

Strategic Plan 2001 - 2006
Putting consumers first



Our aims

We aim to be trusted as the UK's most reliable source of advice and information about food. We want to protect and improve the safety of the food people eat, and to make it possible for people to choose a healthy diet.

Key priorities

Over the next five years we aim to:

- reduce food-borne illness by 20% by improving food safety right through the food chain
- help people to improve their dietary health
- promote honest and informative labelling to help consumers
- promote best practice within the food industry
- improve the enforcement of food law
- earn people's trust by what we do and how we do it

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Introduction

The Food Standards Agency, created by an Act of Parliament in April 2000, is charged with protecting the public's health and consumers' interests in relation to food. In 1998, the Government published its White Paper 'The Food Standards Agency - a force for change', which expressed the need for a food standards body to 'put an end to the climate of confusion and suspicion about the way that food safety and standards issues have been handled.' Since its inception, the Agency has operated under three guiding principles:

- Putting the consumer first
- Being open and accessible
- Being an independent voice

This Strategic Plan sets out our priorities for food safety, public information, labelling and choice, nutrition and diet and food law enforcement over the next five years. It also describes how we will put our core value of openness into practice, describes our democratic accountability and explains what we are doing to improve the way we work.

Each year we will produce a more detailed business plan showing what we will be doing in the year ahead, and an Annual Report to summarise our progress to date. For more information on the Food Standards Agency's policies and activities, consult our website on www.foodstandards.gov.uk.

1 putting consumers first

Key priorities

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- earn people's trust by what we do and how we do it

We aim to be trusted as the UK's most reliable source of advice and information about food. We want to protect and improve the safety of the food people eat, and to make it possible for people to choose a healthy diet.

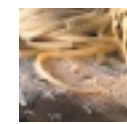
Our core values are an example of how the Agency aims to protect and improve food safety and to make it possible for people to choose a healthy diet.

In *putting consumers first*, the Food Standards Agency has made food safety its top priority. We provide consumers with understandable, accurate and reliable information on which they can base their decisions about food and which will help them to understand all issues surrounding food and food safety. The Agency is committed to supporting all consumers in food matters, including the most socially and economically disadvantaged.

The Agency functions in an *open and accessible* fashion. We have made a commitment to decide on policy issues in public and after an open debate. Open Board Meetings are one example of the Agency's transparent working and the ethos of openness goes right through the Agency, across the UK.

Whenever possible, the Agency seeks people's views before reaching conclusions and always explains the reasons for its decisions and advice in a straightforward manner. The Agency aims to be candid where there is doubt; when decisions need to be made on the basis of incomplete information we will explain both what we know and what we do not know, and what we are doing to decrease the uncertainty.

Our website is an important tool both for communicating with and listening to consumers, and the monthly *FSA News* keeps stakeholders abreast of the latest Agency developments and research.



The Food Standards Agency is an *independent voice within government*, able to give advice, and to publish it, without asking politicians first. So that you can always be sure you know what we are saying to the government of the day, we publish the advice we give Ministers about action needed to protect public health.

Food safety is crucial for everyone. The average household spends £3,000 a year on food, which makes up the largest single part of their household expenditure. This amounts to about 16% of their after-tax weekly income. For the poorest 20% of households, the figure is 30%, while for the richest it is just 11%*. Given food's enormous implications for our lives, consumers must be protected by effective and proportionate regulation of the food industry. The Food Standards Agency will play a key part in the forthcoming debate on the way that food is produced and sold in this country.

The Food Standards Agency is forward-looking and vigilant in watching over new developments. We keep abreast of new foods, products and processes. We commission scientific research and surveys to help ensure that our policies are based on sound evidence and that the science we depend on remains at the forefront of understanding. We take an impartial view based firmly on the best available evidence. We seek advice from experts on scientific advisory committees that advise the Agency, but we are also keen to encourage and listen to the views of the widest possible range of individual experts and interested bodies.

* Source: Family Spending 1999-2000; Family Expenditure Survey, ONS

1 putting consumers first

The FSA has wide-ranging powers

The Food Standards Agency was set up as a new government department, to meet the concerns of consumers about the way food safety decisions are taken. It is our responsibility to ensure that the interests of consumers are put first in the development of food policy and regulation.

