

FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY AND FOOD STANDARDS SCOTLAND ANNUAL FOOD STANDARDS REPORT

Report by Rebecca Sudworth, Director of Policy

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1. Summary

- 1.1 This paper sets out proposals on scope and approach for a joint Food Standards Agency (FSA) and Food Standards Scotland (FSS) annual report on food standards (“the report”) and our plans for publication and engagement.

2. Decisions

- 2.1 The Board is invited to discuss and agree the proposals for the report, particularly in relation to scope, and mandate the executive to work with FSS on the first report for publication in mid-2022.

3. Introduction

- 3.1 The former Chair reported to the Board in September 2020 that she had asked the Executive to develop proposals for a new regular assessment of the state of play on food standards. In discussions on the Chief Executive’s report in March, the Board was advised that the report would be produced jointly with FSS. A paper presented to the Board in June provided an update on plans and indicated that we would return to the Board with proposals.
- 3.2 The report will provide a regular and routine overview of food standards and consumer interests in relation to food over time, based on science and evidence.
- 3.3 The report will be mainly retrospective in nature but will have the facility to note key upcoming issues which might be covered in future reports.

4. Discussion

One Nation

- 4.1 The FSA is committed to collaborative working across the three nations in which we operate and with FSS. Our approach to developing these proposals has been grounded in the four-country context and will continue in the development of each year’s report.

- 4.2 The report will embrace the different Government landscapes, strategies and initiatives that exist across England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland as well as synergies between the nations. It will reflect regulatory and policy positions across the UK, including where different approaches have been taken to protect consumers.

Scope

- 4.3 Central to the scope of the report is our mission of ‘food we can trust’. In considering proposals on scope, we have recognised that ‘food standards’ go beyond food safety, labelling, composition and nutrition (for which the FSA and FSS have differing policy responsibilities across the four countries). They encompass wider consumer interests around production standards such as environmental and animal welfare considerations. Consumers are likely to associate the term ‘food standards’ with the whole package of legislation and policies applicable across the food system to safeguard consumer health and interests.
- 4.4 Overall, the report will look at the state of the nation’s plate and address whether food standards are being maintained, are falling, or improving. The report will be outcome-focused, and evidence based. We propose that each report will comprise items on which we report routinely; items that respond to consumer interests evidenced by social research; other issues to which FSA/FSS may wish to draw attention; and a forward look of upcoming issues of relevance to food standards.
- 4.5 The report will have the flexibility each year to cover issues of particular or developing interest to consumers evidenced by social science and other issues on which we might want to focus, on a thematic basis.
- 4.6 Given that the report is a significant new undertaking, it is proposed that the first report will be compact and tightly focused to ensure that it is done well and provides a firm footing for future reports.
- 4.7 A range of areas were considered when developing proposals for the scope of the first report which we are not proposing should fall within scope at this time. These include: non-regulatory standards set by industry which influence food standards overall; nutritional content and sustainability of food, animal feed and animal welfare standards.
- 4.8 The first report will not bind the FSA and FSS for future annual reports. The first report will serve as an initial template and there will be flexibility to develop the report’s structure over time in terms of what we might routinely report on. This coupled with the ongoing flexibility for each year’s report to cover issues on a thematic basis as described above means that the report will be both agile and responsive.

Proposed content for first report

- 4.9 The following paragraphs set out current thinking around content for the first report, but we will, in raising awareness of the report, also be providing stakeholders with the opportunity to provide feedback on content, so these could be subject to change.
- 4.10 It is worth noting that the first report will be relatively early in the life of the UK risk analysis process. While there will be many issues going through the process, there will be fewer risk management recommendations and decisions to report than will be the case in subsequent years. Over time, increasing numbers of issues will progress through the system increasing the numbers of risk management recommendations made to ministers and decisions taken.
- 4.11 We propose the first report establishes an initial set of components providing a firm platform on which to build for future reports, as follows:
- Forewords / introductions from the FSA and FSS Chief Executives and Chairs.
 - General Introduction: An independent report from FSA and FSS with UK coverage; its purpose, aims and scope including an explanation of ‘food standards’ for the purposes of the report; four-country working; and an overview of issues and themes covered.
 - Broad UK context, including departmental responsibilities, priorities and strategies in the UK nations, and other high-level points of consumer interest in relation to food.
 - The Nation’s Plate: An overview of people’s eating and food shopping behaviour (where people buy food, where people eat, what people eat, how much people spend on food) in addition to consumers’ concerns, interests and priorities when it comes to food.
 - Annual Themes: Our response to COVID-19 - how the pandemic changed the food system and consumer behaviours and its legacy in those regards; and EU Exit and its impact on food standards.
 - Information and analysis on the levels and different types of food incident and food crime over the reporting period covering safety and labelling and authenticity. Detailed reflection on any non-routine incidents and food crime of significant consumer interest and the responses to these.
 - Overview of food safety issues that are going, or have gone, through the Risk Analysis Process and any associated regulatory / policy changes (including those in response to risks and opportunities identified through horizon scanning, surveillance, research, incidents, etc.).

