

Annual Communications Update

FSA 25/12/07 - Report by Claire Forbes, Director of Communications

1. Summary

1.1 This paper provides an update on the work of the FSA's communications team. It covers:

- The context for FSA communications in 2025
- Progress on commitments made to the FSA Board in December 2024
- Communications priorities for the next 12 months.
- Two case studies illustrating our approach in Annex 1

1.2 Communications metrics November 2024 – October 2025 in Annex 2.

2. Introduction

2.1 The FSA's communications function has 33 FTE staff in the Strategy and Regulatory Compliance Directorate, with an annual programme budget of £497,000. FSA Wales and FSA Northern Ireland have communications teams funded separately by the Welsh Government and the Department of Finance (NI). FSA NI has a communications budget of £59,600 with five staff, one of whom is focused on nutrition and one of whom is a student intern. FSA Wales has a communications budget of £34,500, with four staff. All three teams work in a 'one nation' approach, are part of the Government Communications Service (GCS) and work to its professional standards.

2.2 The three national teams work closely with Food Standards Scotland (FSS), the Welsh Government and NI Executive and other government departments, including the Department of Health and Social Care, the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Health Security Agency.

2.3 The FSA's communications support our overall mission: that food is safe, food is what it says it is, and that food is healthier and more sustainable. The teams operate 24/7, driving awareness and promoting food safety amongst different consumer and business audiences; convening stakeholders to increase advocacy, influence and insight; explaining new policies and legislation and speaking out on food issues to protect consumers' interests.

3. Context to our communications in 2025

3.1 2025 is the FSA's twenty-fifth anniversary, providing an opportunity to reflect on how we have protected public health and the interests of consumers since our inception, and to prepare for the challenges and opportunities of the future. During this year, there has also been considerable focus on the government's agenda for growth and regulatory reform, while the FSA's monthly Consumer Insights tracker shows that food affordability, food waste and ultra processed foods continue to rank top amongst consumer concerns. At the same time, the more widespread use of artificial intelligence (AI) has had a measurable impact on our digital communications, and we have been working to mitigate the risk of mis- and disinformation.

3.2 Maintaining consumer trust remains at the heart of our communications approach. The latest Food and You 2 survey (September 2025) shows that 78% of people with at least some knowledge of the FSA trust us to make sure food is safe and what it says it is; an increase of nine percentage points from the previous survey (69%).

3.3 There have been new challenges to building familiarity with a 20% drop in visitors to our website in the last year; the result of the introduction of AI summaries at the top of web searches which reduce the need to click on individual websites. We are working to ensure our web content features prominently in these summaries, and, with the support of the Science Council, we have been enhancing our readiness to respond to mis- and disinformation about food safety. This work includes identifying food safety topics most at risk of being misrepresented and preparing clear and reassuring digital content to provide consumers with accurate information.

4. Progress on commitments made last year

4.1 Our commitments discussed with Board last year were:

Making the case for and supporting implementation of regulatory reform

4.2 Our communications have responded to government reform of both the civil service and the regulatory landscape. Our reform narrative builds on the achievements of the past 25 years: in an op-ed in The Grocer marking the anniversary, our Chair, Professor Susan Jebb, celebrated our legacy of protecting public health while recognising the need to evolve to meet future challenges.

4.3 We have engaged with Parliamentarians across three nations on issues relevant to consumers and our regulatory reform and our annual Parliamentary events across three nations provided an opportunity to reflect on our 25-year history and look ahead to the future. With a large intake of new MPs following the 2024 General Election, we have increased the number of briefings on policy issues, such as the provision of written allergen labelling, by more than 50% and developed a new Parliamentary newsletter. Our Chair took part in a Westminster MP round table on the future of the small abattoir sector.

4.4 We recognise that stable, effective and proportionate regulation has an important role to play in supporting the government's growth mission. One prominent way our work supports economic growth is our sandbox on Cell Cultivated Proteins (see case study in Annex 1). A key message here is that safety is essential for trust in innovation and novel foods. We have also helped smaller businesses continue to provide food that is safe through the latest wave of our 'Safer Food, Better Business' campaign (the results of this campaign are set out in Annex 2).