Parliament requires us to act in a proportionate way when we take action to manage food risks. That means balancing the costs and benefits of what we do. We will be precautionary in our approach, taking into account uncertainties in the evidence in coming to a view about risk. If we believe that there is a serious threat to consumer safety, we will take action where necessary without waiting for conclusive proof.

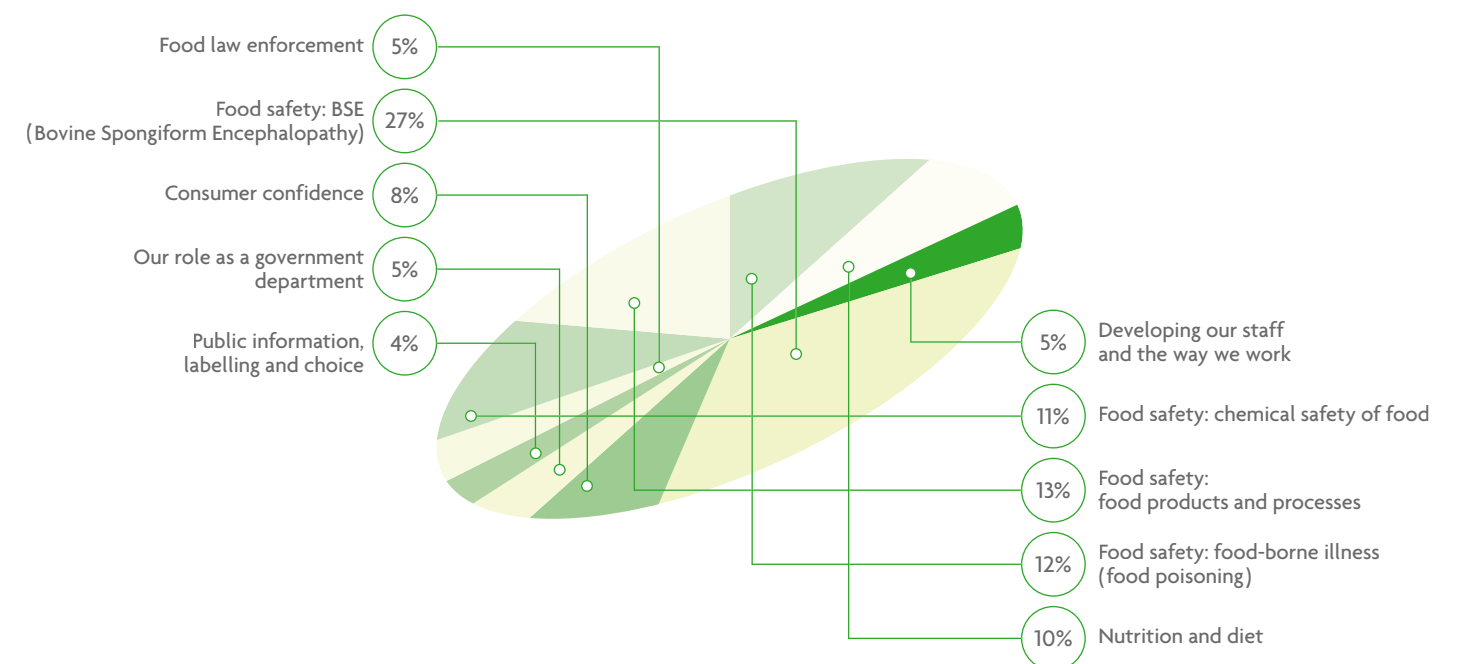
To ensure that consumers' interests are considered throughout the food chain, the Food Standards Agency's sphere of influence is from 'farm to fork' - in other words from the point where food is grown or manufactured, right through to when it arrives on your plate. We have responsibilities in relation to pesticides and veterinary medicines used in producing food, and in relation to hygiene standards in restaurants and take-aways. We check food safety and standards through our own surveys of food in the shops, and through those carried out by Local Authorities. We also carry out surveys on nutrition and diet so that we know how eating habits are changing. Because food is a global market, we protect the interests of UK consumers through our negotiations in Europe and elsewhere to improve international standards. We will work in close collaboration with the European Food Authority when it is established.

The enforcement of laws and regulations is vital in protecting consumers. In licensed meat premises, such as slaughterhouses, the Meat Hygiene Service - part of the Agency - ensures that operators obey the regulations. (In Northern Ireland the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) does this on our behalf.) In factories, shops and restaurants Local Authorities are responsible for making sure that food laws are enforced, and they play a key role in the front line of consumer protection. We have a role in setting standards for Local Authorities and monitoring how well they do their jobs.