- Comments on non-routine food safety issues of significant consumer interest/concern (other than incidents/food crime) setting out the rationale should different approaches have been taken to protect consumers in different nations.
- Overview of regulatory changes relating to food labelling, authenticity and nutrition within FSA Wales, FSA Northern Ireland and FSS remits. Overview of wider nutrition issues within the remit of FSA Northern Ireland.
- Overview of changes to imported foods and the continued importance of the FSA/FSS risk analysis system in protecting consumers in this regard.
- Overall FSA and FSS position on how food standards have changed over the reporting period and the impact, drawing conclusions based on data/evidence from a range of sources including our risk analysis process, sampling activity, incidents, food crime monitoring and social research.

Food Strategies in the UK Nations

- 4.12 The National Food Strategy report published on 15 July which covers England makes several recommendations in respect of the FSA including around reporting. We have welcomed this report and are engaging with government and other partners towards a White Paper which will set out the Government's response within six months.
- 4.13 In the light of the ongoing discussions the first report will not seek to address any National Food Strategy recommendations.
- 4.14 In relation to Wales, the FSA will continue to have regard to the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 which is referenced in the Welsh Food Advisory Committee (WFAC) Chair and Wales Director Report paper (FSA 21/09/07), and to the principles of the Food Strategy for Wales. In Northern Ireland the FSA will continue to be represented on the Food Programme Board on the development and delivery of a cross-Departmental Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework which recognises the interconnectedness around food and provides a "whole of Government" approach.
- 4.15 In Scotland, FSS will continue to have regard to the broader food policy landscape and the Scottish Government's national food and drink policy, becoming a Good Food Nation.

Indicative timeline, clearance and publication

- 4.16 The FSA and FSS Boards will be sighted, and their comments sought during the development of the report.

- 4.17 An indicative development and publication timeline for producing the first report based on the process for the FSA's Annual Report and Accounts, including proposals on how the Board will be sighted on the report's development, can be found at the Annex.
- 4.18 Following EU Exit the FSA and FSS have a more direct responsibility to assure the legislatures in four nations that UK consumers can have trust in the food they eat. It is intended that the report will be laid before each of the UK legislatures, with the FSA using powers under s.4(3) of the Food Standards Act 1999 to lay the report before the Westminster Parliament, Welsh Senedd and Northern Ireland Assembly. Publication of the report will take place after it has been laid before the legislatures, meeting accessibility and Welsh language translation requirements.

Engagement to raise awareness of report

- 4.19 A plan for engagement with partners in government, industry and consumer representatives has been developed to ensure, given the differing policy responsibilities across the UK, that the scope and aims of the report and how it fits into the new reporting landscape are well understood. This is particularly important for the first report and will be distinct to engagement with these stakeholders on the development of the report itself.
- 4.20 We intend to commence this engagement subject to the Board's endorsement of the proposals set out in this paper. It will be conducted in two-phases with FSA and FSS engagement activities being separate, but aligned in approach:
- **Phase 1** will focus on engagement with Other Government Departments and the Devolved Administrations to raise awareness across Government of the report.
 - **Phase 2** will focus on raising awareness with industry, consumer and enforcement groups later in the year.
- 4.21 As per the indicative timeline at the Annex, a communications plan will be developed for each year's report.

5. Conclusions

5.1 The Board is invited to:

- Discuss and agree proposals for the report's scope and publication including the proposal that the first report will not seek to address any National Food Strategy recommendations;
- Note that the Board will be sighted and have the opportunity to comment during the development of the report;
- Mandate the executive to work with FSS on the first report for publication in mid-2022.

INDICATIVE DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLICATION TIMELINE FOR FIRST REPORT

Period	Activities
September 2021 - March 2022	Agree scope of first report with FSA and FSS Boards (15 September). Contributions commissioned and drafting commenced. Engagement with Other Government Departments and the Devolved Administrations (Phase 1) and then with industry and consumer and enforcement groups (Phase 2) to ensure that the scope and aims of the report, and how it fits into the new reporting landscape, are understood. Communications plan for report developed.
April	First draft shared with FSA Executive Management Team (EMT), FSS Executive Leadership Team (ELT) and Boards by correspondence. Amendments made to draft taking on board comments received. First draft sent for typesetting.
May	First typeset draft scrutinised, amendments made and sent for second typeset draft. Second typeset draft discussed by EMT and ELT and shared with Boards by correspondence. Amendments to draft taking on board comments received.
End May	Final draft sent for typesetting.
Early June	Final checks and quality assurance. Seek joint formal sign-off by FSA and FSS CEOs and Chairs. Design agency finalises various version requirements (e.g. accessibility versions such as large print, Welsh language translation, electronic documents etc.). Sighting FSA/FSS Boards, Ministers / other Government Departments.
Mid-June	Before Legislatures' Summer Recesses: Laying of the report before the four legislatures. Publication of the report as soon as it has been laid before the four legislatures. Associated communications activity before and after laying / publication according to communications plan.
Post-Publication	Potential consideration of final report at public Board meeting.