

## Our Food 2023

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) and Food Standards Scotland (FSS) have called on government to work with regulators to address the ongoing shortages of key professionals in the food system.

The potential impacts of these shortages are highlighted in their annual 'Our Food' report, which is an evidence based assessment of food standards across the UK for 2023.

Food standards remained stable in 2023, despite pressures including inflation and labour shortages. However, the report raises questions about the resilience of the UK's food system, including ongoing shortages in key occupations needed to keep food safe.

After a long term decline in numbers, pressure on the local authority workforce of environmental health and trading standards officers continues, with a significant backlog in the number of food businesses awaiting inspection.

The report also finds that without a reliable and secure resourcing model for Official Veterinarians, there is an increased risk of disruption to the UK meat chain in the years ahead due to staff shortages, as well as increasing costs that will be passed on to businesses and consumers.

The FSA and FSS are calling on government, industry and regulators to strengthen those parts of the food system that have been in decline. Without the expertise of these key professionals, there is a real risk that standards within food businesses will deteriorate, putting people at greater risk of illness and risking a loss of trust in our food system.

These risks are significant, as the UK agri-food sector contributes £147.8 billion to the UK economy and accounts for £24.4 billion of exports. It's vital that the public and trading partners retain trust in UK food, and to do that we need to keep standards high.

The food system across the UK continued to experience significant challenges throughout 2023, with the rising cost-of-living and inflation continuing to impact grocery bills for consumers, and food businesses grappling with labour shortages and increased supply chain costs.

"Despite these pressures, our food standards remain high and there is much to be celebrated in the resilience of the UK's food system.

I remain concerned however about the ongoing shortages in the key professionals we need to keep our food safe. Our report also highlights the need for public health policies across the UK that address the causes of poor diets.

No single organisation or government can ensure that all consumers have equitable access to safe, healthy and sustainable food, and we need to work in partnership to deliver the food system that consumers want and need in the future."

Professor Susan Jebb, Chair of the Food Standards Agency

Our food system remains robust, but these workforce shortages are stretching resources and placing extra strain on the agencies responsible for keeping food safe.

“This is now the third year where concerns have been raised and we need to act now to maintain high standards and ensure public trust in our food supply chain. Food Standards Scotland (FSS) has been vocal for some time about the sustainability of the current model and the impact the lack of resources is having on the regulation of food businesses. We have raised this issue with Scottish Ministers, and it is one that we, and other stakeholders, continue to take very seriously. We know the system needs reform and we have proposals for reform, but we don't have the necessary funding to deliver changes to the current system.”

Heather Kelman, Chair of Food Standards Scotland

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### **England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales**

PDF

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