There are several important issues related to food production where other Departments, not the Agency, have the principal responsibility for public policy. Animal welfare, for example, is the responsibility of the Agriculture Departments; the environmental impact of farm practices is handled by the Environment Departments and Agencies. Government policies in health and education also have important roles in relation to food. A range of government departments have responsibility for helping British food suppliers, manufacturers or retailers prosper in a highly competitive international market. In all such cases the Food Standards Agency will work closely with those responsible to seek the best possible outcomes for the consumer.

Our resources:

The Food Standards Agency's total expenditure in 2001-2002 will be £94 million. The chart below shows how this is distributed across the ten work areas described in this Plan and how we expect the total to increase over the next three years. (All government departments have their budgets agreed with the Treasury for a three-year period.)



2 food safety



Food-borne illness (food poisoning)

What we want to achieve:

- to reduce the incidence of food-borne disease by 20% over the next 5 years
- to reduce Salmonella contamination of UK produced retail chicken by at least 50% over the next four years

When people suffer from symptoms such as diarrhoea and vomiting, they generally put it down to food poisoning. In our first consumer survey at the end of 2000, 14% of adults said they had suffered from food poisoning at least once in the previous year.

Food-borne micro-organisms are a significant cause of illness in the UK. A recently published major study estimated that in 1994-1995, there were around 9.4 million cases of infectious intestinal disease (diarrhoea and vomiting) in England. Many of these probably resulted directly from eating contaminated foods. Notified cases – cases that are reported to Local Authorities by doctors – more than doubled between 1988 and 1999. Because food poisoning is often under-reported, notifications are not a reliable indicator of the number of true cases. However, the data provided by the laboratory reporting system confirm the upward trend, at least until 1997.

The Food Standards Agency aims to benefit consumers directly by cutting the number of cases of food poisoning, and we have set ourselves a tough target – to reduce food-borne illness by 20%. We will improve existing surveillance systems to monitor how well we do against these targets, and we will publish the results.

Our aim is to ensure that all parts of the food chain control their procedures properly so as to minimise food contamination by harmful microbes. It is the primary responsibility of those who produce and process food to make it as safe as possible, and for the enforcement organisations to oversee them. We will work with industry to promote good practice, and to implement modern techniques for identifying and controlling food safety risks (a system called 'HACCP*').

Food poisoning:

- may cause serious illness or permanent disability – and some types can kill
- is a significant cause of illness in the UK – could be up to 4.5 million cases a year
- is expensive – costs the economy, including employers and the NHS, up to £350 million a year

Food Safety
Food-borne illness (Food Poisoning) Analysis
Planned Expenditure (£m)

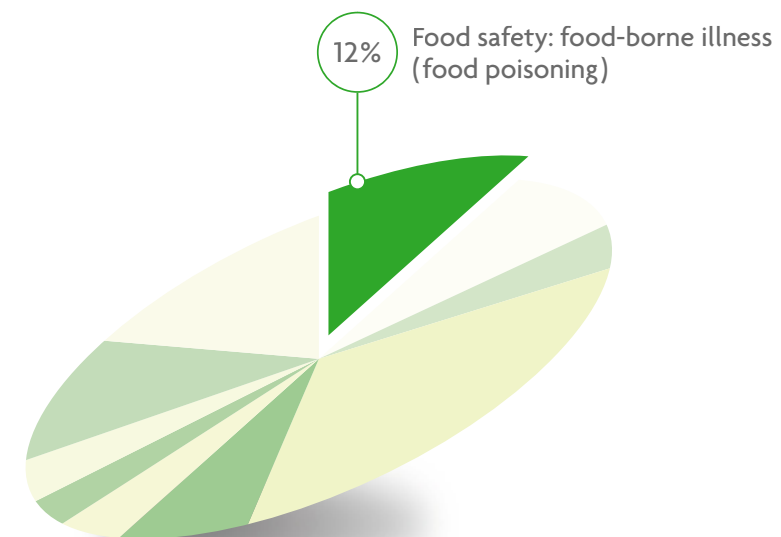


We will promote safer food handling practices in catering businesses and in the home. We explain in chapter 5 how we are setting standards for the local and national agencies whose job it is to enforce food law. We will support our strategy by commissioning research on the causes of food contamination and on what measures are most effective to reduce it, and we will conduct research into why food poisoning seems to affect most the poorest members of society. We are co-sponsors (with the Scottish Executive) of the E. coli task force.

