

National coordinated food sampling programme: partnership between ourselves and NTS

Status: Closed

Date launched: 25 July 2015

Closing date: 22 July 2015

About the partnership

We and NTS are in the process of developing a detailed Memorandum of Understanding that will underpin the partnership and the partnership is still subject to that being agreed by both ourselves and the National Trading Standards Board.

The intention is to start the partnership in autumn 2015, which is when the work will need to start on developing the 2016/17 coordinated sampling programme. The current 2015/16 programme will be unaffected and will continue to be operated solely by us. The 2015/16 programme will conclude in March 2016.

The FSA-NTS partnership will cover England. The FSA in Wales is considering its options, which include joining in with the partnership. The NTS has no remit in Northern Ireland, and the FSA in Northern Ireland will be making separate arrangements. Food Standards Scotland already run its own sampling programme and this will be unaffected by the partnership.

Improving delivery

For a number of years, we have funded additional sampling by local enforcement authorities against national sampling priorities. This has worked well and a significant amount of additional targeted sampling has been successfully delivered and has contributed to consumer protection. The current system has, however, placed a considerable administrative burden on the FSA due to the large number of contracts with regional groups and individual local authorities. It is also resource intensive for local authorities in terms of the bidding process against the priorities.

We wanted to find a way to address these issues that also allowed for identification of priorities and delivery to draw more on the experience and expertise of enforcement authorities. Successful delivery of the first year of the feed surveillance programme by the NTS in England promoted us to think that a similar partnership could be beneficial to the delivery of the food standards sampling programme.

Benefits we envisage from the NTS/FSA partnership include:

Greater administrative efficiency, including freeing up FSA resources for more strategic work in this area.

Reduced burden on local authorities and regional groups through removal of the current bidding process and replacement with a more consultative, regionally based approach.

Better use being made of local authority intelligence, experience and expertise in terms of both priority setting and delivery.

Efficiency gains from being able to link governance and administration of the food sampling programme with that for the feed surveillance programme.

Scope and UK-wide working

The partnership would cover food standards issues (chemical safety, authenticity and labelling) only and not involve food hygiene sampling. Food hygiene sampling will be unaffected.

The current sampling programme system involves UK-wide stakeholder discussion to set the sampling priorities. We are keen to continue this irrespective of the geographic coverage of the NTS-FSA partnership. This will allow us to continue to draw on the best expertise available, while accepting that different parts of the UK may have different local priorities.

Food standards activity is of course delivered by both trading standards and environmental health professionals, depending on the type of authority. We fully understand that trading standards departments are more used to working with NTS, but the fact that NTS has successfully worked with environmental health departments on delivery of the feed programme is a good basis to believe that NTS will also work effectively with environmental health colleagues delivering food standards activity. We understand that NTS has already been working to ensure that this is the case.

The FSA fully supports NTS's intention to work through regional groups to task down the different priorities and then for regions to agree themselves how many local authorities need to be involved in delivery of each priority. We agree that this should reduce the burden on local authorities, while ensuring appropriate engagement.

We hope this information is useful. We are still working out the detail to ensure that the NTS-FSA partnership will deliver the best possible outcome for consumers as well as benefits for all parties concerned. More information will be provided as it becomes available.

Publication of response summary

Within three months of a consultation ending we aim to publish a summary of responses received and provide a link to it from this page.

You can find information on how we handle data provided in response to consultations in our [Consultations privacy notice](#).

Further information

This consultation has been prepared in accordance with [HM Government Consultation Principles](#). If an Impact Assessment has been produced, this is included in the consultation documents. If no Impact Assessment has been provided, the reason will be given in the consultation document.