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About the Food Standards Agency

Established in 2000 following several high-profile outbreaks of foodborne illness, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) is the independent government department working to protect public health and consumers' wider interests in relation to food in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Our mission is food we can trust.

Our work not only protects people, but also reduces the economic burden of foodborne illness and supports the UK economy and trade by ensuring that our food has a strong reputation for safety and authenticity in the UK and abroad.

We are responsible for the systems that regulate food businesses and we are at the forefront of tackling food crime.

The FSA's role does not just cover food safety, but also other consumer interests in food, which include price, availability, and some aspects of food production standards like environmental concerns and animal welfare.

Our work is underpinned by the latest science and evidence and agreed at our open Board meetings. Transparency is a guiding principle for the FSA and key to maintaining public confidence.

Mission and vision

Our overarching mission is food we can trust, and our vision is comprised of the following goals:

- Food is safe
- Food is what it says it is
- Consumers can make informed choices about what to eat
- Consumers have access to an affordable diet, now and in the future*

* the FSA only holds nutrition policy in Northern Ireland, not in England and Wales.



Our people

More than 1,300 people work for us to make sure food is safe and what it says it is. They include statisticians, analysts, researchers, inspectors, enforcement experts, policy professionals, economists, veterinarians and more than 500 frontline staff, who work alongside our operational delivery partners to inspect abattoirs and other primary production sites.

As a non-ministerial government department, we are governed by a Board, rather than ministers. Our Board sets the overall strategic direction of our organisation.

Food is a devolved matter, so the Welsh and Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committees provide advice and insight to the Board relating to food safety and standards in their respective countries.

The Board is also guided by independent Scientific Advisory Committees, which draw on the views of more than 100 experts, ensuring that our guidance is always based on the best and most recent science and evidence.



Our approach

We use a scientific, evidence-based approach to ensure food is safe and what it says it is, empowering businesses and consumers to do the right thing to keep food safe. We tell the truth about food.

78%
of people
have heard of
the FSA

Of those
73%
trust us to
do our job

We strive to:

- Be the trusted voice on food standards in the consumer interest
- Make it easy for businesses to maintain food safety and standards
- Collaborate with the most influential players in the food system to improve food safety and standards
- Optimise data and digital capability internally and externally to strengthen our influence
- Operate transparently and openly

The context we work in

The UK food sector

£120.2bn

agri-food sector contribution to national Gross Value Added in 2018 (UK)



4.1m people

employed in the agri-food sector in Q4 2019 (GB)



£234bn consumer expenditure on food, drink and catering in 2019 (UK)



£23.6bn food, feed and drink exports in 2019 (UK)



500,000+ food establishments (2018/19) England, Northern Ireland and Wales

Primary Producers

4,000



Manufacturers & Packers

17,000



Importers/Exporters

1,000



Distributors/Transporters

9,000



Retailers

124,000



Restaurants & Caterers

413,000



Source: [National Statistics Food Statistics in your pocket: Summary](#)

Source: [Annual report on local authority food law enforcement 2018-2019](#)

The food regulatory system

The food system is complex and its regulation involves multiple bodies. The Food Standards Agency operates in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and has different policy responsibilities within these countries. Food Standards Scotland is the non-ministerial government department of the Scottish Government responsible for food safety, food standards, nutrition, food labelling, feed official controls and meat inspection in Scotland.

Policy

FSA

Food safety and hygiene
Animal feed safety, hygiene and labelling
Food labelling (safety, allergy)

FSA in Northern Ireland

Food safety and hygiene
Animal feed safety, hygiene and labelling
Food labelling (safety, allergy)
Nutrition standards, nutrition food labelling
Other food labelling (includes food composition standards, country of origin)

FSA in Wales

Food safety and hygiene
Animal feed safety, hygiene and labelling
Food labelling (safety, allergy)
Other food labelling (includes composition standards, country of origin)

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Other food labelling (England) (includes composition standards, country of origin)

Department of Health and Social Care

Nutrition standards, nutrition food labelling (England)

Welsh Government

Nutrition standards, nutrition food labelling (Wales)

Who enforces food controls

FSA delivery

Meat Hygiene Inspectors and Official Veterinarians conduct hygiene, document and physical checks and take samples from approved producers of meat (including abattoirs and cutting plants).

Qualified veterinarians conduct checks on animal products and deliver animal welfare checks*.

*DAERA is responsible for the meat operations delivery on behalf of the FSA in Northern Ireland.

Local authority delivery

Food Safety Officers conduct food safety and hygiene official controls. They inspect premises to check that food is stored and prepared safely.

Food Standards Officers check that food meets safety, composition and nutrition labelling standards (for example, labelling of allergens, use-by dates, nutritional and compositional information).