Local Authorities and health authorities staff are the first to respond to food poisoning outbreaks. Should an outbreak occur that has wider or national implications we will support the local teams and take action nationally, if necessary. During these emergencies, the Agency will be open about problems and about what we are doing to tackle them. Chapter 6 describes how we will deliver an open approach in line with our core values.

The way we will do it:

- work with industry and consumers to minimise contamination of food
- improve food safety through better education and enforcement (see chapter 5)
- develop effective, user-friendly guidance on safer food handling in the home
- develop key messages for schoolchildren on food safety
- commission research to develop better control measures throughout the food chain



*Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point - A system to identify what steps in processes or procedures are most likely to go wrong and to ensure that these steps are effectively controlled.

BSE (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy)

What we want to achieve:

- to ensure the controls are based on the latest scientific knowledge
- to ensure that BSE controls are effectively enforced
- to provide accurate, independent information on BSE issues and the effectiveness of enforcement
- to ensure that imported meat is monitored to check that EU controls have been applied

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) is a prion disease which belongs to the family of diseases called transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs). TSEs include scrapie in sheep and Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD) in people, diseases that have existed for a long time. In 1996, a new variant of CJD (vCJD) was identified in people. The majority of experts now agree that the most likely cause of vCJD was exposure to BSE. (The Phillips Report of 1999 provides a thorough and detailed analysis of the BSE outbreak and the measures taken to control it up to 1996.)* There are still many uncertainties about vCJD, including how many people will develop it and how long it takes them to develop the disease, which is always fatal. At 30 March 2001 there were 97 definite or probable cases of people infected by vCJD in the UK.

Because of the possible risk to human health from eating BSE-infected meat, strict controls are in place on beef sold for human consumption in the UK. The first control, known as the Over Thirty Month Rule, has been in place in this country since 1996. It helps ensure that any cattle older than 30 months are not slaughtered and sold for human consumption.

The second control to keep infected beef from entering the human food chain is a ban on specified risk material (SRM). SRM are the parts of cattle and sheep most likely to carry BSE, including spinal cord and brain tissue, which are removed at slaughter and disposed of under controlled conditions.

A third BSE control known as the feed ban prevents all farm animals from eating meat-and-bonemeal derived from mammals. This control stops cattle from being exposed to BSE and therefore reduces the incidence, or number of new cases, of BSE.

In 2000, the Agency undertook an extensive review of these controls and concluded they should all remain in place and, in some cases, be strengthened. The Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) enforces public health controls in licensed slaughterhouses and meat plants. EU-wide controls have been gradually introduced and the MHS also monitors imports to check whether they are effectively applied to meat coming on to the UK market.

* 'The BSE Inquiry: The Inquiry into BSE and variant CJD in the United Kingdom', Cm 887, 1999, Crown Copyright. Available from www.bse.org.uk or The Stationery Office Limited.

Food Safety
BSE (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy)
Planned Expenditure (£m)



There is a theoretical possibility that BSE is present in sheep in the UK although, so far, it has not been found to occur naturally. We have pressed for the development of diagnostic tests which would enable the mass screening of sheep for BSE.

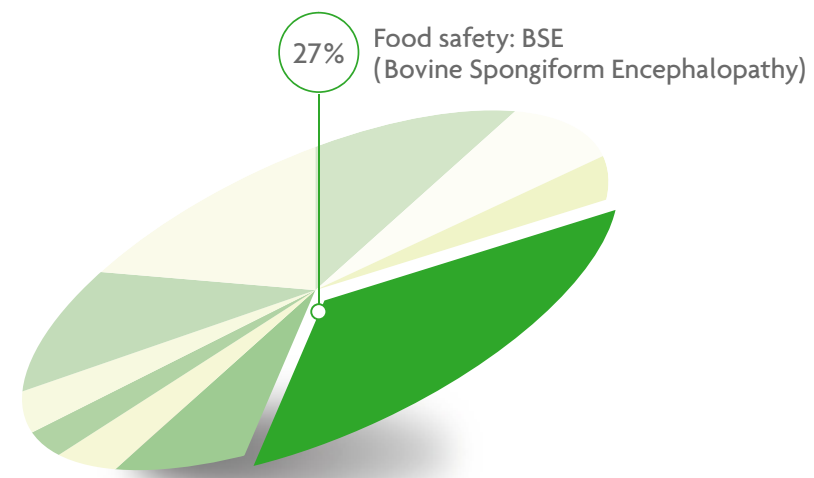
Our review of the controls stressed the scientific uncertainty which still surrounds BSE. We will continue both to be open about this uncertainty and to review the controls in light of scientific developments. For the latest developments, visit the Agency's dedicated BSE controls website www.bsereview.org.uk.