4.5 Internally, we have used our communications to help staff adapt to and understand civil service reforms, the government Plan for Change and Regulatory Action Plan.

Continuing to improve our incident communications

4.6 We completed a cross-FSA project to improve our incident communications, enabling a more integrated response to incidents. For example, in addition to our own activity in the media and on social media, we now routinely work with stakeholders such as trade bodies to access their communications channels during incidents. We hosted a workshop with the five largest bodies in the food sector to develop this, leading to increased reach into target business audiences.

4.7 We expanded our preventative communications by issuing warnings to consumers and industry of food safety risks. This included proactive media engagement on grey market goods, including Dubai chocolate and Jolly Ranchers, generating widespread media coverage and reinforcing public health messaging. In Northern Ireland, we conducted radio and TV interviews on the risks of glycerol and listeria.

Targeting our communications and ensuring that we have the right partnerships, channels and knowledge to reach audiences most at risk.

4.8 This year, we commissioned research to give us greater insight into key demographics who are either more vulnerable to foodborne disease, or who we are less likely to reach through our current communication approach. Our staff networks provided valuable insight and expertise to help us tailor our communications for different groups. As a result, we are improving our understanding about how to reach those at greatest risk from food safety failures and have worked with partners to highlight our food safety messages in locations where vulnerable consumers are, such as pharmacies and doctors' surgeries.

4.9 We are also working with aggregators such as Uber Eats to reach small businesses where English may not be a first language, with key materials on food hygiene and allergies. Representatives from our communications and food fraud teams have engaged with the Inter-Ethnic Forum in Northern Ireland to support targeted messaging of ethnic minority groups in relation to food crime and promotion of the Food Crime Hotline. We also continue to take advantage of Welsh language news and social media opportunities to share key messaging and campaign activity.

4.10 Our Christmas campaign in December 2024 struck a balance between promoting general kitchen safety messages to a broad audience, whilst targeting relevant information about the risk of listeria in smoked fish to clinically vulnerable groups. The general campaign was media-led, using insights from our Consumer Insights Tracker to highlight common kitchen hygiene mistakes, such as not checking use by dates, and gained widespread national coverage, including BBC Breakfast. It was our most successful Christmas campaign to date, with a reach of 34.8million.

4.11 We launched a food safety campaign with the strapline 'Bacteria Love It Here'. The campaign, which showed how bacteria can thrive on food and in domestic kitchens, was promoted to a range of audiences, including 100,000 new students living away from home for the first time, and we worked with the National Union of Students to amplify these messages.

Partnership working, including within the FSA, to help us grow our reach with different audiences.

4.12 We collaborated with different partners during the year to enhance the reach of our communication activities. In April, we launched the latest wave of our 'Safer Food Better Business' campaign with support from 24 industry partners including Deliveroo and UberEats, who increased our reach by sharing content on their platforms. The campaign has also been supported by 14 Local Authorities. As a result, we have achieved a 45% increase in web traffic to our Here to Help business guidance hub year on year, with over 200,000 views.

4.13 In Northern Ireland, partnership working with other government departments and district councils in Northern Ireland has been essential to reassuring consumers that fish from Lough Neagh remains safe to eat. Here, we took a proactive approach to media in September, with the BBC's Nolan Show accepting our offer of an interview about Lough Neagh with then Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA), Professor Robin May.

4.14 In Wales, we collaborated with the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC) to shape new food safety-focused qualifications as part of new National Qualifications for Wales. This includes a Food Planning and Preparation module for learners aged 14–16, highlighting the importance of practical, real-world skills and a Vocational Certificate of Secondary Education in Hospitality and Catering, supporting career pathways in the food sector. This collaboration strengthens our visibility, brand and relevance within the Welsh education system and deepens our engagement with young people and educators, helping to embed food safety awareness early.

4.15 There remains more to be done to build partnerships with organisations representing different consumer groups, including those that may be more vulnerable to foodborne disease. These are often charities or not-for-profit groups, which may look to us for a financial contribution as part of the partnership agreement.

