

FSA publishes its fourth Retail Surveillance Survey as targeted approach to food testing continues

The Retail Surveillance Sampling programme is targeted at areas of known or potential risk. The survey took place from July 2023 to January 2024 and sampled 1025 products in total, including those that may be found in a typical basket of food, along with a range of other products.

Food samples were bought from national supermarkets and smaller independent retailers, with some samples bought online. The samples were tested for undeclared allergens, contaminants, adulteration, inaccurate composition or incorrect labelling.

The survey found:

- There was a considerable increase in compliance for olive oil year on year 75% in 2022/23 to 87% (26 out of 30) 2023/24
- Food authenticity rates for samples tested were 97% compliant for the areas of authenticity tested
- There are no overall geographical hotspots for non-compliance

Because the survey targets products where we know there is a risk, or where there is a lack of information, the results are not representative of food safety in the UK. Instead, they help Local Authorities (LAs) choose where to target their resource, so they can protect consumers.

While most food tested as part of this targeted sampling programme was safe and authentic, the project highlighted some concerns to be investigated further:

- 40% (16 out of 40) of frozen raw chicken was non-compliant due to undeclared, or excess, added water and labelling issues
- 42% (10 out of 24) of frozen beef burgers were non-compliant, with eight samples having less meat content than declared, and 4 samples containing higher fat levels than stated.

The results of the frozen chicken and beef burger sampling have been communicated to industry partners by the National Food Crime Unit (NFCU) and further work to make sure industry are vigilant is planned.

This annual survey is designed to help LAs target their food safety inspections so that they can use their resources more effectively, to better protect consumers. The increased compliance for some products such as olive oil are positive, and we will continue to carry out targeted surveillance programmes to identify and find emerging risks within the UK food system to help ensure the safety of consumers. Professor Rick Mumford, Deputy Chief Scientific Advisor & Deputy Director of Science, Research and Evidence at the Food Standards Agency

The retail survey is part of the multiple layers of protection built-in to the food system to protect consumers, which includes our Food Standards Delivery Model in England and Northern Ireland. Together with the information from the retail survey, LAs can direct their resources towards the greatest areas of risk. Where any incident of non-compliance is found, referrals are made to the relevant LAs to investigate and take appropriate action.

The programme was delivered in partnership by the three Local Authority Official Food and Feed Laboratories (OLs) and two private OLs in England and Wales. The [full report](#) is available in the research section of our website.