process, please say whether you have had experience of this and, if so, how satisfied or dissatisfied you were with that experience.**

Single code, read out.

### Dairy

| Statement   | Very satisfied | Satisfied | Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied | Dissatisfied | Very dissatisfied | No experience |
|---|----------------|-----------|------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|---------------|
| 1 Approval of new establishments/premises   | 1              | 2         | 3                                  | 4            | 5                 | 6             |
| 2 Re-approval following a change of activities  | 1              | 2         | 3                                  | 4            | 5                 | 6             |
| 3 Unannounced visits  | 1              | 2         | 3                                  | 4            | 5                 | 6             |
| 4 Enforcement of FSA regulations  | 1              | 2         | 3                                  | 4            | 5                 | 6             |
| 5 The FSA Team  | 1              | 2         | 3                                  | 4            | 5                 | 6             |
| 6 [England and Wales] Inspections including for animal welfare (Northern Ireland inspections) | 1              | 2         | 3                                  | 4            | 5                 | 6             |

## Meat

| Statement  | Very satisfied | Satisfied | Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied | Dissatisfied | Very dissatisfied | No experience |
|--|----------------|-----------|------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|---------------|
| 7 Approval of new establishments/premises  | 1              | 2         | 3                                  | 4            | 5                 | 6             |
| 8 Re-approval following a change of activities   | 1              | 2         | 3                                  | 4            | 5                 | 6             |
| 9 Unannounced visits   | 1              | 2         | 3                                  | 4            | 5                 | 6             |
| 10 Enforcement of FSA regulations  | 1              | 2         | 3                                  | 4            | 5                 | 6             |
| 11 [England and Wales] Inspections including for animal welfare (Northern Ireland inspections)                             | 1              | 2         | 3                                  | 4            | 5                 | 6             |
| 12 [England and Wales] Exports to new markets  | 1              | 2         | 3                                  | 4            | 5                 | 6             |
| 13 [England and Wales] The FSA team including official vet [Northern Ireland] DAERA official vets and official auxiliaries | 1              | 2         | 3                                  | 4            | 5                 | 6             |
| 14 Audits  | 1              | 2         | 3                                  | 4            | 5                 | 6             |
| 15 [England and Wales only] Health and safety advice   | 1              | 2         | 3                                  | 4            | 5                 | 6             |

## Wine

| Statement  | Very satisfied | Satisfied | Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied | Dissatisfied | Very dissatisfied | No experience |
|--|----------------|-----------|------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|---------------|
| 16 New wine business registration visits           | 1              | 2         | 3                                  | 4            | 5                 | 6             |
| 17 The Food Standards Agency wine inspections team | 1              | 2         | 3                                  | 4            | 5                 | 6             |
| 18 Enforcement of FSA regulations                  | 1              | 2         | 3                                  | 4            | 5                 | 6             |
| 19 Inspections                                     | 1              | 2         | 3                                  | 4            | 5                 | 6             |

## Shellfish

| Statement   | Very satisfied | Satisfied | Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied | Dissatisfied | Very dissatisfied | No experience |
|---|----------------|-----------|------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|---------------|
| 20 Classification reviews   | 1              | 2         | 3                                  | 4            | 5                 | 6             |
| 21 New area applications  | 1              | 2         | 3                                  | 4            | 5                 | 6             |
| 22 [England only] Sanitary surveys and reviews  | 1              | 2         | 3                                  | 4            | 5                 | 6             |
| 23 [England] Action state reports (text for England) [Northern Ireland] out with investigatory emails | 1              | 2         | 3                                  | 4            | 5                 | 6             |
| 24 Consultation   | 1              | 2         | 3                                  | 4            | 5                 | 6             |

## D: Attitudes towards FSA communication

### 1. How easy or difficult is it to comply with the FSA guidelines and requirements? (ask all)

Single code, do not read out.

- very easy: 1
- easy: 2
- neither easy or difficult: 3
- difficult: 4
- very difficult: 5
- don't know: 6

Ask if respondent has found it difficult to comply with guidelines (D1= 4 or 5)

### 2. You said it is difficult/very difficult to comply with FSA guidelines and requirements. Please can you briefly explain why?

Write in:

Don't know: 1

### 3. Which of the following types of communication do you receive from the FSA? (ask all)

Multicode, read out

- emails from mailing list: 1
- emails specifically to you: 2
- newsletters: 3
- social media feeds (for example, Twitter, Facebook): 4
- face to face meetings with FSA staff (for example, inspections, audits or unannounced visits): 5
- phone calls: 6
- letter specifically for you: 7
- other (please specify): 8
- Single code: don't know: 9
- Single code: No communication received from FSA: 10

### 4. Overall how satisfied would you say you are with FSA's communication with you? (ask all)

Single code, prompt if necessary.