FSA 25: reflecting on what's changed and looking to the future

4.16 Our six-month internal FSA25 campaign launched in April. We looked back at our achievements, celebrated colleagues and looked forward to our future role in a changing food system. A special All-Staff Call had record attendance, with 778 colleagues. A two-week Learning Festival focused on cross-agency learning with workshops led by colleagues on topics such as the role of science in food safety, tackling food fraud, and food hypersensitivity.

4.17 We shared 25 colleague stories in written and video formats, showcasing different roles and service lengths, strengthening connections across teams. These were very popular, as were our Staff Awards recognising colleagues for their work and inspiring others. There were 239 nominations, 81% of our workforce viewed the shortlist, and 628 colleagues attended the online awards ceremony.

4.18 We also experimented with new content, including a video featuring the FSA's first Chair, Lord Krebs, in conversation with our current Chair, and used Viva Engage to connect with colleagues in Field Operations. The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with strong engagement across the organisation and a clear sense of pride in our shared mission.

5. Priorities for the next 12 months

5.1 Over the next 12 months, we will focus on the following areas:

- Using our data and insight to set the agenda. We have now issued three annual reports on food standards across the UK, jointly with FSS. We will take the opportunity to reflect, with FSS, Defra and other partners, on our plans for reporting food system data and on the interactions with other food system reporting, such as the triennial UK Food Security Report, to which we also contribute. This means we will not publish Our Food in 2026, but we will focus on how we can drive insight from other data and use it to set the agenda about food safety for the benefit of everyone.
- Migrating our website content to gov.uk. Working with colleagues in Openness Data and Digital, we will be reviewing our website content and digital communications. This

includes ensuring that our communications maximise the opportunities that AI presents to provide accurate and engaging food safety information to people, while also mitigating the risk of mis- and disinformation.

- Promoting our enforcement activity, the role of frontline staff and National Food Crime Unit powers; these messages generate some of the biggest impact amongst consumers and demonstrate the benefit of regulation in keeping food safe.
- Continuing to demonstrate how food safety regulation is good for business and business growth, by promoting our work on innovation and reform.
- Continuing to target our communications, for example by launching bilingual FSA social channels in Wales. These will allow us to engage more directly with people in a way that suits them best, making our information more relevant and impactful.
- Providing internal communications and engagement support for FSA's internal change programme, FSA Ready.

Annex 1

Case study: new guidance for slush ice drinks with glycerol

In June 2025, the Board endorsed proposals to update guidance on slush ice drinks with glycerol, which recommended that these drinks should not be sold or given to children under seven years of age. We launched a communications campaign in July 2025 to raise awareness of this new guidance which targeted:

- Consumers: a news release and social media posts were sent out during the school summer holidays. We secured a paediatrician influencer to reach a large online parent following. We also fielded an interview with a BBC Northern Ireland consumer show. The Department for Education and UK Health Security Agency amplified our key messages in their newsletters sent out to over 91,000 education and health stakeholders.
- Businesses and industry: FSA held two briefing sessions with manufacturers, and retail and hospitality stakeholders, supported by industry and local authority emails and a printable poster for vendors. We issued a newsletter with a summary of the new guidance.
- The campaign was delivered in house with a total spend of £500.

The results

- We achieved 791 articles in the national, regional and trade media, including a positive feature on ITV's Good Morning Britain with then FSA CSA. Our social media activity had a total audience reach of around 862,000 with 49,000 click-throughs to information on our website.
- There have been over 1,100 downloads of the guidance poster for vendors so far and around 2,500 recipients opened the guidance newsletter.
- We have been tracking awareness of slush ice drinks with glycerol guidance since March 2025 using our Consumer Insights Tracker. Between March and April 2025, awareness of the previous advice rose from 36% to 54% for the lower age advice and 28% to 43% for the under 10s guidance. When asked about the updated guidance in August 2025, 50% of

respondents said they were aware of the under 7s guidance and 44% of the under 10s guidance. This dropped slightly to stand at 47% and 38% respectively in September 2025. This suggests that maintaining high levels of awareness over time may require ongoing activity.

- We are continuing the campaign, including Christmas related posts warning parents about slush ice drink home kits containing glycerol which may be given as Christmas presents to young children.