Imported food delivery

Port Health Officers conduct risk-based document checks, identity checks, physical checks, and take samples of food imports.

Official Veterinarians and Official Fish Inspectors conduct checks on animal products.

Food and feed businesses

Under UK food and animal feed regulations, it is the responsibility of food businesses to ensure that all food and feed placed on the market is safe, that its quality is what consumers would expect and that it is not labelled in a false or misleading way.

The FSA is directly responsible for controls in approved producers of fresh meat (including abattoirs and cutting plants), wine and on-farm dairy establishments. FSA and local authorities together deliver shellfish official controls.

Food businesses covered by local authorities include food producers, food processors, catering establishments, takeaway and food delivery, retailers and approved dairy, meat and fish establishments. FSA and local authorities together deliver shellfish official controls.

Local and port health authorities in England, local authorities and APHA in Wales, and local authorities and DAERA in NI are responsible for imported food controls. Feed controls are the responsibility of local authorities in England and Wales, and DAERA in NI.

Consumers

Consumers are responsible for the safe preparation and storage of food in their home and for checking labelling to ensure that food is suitable for them to eat.

What we do

- **Effective and innovative food regulation** – we ensure the effectiveness of the food regulatory system. We constantly refine our regulatory approach to make it easier for businesses to do the right thing in a complex, fast moving, global food ecosystem.
- **Protecting the public from foodborne disease** – we work with farmers, food producers and processors, consumers, and the retail and hospitality industries to reduce the risk of foodborne disease (food poisoning), which has a societal burden of approximately £9.1bn per annum.
- **Controls on abattoirs and primary production** – we implement checks at abattoirs, and we audit and inspect meat cutting plants, game handling establishments, wine producers and on-farm dairy establishments. We also monitor and report on classified shellfish production areas for contamination and marine biotoxins.
- **Risk analysis** – we use science and evidence to provide advice to ministers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland on food safety and consumer interests. We advise ministers on the authorisation of new products coming to the market.
- **Food hypersensitivity** – we improve the quality of life for people living with food hypersensitivities and support them to make safe and informed choices to effectively manage risk.
- **Food crime** – our National Food Crime Unit is a dedicated law enforcement function which provides leadership on food crime.
- **Food and feed incident handling and response** – we respond to food incidents, taking action to protect consumers when there is a concern around the safety or quality of food (and/or feed).

Food business compliance

In 2019/20, **97.9% of meat food business operators** rated ‘satisfactory’ or above for compliance with food safety, hygiene and animal welfare regulations.



Incidents

In 2019/20, FSA investigated **2,479 food, animal feed and environmental contamination incidents**, protecting consumers by removing products from market or notifying them of risks.



Our risk analysis process

Our risk analysis process uses science and evidence to provide advice to government, business and consumers on food safety risks.

It is the process of estimating risks to human health, finding ways to control these risks, and communicating both risks and controls to the people who need to know.

As well as food safety, it can also consider other factors such as animal welfare, environment and economic impact.

Issues range from control of pathogens (e.g. COVID-19, listeria) and allergens, to authorisation of chemical washes, GM processes and much more.

We use the same risk analysis process to advise government ministers on authorising new products coming to market – like additives and flavourings – from the UK or further afield.

The advice that comes out of risk analysis is based on science and evidence, not on wider political or public pressures.

- During the coronavirus crisis, we carried out detailed risk assessments on the transmissibility of COVID-19 through food and provided advice to help business and consumers to do the right thing.
- When meat in prepacked sandwiches was linked to listeria infections in hospital patients in 2019, we used risk analysis to make risk management recommendations to the NHS Hospital Food Review panel to reduce the risk of vulnerable groups contracting listeriosis in the future.
- In 2015, we carried out risk analysis on runny eggs and updated our advice to state that vulnerable groups could now safely eat raw or lightly cooked UK hen eggs if they bear the British Lion mark.

Our risk analysis process is world-leading in food safety regulation and puts transparency, public understanding and trust at its heart.



Partnerships

We strive to build strategic, collaborative partnerships in the UK and abroad.

Scientific partnerships across government and with academia are critical to meeting our science and evidence needs. For example, our risk analysis process, which analyses food safety risks, draws on the independent views of over 100 scientific experts, analysts and other practitioners.

Our Food Hygiene Rating Scheme is delivered in partnership with 373 local authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. They carry out hygiene inspections in around 490,000 businesses –

enabling consumer choice and improving hygiene standards in food.

Strong partnership working also helps us to understand and reach the consumers we seek to protect. For example, partnering with Just Eat has helped us to increase transparency of information on hygiene in food businesses, enabling consumers to consider food safety when ordering food online. Collaborating with charities like Allergy UK and the Anaphylaxis Campaign helps us to better understand and support people living with food hypersensitivities.