- very satisfied: 1
- satisfied: 2
- neither satisfied or dissatisfied: 3
- dissatisfied: 4
- cery dissatisfied: 5
- don't know: 6

**5. What types of messages and information do you value from the FSA? (ask all)**

Multicode, do not read out.

- changes to official controls: 1
- changes to regulations affecting your business: 2
- changes to FSA staffing: 3
- commentary on how wider issues will affect the FSA's work (for example, EU exit): 4
- other (please specify): 5
- Single code: don't know: 6
- Single code: none: 7

## **E: FSA's response to COVID 19**

This next section asks about your experiences with the FSA during COVID 19, and how well you felt supported during this time.

**1. How has COVID-19 affected your organisation's ability to comply with food standard regulations? Would you say it has made things...? (ask all)**

Single code, read out.

- a lot easier: 1
- slightly easier: 2
- neither easier nor difficult: 3
- slightly more difficult: 4
- a lot more difficult: 5
- Do not read out: don't know: 6

Ask if easier or difficult (E1=1 to 2, 4 to 5)

**2. To what extent do you feel that the FSA supported your organisation during the restrictions brought in as a result of the COVID pandemic?**

Single code, read out.

- to a great extent: 1
- to some extent: 2
- not at all: 3
- business did not require COVID-19 support from FSA: 4
- Do not read out: don't know: 5

Ask if we have felt unsupported during the pandemic (E2=3)

**3. Why do you feel that you were not supported?**

Write in:

Don't know: 1

Ask if easier or difficult (E1=1 to 2, 4 to 5)

**4. How has the FSA's response to the COVID-19 pandemic affected your views of the FSA? Would you say your view has...?**

Single code, read out.

- considerably improved: 1
- slightly improved: 2
- not changed: 3
- slightly worsened: 4
- considerably worsened: 5
- don't know: 6

Ask if respondent views have improved or got worse (E4=1 to 2 or 4 to 5)

**5. Why did your views of them change?**

Write in:

Don't know: 1

## **F: FSA's responses to the EU's Exit and other events**

**1. What level of impact, if any, has the UK's exit from the EU had for your business? Would you say that it has had...?**

Single code, read out.

- a large impact: 1
- a small impact: 2
- no impact: 3 (route to F5)
- Do not read out: don't know: 4 (route to F5)

(ask if EU exit has had impact F1-1 or 2)

**2. To what extent do you feel that the FSA supported your organisation during the UK's exit from the EU?**

Single code, read out.

- to a great extent: 1
- to some extent: 2
- not at all: 3
- business did not require support from the FSA: 4
- Do not read out: don't know: 5

(ask if EU exit has had impact F1-1 or 2)

**3. How has the FSA's response to the UK's exit from the EU affected your views of the FSA? Would you say your view has...?**

Single code, read out.

- considerably improved: 1
- slightly improved: 2
- not changed: 3

- slightly worsened: 4
- considerably worsened: 5
- Do not read out: don't know: 6

Ask if respondents views have improved or got worse (F2=1 to 2 or 4 to 5)

#### **4. Why did your views of the FSA change?**

Write in:

Don't know: 1

#### **5. Other than the COVID 19 pandemic and the UK leaving the EU, has there been any other events since 2020 that have impacted your views and interactions with the FSA? (ask all)**

Single code, do not read out.

- yes (please specify): 1
- no: 2
- don't know: 3

## **G: OTP and Initiatives**

Ask all meat, dairy and wine sector

The Operational Transformation Programme (OTP) is designed to modernise the way the FSA delivers regulatory activities in the meat, dairy and wine sector.

The aim is to move towards a more proportionate risk and evidence-based approach to regulation. The FSA are exploring introducing new technologies in the audit and approvals processes, the potential to take a more risk-based approach to how the FSA utilises its resources and the potential to use a different regulatory approach following changes to our current legislation.

#### **1. How familiar were you of OTP and the initiatives which are planned to be introduced by the FSA?**

Single code, prompt if necessary.

- very familiar: 1
- somewhat familiar: 2
- heard of them but did not know what they would involve: 3
- not heard of them: 4
- don't know: 5

#### **2. Have you had any engagement with the FSA directly or via a trade association about the OTP? (ask all heard of OPT (G1=1 to 3) meat, dairy and wine sector)**

Single code, read out.