Case study: the launch of the cell cultivated sandbox programme

The FSA has received government funding to support innovation in the food sector. This investment can help bring the most innovative products to market faster, ensuring greater consumer choice, but without changing our high food safety standards. These innovative products include chicken fillet made from chicken cells and cow-free milk proteins produced by fermentation. In March 2025, the FSA launched a pioneering regulatory programme for cell-cultivated products.

- While we have promoted this work within the food industry and supported the promotion of business guidance and research, we also worked to familiarise consumers with some of the products in development and the FSA’s role in assessing safety. We want consumers to have the confidence to make informed choices about the food they eat and be reassured that any new products that come to market have been judged safe to eat.
- As well as a stakeholder event, our Chair and the CSA were interviewed on The Today Programme, BBC Breakfast, 5Live, Sky News and regional radio. In a video, our CSA explained the sandbox programme and an internal news story introduced colleagues to the programme.

The results

- The combined BBC coverage resulted in a reach of 28 million. The news story was one of the most popular on our website with 3,456 page views.
- Our video explaining the sandbox programme for cell-cultivated products was our most popular content on LinkedIn in March, reaching 14,100 impressions and 1,500 engagements for a 10.87% engagement rate. The video was viewed 10,600 times.

Annex 2:

Communications metrics, November 2024 to October 2025

Food.gov.uk	Metric (YoY comparison)
Visitor numbers	7,545,873 (? 16%)
Page views	11,694,159 (? 12%)
Most popular pages (page views)	1. Food additives, consumer advice (354,447) 2. Online food safety training (320,935) 3. Safer Food Better Business (303,230) 4. Report a food problem (289,831) 5. Allergen guidance for food businesses (280,232)

Food.gov.uk	Metric (YoY comparison)
Top news stories (page views)	1. Precautionary advice issued to pet owners on dog chews linked to illness (35,021) 2. FSA updates advice on risk to children of glycerol in slush ice drinks (19,396) 3. Not suitable for under 4s new industry guidance issued on glycerol in slush ice drinks (17,111)
FSA Social Media channels	
Impressions (all channels)	8,533,043 (?18%)
Engagement rate (all channels)	4.46% (8.75%)
Top 3 posts during the year (all Facebook)	- Glycerol. 409K impressions; 313 reactions; 3.6K interactions - Early years choking hazard poster. 236K impressions; 291 shares; 683 interactions - Halloween choking hazards to avoid for children under five. 214K impressions; 65 shares; 168 interactions
Stakeholder bulletins	
Total bulletins sent	46
Total subscribers	11,800
Media coverage	
Total pieces of coverage	28,000
Opportunities to see	7.2bn
Breakdown of opportunities to see	national 72.9% (72.2% previous year) regional 10.5% (12.6% previous year) industry 8.6% (4.9%) broadcast 6% (8.9%)
Safer Food, Better Business (April – July 2025)	
	- Estimated reach: 208,339 - Website hits: 15,109 (? 45% YoY) - Training certificates issued: 59,363 (? 30% YoY) - SFBB Guidance downloads: 10,483 (? YoY in England & Wales, ? in NI) - Allergy Guidance views: 53,618 (? 24% YoY) - News & Alerts sign-ups: 3,440 (? YoY due to no paid support) 24 partners supported including Uber Eats, Deliveroo, and trade bodies 14 Local Authorities supported
Bacteria Love It Here (ongoing consumer campaign)	

Food.gov.uk	Metric (YoY comparison)
	Phase 1: June to August 2025. • 30 paid ads on Facebook and Instagram across three nations. The posts generated more than 2.1m impressions and more than 33,000 interactions (reactions, shares, and comments). • The campaign was launched after the creation of a new landing page: Food safety and hygiene at home Food Standards Agency. During the first phase of the campaign the page recorded 3,160 visitors and was viewed more than 5,000 times.
Internal communications (FSA25 campaign)	
	• Total views for FSA25 internal comms: 3,901 views • Most viewed article: Staff Awards shortlist, 1,275 views • 30 colleague blogs were published, 16 of which were videos • Award Winners case studies, highest viewed was the FSA Heroes case study with 637 views • Two-week Learning Festival in May featured 6 colleague-led events – the highest attended was a Food for Thought seminar with CSA Robin May, attended by 151 colleagues