

# Annual Food Standards Agency and Food Standards Scotland report highlights ongoing food safety and standards challenges

Overall, food safety and authenticity standards were stable in 2024, but several aspects of the food system remain under considerable pressure. Local authorities still do not have enough resources to address the substantial backlog of inspections, nor deal with the growing number of new food businesses that should be inspected. There has been progress in implementing documentary and physical checks at our borders, however more comprehensive and accurate data would allow consumers to be better protected. It is also still the case that too many households are struggling to afford food, and that more action is required to improve the healthiness of the food we eat.

The decline in local authority food sampling rates which takes them below pre-pandemic levels is also a concern as our own surveillance sampling shows that labelling issues are responsible for most non-compliances. As in previous years, there are still examples of products containing allergens that are not labelled correctly. Failure to identify allergens on labels can be life threatening to some consumers with food allergies. Businesses need to pay greater attention to the accuracy of labelling, especially for allergens.

Recruitment of Official Veterinarians (OVs) has improved but remains challenging and we need a more sustainable recruitment pipeline to ensure high standards are maintained in the meat industry.

Household food insecurity continues to be a significant problem with one in five (21%) households across the UK reporting being food insecure in 2024. More needs to be done to help people to eat diets that meet health goals, such as 5 fruits or vegetables a day. In England, the Government's planned food strategy and 10-year NHS plan, the Scottish Government's Good Food Nation Plan and work on children's health, the Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework and the Welsh Government's summary of food related policies in Food Matters: Wales and the Community Food Strategy all present opportunities to change the food environment to one that favours healthier food choices. As regulators we stand ready to play our part to improve public health outcomes.

The FSA and FSS are calling on government, industry, and regulators to work together to respond to these risks in our food system, to uphold high food standards, and to achieve a food system that works for everyone.

"This year marks a significant milestone – 25 years since the Food Standards Agency was established and a decade since the creation of Food Standards Scotland. Our unwavering commitment to evidence-based decisions and putting consumers first remains as strong today as when we began.

This is particularly important given the shifts we could see in the food supply chain in the future. With recent announcements on closer cooperation between the EU and the UK, and new trade deals elsewhere in the world, our duty in the FSA remains to protect public health by upholding high food standards.

25 years on from the creation of the FSA, safe food is largely taken for granted by consumers. But this remarkable shift from the crisis of confidence in the 1990s didn't happen by chance – food safety isn't good luck. Instead, it comes from good management and the enormous and ongoing effort by everyone working in the food system. As the regulator we need to play our part by setting out our expectations, supporting others in the system to deliver on their responsibilities and taking firm action when problems arise. This annual report is an opportunity for us all to take stock and renew our commitment to working in partnership to ensure food is safe, what it says it is, and that consumers can make informed choices about the food they eat."

**Professor Susan Jebb, Chair of the FSA**

"This year's report highlights the continuing pressures across our food system - resource constraints in local authorities contributed to by significant recruitment difficulties continue as do the unacceptable levels of household food insecurity. Overall food standards remain stable, but we should not be complacent given the years of under-investment in capacity and capability. Food needs to be safe, accurately described, and support healthier choices, and we need a system that supports growth and trade, and the current trajectory of resource puts that at risk.

In Scotland, tackling poor diet and the levels of obesity must be a priority, so we welcome the Good Food nation agenda and public health framework. These present important opportunities to shift the focus to the prevention of disease and offer an important framework to improve food outcomes for everyone. Realising its potential will require coordinated action, a change to our food environment and long-term commitment from government, industry, and regulators alike.

**Heather Kelman, Chair of FSS**

## **Read the report**

<https://www.food.gov.uk/our-work/our-food-2024>