

The Cost of Food Crime Phase 2 - Conclusion

To achieve an estimate of the cost of food crime to the UK, the team carried out substantial investigations into sources of data supplemented by 24 qualitative interviews that fed into the refined model for the cost of food crime, or more accurately, the cost of food fraud as theft is not currently included in the model. The main issue that we encountered was the absence of detailed crime records for food fraud, which led to us creating our own database of cases using web scraping.

The qualitative data collection through interviews and the FBO Tracker survey gave a picture of food fraud in the UK that shows that, unless prosecuted, most occurrences likely go unreported and not classified as fraud, being dealt with as food safety, quality compliance, or business-to-business incidents.

The combination of the very high degree of awareness of food safety, quality and fraud among large UK businesses, local authorities and enforcement agencies, and the extensive use of objective diagnostic testing means that the sector has built resilience to fraud. Small and medium sized businesses in the UK are more vulnerable, as our findings show. It is also likely that the occurrence of food fraud in the UK is higher than that given in the study, especially in the small business sector.

To provide a fuller picture of the extent of food fraud in the UK, and its cost to the UK, a standard system of reporting and recording such occurrences would need to be developed. In the meantime, the model developed here and the range of costs identified, show that the cost of food fraud in the UK is significant and takes many forms, and that continued government action to protect consumers is much needed.

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