Foreword

Food matters. In fact, it is integral to who we are and how we live. It impacts on our health, defines our communities and powers our economy.

A full PDF version is available for download:

England, Northern Ireland and Scotland

PDF
[View Our Food 2021: An annual review of food standards across the UK as PDF(Open in a new window)](#) (13.82 MB)

Food matters. In fact, it is integral to who we are and how we live. It impacts on our health, defines our communities and powers our economy. It gives us enjoyment, variety and comfort in our lives. It is what we turn to, again and again, when we want to celebrate and share cherished moments with friends and family.

For all these reasons, it is vital that the food we buy meets the standards we expect and supports the values we hold dear. As consumers, we should feel confident that what we eat is what it claims to be, and that we are being protected from anything that is unsafe, inauthentic, or harmful. Everyone should be empowered and informed to make the right dietary choices for themselves, their families and the planet.

So why publish a report on food standards now? Quite simply, we believe this an important period for food quality and safety. At a time when the UK is taking on new responsibilities for food following our departure from the European Union (EU), consumers need strong watchdogs looking out for whether standards are being protected. This report – the first in a series to be published annually – will help us do so by providing an objective, data-driven assessment of the safety and standards of food over time.

Why us? Because the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and Food Standards Scotland (FSS) are together responsible for food standards across the whole of the UK – this is an important, long-term collaboration between our two organisations that should provide greater transparency and accountability for food quality across the four nations. This, in turn, will help us work with food businesses, local authorities and other partners to address any emerging threats or vulnerabilities.

Why now? Because this first report is a chance to reflect on a particularly momentous period for UK food, spanning the years from 2019 to 2021. It not only takes in the first year after the UK was fully outside of the EU but also coincides with the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Both posed substantive challenges in ensuring business continuity and maintaining regulatory standards, and a major part of this report is devoted to understanding what impact these events have had, what we can learn from them and what we need to monitor in the future.

At the same time, other societal changes are posing additional questions. Climate change is resetting people's expectations and priorities. Technology is reshaping the business landscape and creating new regulatory challenges. Poor diet and obesity remain major concerns, with health

worries also putting a sharper focus on food information and the integrity of product marketing.

This was also a period when rising food prices were beginning to be felt. As we will see, there is a risk that this will make a healthier and more sustainable diet feel an unreachable goal. We expect that the affordability of food – and especially "good food" – will be a significant theme in next year's annual report.

Finally, our food system is resolutely global in nature, and an important part of our work is with UK government departments, the Scottish Government, Welsh Government, and Northern Ireland Executive to protect food standards as best we can from the potential impact of any external shocks and upheavals. The war in Ukraine, for example, is already disrupting food supply chains. While it is too early to draw any conclusions about the specific effect on food standards, this is something we are monitoring closely and will explore further in next year's report.

Similarly, as the UK builds new trading relationships with the rest of the world and our relationship develops with the EU, we need to keep a close eye on the impact of new trade deals and effectiveness of measures put in place to uphold the standards of our imported foods.

Of course, the process of getting food safely from "farm to fork" is complex and multi?faceted, and this report can only address a limited number of these areas.

However, we want this evidence to start important conversations about emerging trends, future risks and how, together, we navigate our way through uncertainty and change.

We look forward to working with our many partners – and each other – to ensure that food across the UK continues to be safe and increasingly healthier and more sustainable.

Professor Susan Jebb, Chair, The Food Standards Agency

Heather Kelman, Chair, Food Standards Scotland

Food Standards Agency

Established in 2000, the Food Standards Agency is an independent, non ministerial government department working to protect public health and consumers' wider interests in relation to food. With responsibilities spanning all aspects of food and feed safety and standards across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, it works to make sure the food we eat is safe and what it says it is, as well as being healthier and more sustainable for the future.

Food Standards Scotland

Food Standards Scotland (FSS) was established on 1 April 2015 as the new independent non-ministerial public sector food body for Scotland. It exists to uphold food safety and standards, improve the public's diet, and protect consumers' other interests in relation to food. Its remit covers all aspects of the food chain which can impact on public health, aiming to protect consumers from food safety risks and promote healthy eating.

FSS was formally commissioned by the Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport to produce this report, in conjunction with the FSA, to support requirements in the Food (Scotland) Act 2015, which sets out a clear statutory objective for FSS to protect the interests of consumers in relation to food.