BSE (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy):

- a disease of cattle which is still not fully understood
- is generally thought to cause a form of CJD in people
- it is not yet clear how many people will develop vCJD
- UK controls now minimise risk from eating beef

The way we will do it:

- implement our recent review of BSE controls and keep these controls under review
- set specific performance targets for the MHS and DARD on the enforcement of BSE controls
- support the national scrapie plan for sheep and its earliest possible implementation
- promote the speediest possible development of diagnostic tests for the detection of BSE in sheep
- negotiate at EU level effective measures to protect the food chain and press for their effective implementation in all Member States



The Meat Hygiene Service:
An Executive Agency of
the Food Standards Agency.
MHS staff are at the forefront
of protecting the public.

2 food safety

Chemical safety of food

What we want to achieve:

- to ensure that chemicals present in food do not compromise food safety
- to have proper controls in place and ensure they are properly enforced
- to encourage open debate of the issues amongst stakeholders

Chemicals which are present in food may present a risk to human health. Some chemical and radiological contaminants of food are present in the environment and others occur naturally in food (for example, natural toxicants such as solanine in green potatoes). Other toxic chemicals may be produced by fungal contaminants (e.g. aflatoxin). Some farming, manufacturing and other processes which can cause contamination need to be licensed, and these are described in the next chapter.

The Food Standards Agency aims to protect consumers against harmful exposure to chemical contaminants in food. Because food production is an international business, we negotiate in Europe and other international fora to secure standards and controls which will protect the public. We ensure that legislation is properly enforced. We ensure that appropriate methods of analysis and sampling are integral parts of legislative standards and that they are made available to enforcement authorities (see chapter 5).

We also estimate consumers' exposure to these chemicals and look at the implications for vulnerable groups such as children and pregnant women. We provide advice to consumers, enforcement agencies, the food industry and others on chemicals present in food. With the help of Local Authorities and agencies, we respond to incidents or emergencies whereby the food supply might be contaminated.

Potentially harmful chemicals in food:

- may be present naturally, or by accident, or as a result of industrial or farming processes, so people cannot avoid them altogether
- risks to health are generally low but depend on how much of a particular food people eat
- risks may be higher for vulnerable groups such as children
- effective controls and constant vigilance are essential to protect consumers

Food Safety
Chemicals in Food Analysis
Planned Expenditure (£m)



The way we will do it:

- reduce the public's dietary exposure to chemical and radiological contaminants
- improve risk management on the basis of independent expert advice
- liaise and negotiate with other EU Member States, the European Commission, and international organisations to develop appropriate standards
- increase resources to tackle the problem of dioxins
- maintain our vigilance through surveys of food on farms and in the shops
- publish our research and other relevant information on the safety of food chemicals



2 food safety

Food products and processes – their licensing or approval

What we want to achieve:

- safety assessment processes that protect consumers, are robust, and are applied rigorously
- safety assessment which is open, transparent and based on the best available science
- publication of assessment criteria and other information to improve consumers' confidence in the procedures
- reductions in the discharges of chemicals and radionuclides at source, or otherwise reduce their potential impact on the food chain

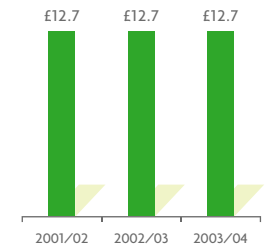
A very wide range of products or processes has the potential to affect food safety adversely if not adequately controlled. These products themselves may be new types of foods ('novel' foods), such as those that have been genetically modified, or food ingredients such as additives. They may be products used in agriculture, which can end up in small quantities in food (such as pesticides, veterinary medicines and products for use in animal feeds).

Some processes like food irradiation may also affect the safety or quality of food and therefore need to be licensed or controlled. Other industrial processes may discharge chemical or radioactive waste products into the environment, which can enter and potentially contaminate the food chain. In such cases, controls must be in place to ensure that contaminants in food do not pose a risk to consumers.