Working at the FSA

We offer fully flexible working arrangements and a commitment to work-life balance because we believe this enables our people to work most effectively.

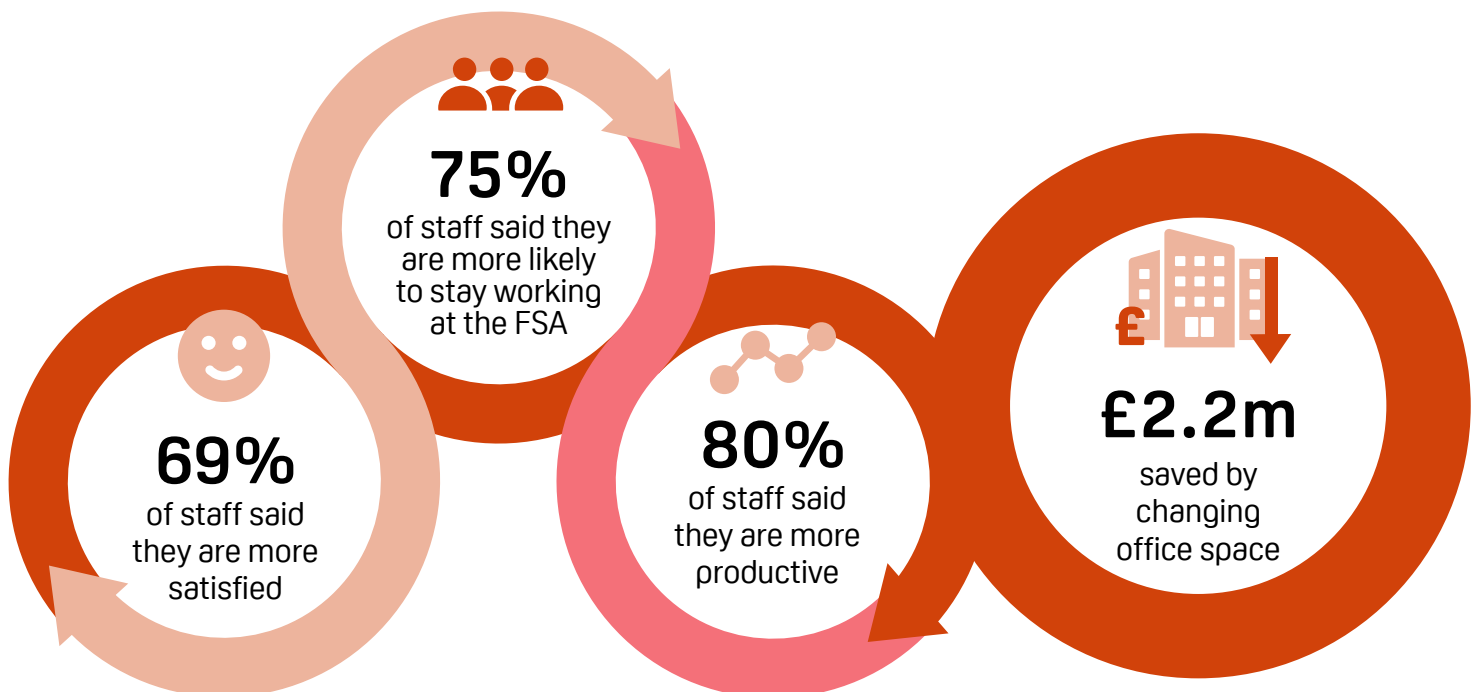
Flexible ways of working (including the option to be fully home-based) and digital tools that facilitate remote working mean we enjoy high levels of staff engagement and help us attract and retain the best talent.

In 2019 we won an 'Innovation in Flexible Working' Award at the workingmums.co.uk Top Employer Awards – recognition of the fact that our flexible policies and practices are truly innovative and break new ground.

In 2017 we brought in a programme to set the gold standard for flexible working:

- We relocated our office in London, renovated our workspace in York and Cardiff, and opened a new site in Birmingham.
- We brought in new contracts for staff (office-based, home-enabled or multi-location) and transformed our IT to enable remote working.
- We gave staff the opportunity to have a better work-life balance by giving them choice about what part of the day/evening or weekend they prefer to work.

As a result of these changes:



The FSA: Protecting your plate since 2000

2000



Creation of the FSA and commitment to openness and transparency

The FSA was created as an independent government department working across England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland to protect public health and consumers' wider interests in relation to food. It was established after several high-profile outbreaks and deaths from foodborne illness.

At launch, the FSA made a commitment to operate openly and transparently, with Board meetings held in public and a Code of Practice on Openness, which is still with us today. This committed the FSA to publish all the advice it gives to other parts of government – groundbreaking for its time, and still so now.

