

Consumer views of potential regulatory divergence in the meat sector: Conclusion

Overall, participants did not believe regulatory divergence would have a significant impact on them as individuals. They widely felt food would remain safe irrespective of whether products followed the same or different regulatory regimes. Although spontaneous reactions resisted the concept of regulatory divergence, participants were more accepting if they felt divergence could reduce the burden on food businesses. There were no clear differences in attitudes across the nations, with political views seeming to have a greater influence on perspectives.

A distinction was drawn between more cosmetic changes, which could have a limited impact on consumers, and more significant changes related to a reduction in quality standards or animal welfare. Participants felt the public would be more concerned about significant changes, often assuming there would be reduction in standards. This was influenced by widespread scepticism that regulatory divergence was being motivated by a need for cost saving.

Although participants were not particularly concerned about regulatory divergence in principle, they argued it was important the FSA informed the public about the proposed changes to the regulatory framework. They emphasised the need for transparency, suggesting a communications campaign to inform people about the existence of regulatory divergence. However, participants felt it would be down to individuals to research the specific details of any changes related to particular products.

Participants did not see a problem with shops selling products following different regulations on the same shelf. However, they wanted clear labels on packaging so consumers could tell which regulations a product complied with. This could follow a traffic light system, related to the significance of a change, or include a QR code to signpost to wider information. Clear labelling was seen as important so that consumers could make an informed choice about what to buy.