Methodology: What works to prevent food fraud

Full details of the methodology can be found in Appendix 4. The study conducted a systematic literature review and supplementary interviews with stakeholders to understand 'what works' or 'what may work' in preventing food fraud.

Literature review

The review adopted a comprehensive search strategy considering all available evidence in the public domain, including peer-reviewed articles, grey literature (for example, government and industry reports), and relevant government reports. This included previously published systematic and critical reviews on this subject, as well as primary research. A list of the databases, key search terms, and indicative criteria for inclusion and rejection based on the quality of the studies considered is provided (Appendix 4). The main review questions were:

1. What food fraud prevention strategies and initiatives have been implemented in the UK and other countries?
2. What strategies/initiatives have been implemented to prevent and tackle commodity-based fraud in other industries?
3. What conditions need to be in place to enable fraud prevention strategies to be successful?

In total, 39,132 sources were initially identified but there was a considerable overlap between databases with 20,406 duplicates. A snowballing approach was then followed with additional searches through Google, other references, and through contact with seminal authors. The management of sources, screening, exclusion and then extraction was managed through Covidence an online tool for systematic reviewing. One-hundred and fifty-one (151) sources went forward for full extraction, descriptive analysis, and synthesis.

Supplementary interviews

In parallel to the literature review, a series of sixteen semi-structured interviews with professionals working on food fraud/crime were carried out (Appendix 5). The online interviews, using MS Teams, were recorded, and later transcribed. All interviewees were granted anonymity and their data was stored securely on the University of Lincoln OneDrive. A pilot interview was conducted to sense check and improve the interview schedule.

The purpose of the interviews was to get an in-depth understanding of current approaches to food fraud prevention and what can be done to improve prevention practices across the sector and within the role of the NFCU. The differences between detection and prevention where also discussed at some length. Extracts from the anonymised interviews are used to explain findings in this report (Appendix 6).

All sixteen participants had significant experience and knowledge of fraud and crime prevention and detection. Many of the participants have been working in the food sector for many years and

their experience adds valuable insight into current practice, what works and what needs to be improved to tackle food fraud. Some participants worked in senior roles for multi-national companies involved in the food industry and others worked with SME food companies. We also interviewed leading academics, accountants involved in auditing the food sector, individuals working in laboratories testing food, and working for Local Authorities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and international organisations such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) and United Nations (UN). The codebook derived from content and thematic analysis of the interviews is included in the report (Appendix 7).