2005

700,000+



Launching 'Safer Food, Better Business' to make food hygiene easier for small businesses

In 2005 we launched 'Safer Food, Better Business' to help small and micro businesses to adopt good food safety procedures. Designed to meet the needs of different types of businesses – including small catering companies, small retail companies, restaurants and takeaways – this guidance continues to be a core part of our offering and most restaurant kitchens now have a printed copy. In 2019 alone there were almost 800,000 unique page views to the 'Safer

Food, Better Business' page of the FSA website and more than 700,000 downloads of the guidance.

In Northern Ireland, catering businesses use the Safe Catering guide to help them comply with food legislation. This food safety management tool offers practical and comprehensive advice to caterers to help them produce a food safety management plan based on the principles of HACCP.

The FSA: Protecting your plate since 2000

2007



Initiating front of pack nutritional labelling

The FSA led on the early development of voluntary front of pack nutritional labelling on prepacked foods. The label shows, at a glance, whether food is high (red), medium (amber) or low (green) in fat, saturated fat, sugars and salt, as well as the total energy (calories and kilojoules) provided.

The labelling, now in widespread use, was designed to encourage consumers to

look for and demand healthier food and give an incentive to businesses to produce that food.

We continue to influence the scheme and a recent consumer campaign in Northern Ireland entitled 'Check the Label' encouraged consumers to use front of pack labelling by highlighting the nutritional value of commonly purchased foods.

2010

72%

5

Improving hygiene standards in food businesses

In 2010, we launched the voluntary Food Hygiene Rating Scheme to provide the public with information about the hygiene standards in food businesses.

We operate the scheme in partnership with local authorities. They give businesses a hygiene rating, from 0 at the bottom to 5 at the top. The scheme became statutory in Wales from November 2013 and in

October 2016 in Northern Ireland, making it mandatory for businesses to display their ratings.

Hygiene standards have improved - businesses achieving the top rating of 5 went up from 53% in 2013 to 72% in 2019. Research shows that businesses with higher ratings are less likely to be responsible for outbreaks of foodborne illness.

The FSA: Protecting your plate since 2000

2014



Reducing Campylobacter poisoning

In 2014, campylobacter was the most common cause of bacterial food poisoning in the UK, affecting more than a quarter of a million people each year.

To tackle this, the FSA launched Acting on

Campylobacter Together (ACT). This included working with farmers, slaughterhouses, and retailers to reduce the presence of campylobacter and possibility of cross-contamination and educating consumers and caterers on good hygiene practices.

2018



Piloting use of blockchain technology

as a regulatory tool to drive and verify compliance in the food chain

In 2018, we successfully completed a pilot using blockchain technology in a cattle slaughterhouse. It was the first time blockchain had been used as a regulatory tool to drive and verify compliance in the food chain.

Blockchain takes records from each stage along the supply chain – from the arrival of the animal at the slaughterhouse, to the packaged meat – and puts them in a block.

Each block is 'chained' to the next block, using an encrypted signature.

This allows it to be shared and checked by anyone with

permission (from farmers to slaughterhouses), rather than having a single central system controlled by one organisation.

Blockchain could increase the transparency of the supply chain, as information about a particular animal can easily be shared across the chain.

It is tamperproof, as it involves multiple copies of data. It improves traceability, as the identification of a product's journey helps assure quality. It is timesaving, as blockchain improves operations by reducing unnecessary activities, such as data duplication.

The FSA: Protecting your plate since 2000

2019



Improving the quality of life for people living with **food hypersensitivities**

In 2019, the government carried out an Allergen Labelling Review following the death of teenager Natasha Ednan-Laperouse. Natasha died from an allergic reaction to sesame in a baguette, which was not labelled with allergen information.

The FSA Board recommended full ingredient and allergen labelling on food that is prepacked for direct sale (PPDS) – food packed on the premises before a customer orders it, like some salads or sandwiches.

The government agreed with this recommendation. A new legal requirement was introduced effective from October 2021 requiring businesses to provide a full ingredient list on PPDS food with the allergens emphasised, giving people with food hypersensitivities the ability to make safe choices when buying food.



Our presence

We operate in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Food Standards Scotland is the non-ministerial government department of the Scottish Government responsible for food safety, food standards, nutrition, food labelling, feed official controls and meat inspection in Scotland.

London

Floors 6 and 7, Clive House
70 Petty France
London SW1H 9EX

York

Foss House
Kings Pool
1-2 Peasholme Green
York YO1 7PR

Wales

11th Floor, Southgate House
Wood Street
Cardiff CF10 1EW

Northern Ireland

10c Clarendon Road
Belfast BT1 3BG

Birmingham

Apex House
Calthorpe Road
Edgbaston
Birmingham B15 1TR

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