

FSA Board asks for further discussions on a new form of national level regulation for supermarkets in England?

At their meeting on Wednesday 18th September, the FSA Board considered proposals from the FSA Executive for a phased approach towards a new form of food hygiene regulation for large, national businesses. The Board heard the results of a trial with five major supermarkets over the past year.

Under the current system, supermarket premises get a planned inspection every few years by their local authority. During the trial, the FSA scrutinised the businesses' internal food hygiene control systems and saw monthly data from internal and third-party audits on many areas including chilling processes, pest control and cleaning across all stores. Environmental health officers engaged by the FSA carried out some local checks to verify the data. During the trial, the FSA had access to data from over 10,000 audits, compared with the 1,500 local authority inspections carried out. During the trial, the FSA was able to observe trends in performance across all participating retailers' stores and could identify new opportunities for improvements to food safety systems, alongside the existing inspections of individual premises.

The Board agreed that national level regulation could provide additional scrutiny of the food safety controls in some businesses serving a very large number of customers. It asked that the idea be explored further with extensive engagement and consultation with local authorities, primary authorities, businesses and consumers, as well as discussions with governments across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Board asked to see further detail on next steps at its next meeting in December. The Board did not discuss longer term change, which would require legislation and they agreed to return to this at a later date.

Commenting on the Board's discussion, Professor Susan Jebb, Chair of the FSA said:

"This is a promising idea that may enable us to strengthen food regulation, continuing to prioritise improvements in food safety for consumers.

The evidence from the trial presented to us today suggests these ideas will give us access to more data about food hygiene and more often, complementing the existing inspection regime.

We're grateful to all those who asked questions and shared their views and concerns with us ahead of our Board discussion, highlighting many of the details we now need to work through. The Board has asked officials to engage with governments, local authorities, businesses and other stakeholders and to report back to us in December with a comprehensive plan for what the next steps might be."

For more information, you can view the [Board Paper](#) and [Pilot Report](#) on our website.