- yes with the FSA: 1
- yes, with a trade association: 2
- with both: 3
- none: 4
- don't know: 5

**3. Do you think the OTP initiatives will make it easier or more difficult to comply with FSA regulations? (ask all heard of OTP (G1=1 to 3) meat, dairy and wine sector.**

Single code, prompt if necessary.

- a lot easier: 1
- a bit easier: 2
- neither easier nor difficult: 3
- a bit more difficult: 4
- a lot more difficult: 5
- don't know: 6

## **H: Summary**

**1. To sum up, please can you say one thing the FSA does well in its dealings with [meat/dairy/wine/shellfish] businesses? (ask all)**

Please try and get the interviewee to give three things the FSA does well.

Write in:

Don't know: 1

**2. And what one thing can they FSA improve on in its dealing with [meat/dairy/wine/shellfish] businesses? (ask all)**

Please try and get the interviewee to give three things the FSA could improve on.

Write in:

Don't know: 1



# **FSA and Official Controls: Annex B Interview topic guide**

## **Respondent introductions**

- Name, what organisation they work for, what their role is, how long they've done it for, any experience of working in other plants/ environments.
- What's the size of the organisation? How many employees?
- [Meat sector only] What is your businesses' current Official controls compliance rating? [Good / Generally satisfactory / Improvement necessary / Urgent Improvement necessary]
- When was your last inspection?
- Key challenges and top priorities for your business currently.

## **Spontaneous views of the FSA (5 mins)**

Purpose: to ascertain unprompted views of the FSA and some benchmarking 'scores'

**For Northern Ireland Meat and Dairy sector:** In Northern Ireland, some of these Official Controls are delivered by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) on behalf of the Food Standards Agency Northern Ireland (FSANI) including meat hygiene official controls. Depending on the subject matter businesses receive communications from FSANI as well as from DAERA, where relevant please only consider your communications with the FSANI.

- how would you rate your overall experience of working with the FSA: would you say it was very good, good, average, poor or very poor?
- why this score?
- what 3 words would you use to sum up your experience of working with the FSA?
- can you explain why you said this?

Moderator to explain that we'll pick up on these responses later in discussions, but before then...

- what is your understanding of what the FSA's role and purpose is?
- and what do you understand their remit is, i.e. the range of activities they are involved in?
- what services does the FSA provide?
- how do you think the FSA funds these activities?
- what interaction do you have with the FSA...
- on a regular/ ongoing basis? Who with? For what purpose? Do you have a continual presence of FSA staff working on-site?
- on an ad hoc/ occasional basis? Who with? What?
- does your business have an FSA account manager, or someone who is assigned to all dealings with the FSA? If so, what advantages or disadvantages do you think this brings to your business?

## Attitudes towards the FSA (10 mins)

Purpose: to explore spontaneous views in greater depth and understand reasons for their views.

- overall, to what extent do you value the FSA and its role generally, i.e. in ensuring people can trust that the food they buy and eat is safe and is what it says it is?
- to what extent do you value the FSA and the role it plays in your business?
- overall?
- is there any difference between the different services you receive – any you value more/ less? Why?
- how has this changed over time?
- what difference, if any, is there between your views of the FSA as an organisation and your views of the individuals you work with?
- what does your experience of working with the FSA depend on – what makes it better or worse? **Probe:** around certain times of day / year; level of business; level of financial pressure; individuals you are working with; service provided etc.
- how has the relationship changed over time, if at all?

## Experiences of FSA (15 mins)

Purpose: to explore FBO's experiences the FSA's processes, and where these experiences work well or need improvement

I'm going to read out a list of different processes that the FSA delivers [NI: directly or that DAERA deliver on behalf of the FSA], and for each, I'd like to find out if you've experienced them, and if so, how you would rate your satisfaction with the process: would you say you are very satisfied,



satisfied, neither satisfied not dissatisfied, dissatisfied or very dissatisfied?

## Meat

- approval of new establishments/premises
- re-approval following a change of activities
- unannounced visits
- enforcement of FSA regulations
- inspections including for animal welfare [Animal welfare not in NI]
- exports to new markets [ENGLAND AND WALES]
- the FSA Team including Official Vet [England and Wales]/ DAERA Official Vets and official auxiliaries [NI]
- audits
- health and safety advice [England and Wales]

## Wine

- new wine business registration visits
- the Food standards Agency wine inspections team
- enforcement
- inspections

## Dairy

- approval of new establishments/premises
- re-approval following a change of activities
- unannounced visits
- enforcement of FSA regulations
- the FSA team
- inspections including for animal welfare [Animal welfare not in NI]

## Shellfish

- classification reviews
- new area applications
- **[England only]** Sanitary surveys and reviews
- action state reports [England]/ Outwith investigatory emails [NI]
- consultation

For each you have experience of...(NB if running out of time focus on the services with most dissatisfaction)

- why did you give it that rating?
- how does it compare to other interactions you have (or have had) with FSA?
- were you charged for the process? Do you know how much? How fair was the charge, in your view?
- how much do you feel you know about how the FSA makes decisions in these cases? What makes it clear/ unclear?
- what did you do as a result of the process?
- anything you've changed as a result?
- following an audit [meat]/ hygiene inspection [dairy/ wine] [not relevant for shellfish]– do you use the audit scores in your business? What impact do audit scores have on their business?
- what could FSA do differently to improve this experience or process?

Overall, how consistent would you say the FSA is in implementing these processes?

- to what extent does it change... depending on who carries out the process? ...depending on when it was carried out (i.e. has the approach changed over time?)?

How easy or difficult is it to comply with FSA guidelines and requirements? Overall, would you say it was very easy, quite easy, neither easy nor difficult, difficult, or very difficult?

- how easy is it to understand...
- what is required?
- what you need to do to comply?
- how you can evidence compliance?
- are there any areas where you're not compliant? If so, what stops you complying?
- what could FSA do to make compliance easier?

## **FSA Communications (5 mins)**

Purpose: to understand the extent to which FSA comms meet the needs of FBOs

What are the different ways in which FSA communicates with you as a business (Spontaneous, then probe: face-to-face, email, newsletters/ magazines, posters, phone calls, events, ad campaigns)?

How satisfied are you with the FSA's communication with you overall: would you say you are very satisfied, satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied?

What types of communication from the FSA works best for you? What do you find... most useful? ...Most engaging?

? Content – Can you give me examples of what you read/ engage with?

? Channels – email? Web pages? Social media updates? Face-to-face

? Frequency?

To what extent do you use FSA comms in your own comms / marketing e.g. do you highlight good audit scores?

How do FSA comms compare with comms from other organisations you deal with?

- what else do you read/ use/ interact with? Which organisations' views do they value / look to?
- what can others learn from the FSA communications? What can FSA learn from other organisation's communications?

## **EU exit, COVID-19 and OTP (5-10 mins)**

Purpose: to understand the extent to which FSA response to COVID-19 and EU exit impacted businesses, as well as level of knowledge of OTP.

Businesses asked these questions only if in survey they say they were affected by COVID/EU Exit.

### **Covid-19**

[In the survey you mentioned that COVID 19 had impacted your organisation's ability to comply with FSA regulations and made them -a lot easier/ slightly easier/ neither easier nor difficult/ slightly more difficult / a lot more difficult].

- could you tell me a bit more about how COVID-19 has impacted your organisation?

- in what way, if at all, did the FSA support your organisation during the restrictions brought in as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic? How clear were their communications? How did this help your organisation?

## **EU Exit**

[In the survey you mentioned that UK's exit from the EU had a large impact/ a small impact/ no impact on your business]

- could you tell me a bit more about how the UK's exit from the EU has impacted your business?
- in what way, if at all, did the FSA support your organisation during and since the UK's exit from the EU? How clear were their communications? How did this help your organisation?

## **[Ask All] Operational Transformation Programme**

Can you tell me in your own words what you know about the Operational Transformation Programme, and what impact this will have for your business?

Interviewer then read out:

The Operational Transformation Programme (OTP) is designed to modernise the way the FSA delivers regulatory activities in the meat, dairy and wine sector.

The aim is to move towards a more proportionate risk and evidence-based approach to regulation. The FSA are exploring introducing new technologies in the audit, inspections and approvals processes, the potential to take a more risk-based approach to how the FSA utilises its resources and the potential to use a different regulatory approach following changes to our current legislation.

- [Heard of OTP:] Have you had any engagement with the FSA directly or via a trade association about the OTP? What did this entail? How clear were these communications?
- do you think the OTP initiatives will make it easier or more difficult to comply with FSA regulations? Why do you say that?
- [If not heard of OTP ask:] In principle how does that sound to you? Do you have any concerns?

## **Looking to the future and summing up (5 mins)**

Purpose: to summarise the points made and get a sense of FBOs' priorities

- what are the three things the FSA does best? What three things could it most improve on?
- what's the one thing you'd change / one service you'd abolish?
- do you have any other thoughts or comments on the topics we've discussed?

## **Thanks, final admin and close (2 mins)**

Check consents for including anonymous quotes in reporting and recontacting in future.