Food products and processes:

- include novel foods, genetically modified foods, agricultural products and processes such as food irradiation
- require licensing or approval – to protect consumers – if they could affect food safety

Food Safety
Food Products & Processes Analysis
Planned Expenditure (£m)



The Food Standards Agency ensures that the arrangements for licensing or approving products protect public health and the interests of consumers. The Agency oversees rigorous pre-market food safety assessments of novel foods, food additives, pesticides and veterinary medicines, and we ensure that assessment mechanisms are consistent and effective. In some cases, we are directly responsible for the approval processes. In others, we have powers to ensure that approvals by other bodies protect the health and interests of consumers.

Under EU legislation we act as what is called the 'Competent Authority' for carrying out pre-market safety assessments, and for ensuring the adequate labelling of novel foods and processes (including foods produced using genetic modification) and for additives and protein products used in animal feeds. We have a statutory right to be consulted about proposals for the authorisation of discharges of radioactive waste and chemical contaminants into the environment and we advise Ministers on the exercise of their powers. We participate in international discussions on procedures for assessing the safety of new products and processes, and negotiate in all the relevant international bodies.

The way we will do it:

- review the regulatory processes for pesticides and veterinary medicines with the aim of minimising their residues in food
- ensure that all assessments are carried out satisfactorily
- work towards greater consistency in the assessment procedures and values of international bodies
- ensure that procedures for assessing new and existing products and processes are based on the best available science



3 public information, labelling and choice

What we want to achieve:

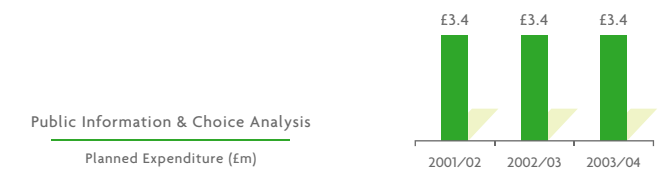
- to promote honest and informative labelling, and encourage and support initiatives to improve the clarity and value of information provided to consumers
- to initiate, develop, negotiate internationally and implement rules on food composition, labelling and advertising which protect the interests of consumers
- to protect consumers by controls on foods which make health claims or which require special treatment for other reasons. (e.g. baby foods)

Consumers need clear and accurate information so they can make informed choices about their diet and the foods they buy. They need to know about food issues, including risks, to be able to make sense of labels and other information about food and diet. Labelling rules must be transparent and ensure that labels give consumers the information they want and need. Special treatment is required for some foods, such as those being promoted for their special nutritional or health-giving properties, to ensure that consumers are not misled.

The Food Standards Agency is leading the movement for improvements in food labelling, in the interest of consumers. We do this by negotiating for the UK in the international organisations which set most of the rules on food composition, labelling, and advertising. Changing the international rules takes time, so we also work with food manufacturers and retailers who can do much on a voluntary basis to improve the information available to consumers.

Public information, labelling and choice:

- consumers need meaningful and honest information to enable them to make informed choices
- most rules about labelling are set internationally
- it is the job of the Food Standards Agency to protect the interests of UK consumers in international negotiations



We have a role in ensuring that food meets appropriate compositional and quality standards. We monitor and audit Local Authorities' enforcement of labelling regulations and we commission our own surveys of food in the shops to check that it is what it says on the label.

Our role also includes promoting deeper understanding of food issues such as food composition and quality standards and labelling, which we explain in our publications and on our website, www.foodstandards.gov.uk.

The way we will do it:

- implement our 18-point action plan on food labelling*
- provide clear guidance to industry and enforcement authorities on implementation of legislation
- encourage initiatives by food manufacturers and retailers to make information more available and more comprehensible to consumers
- promote the provision of better food education in schools
- disseminate advice to consumers on the use of labelling information



* See www.foodstandards.gov.uk/farm_fork/label_plan.htm

4 nutrition and diet



What we want to achieve:

- long term improvements in the diet and nutrition of the UK population
- reduction in inequalities by enabling and encouraging the disadvantaged and vulnerable to improve their diets

It is widely agreed that a balanced diet can help to improve the health of the population. For example, a healthy diet can play an important part in helping reduce coronary heart and related diseases, which currently account for 41% of all deaths in the UK. Poor diet is also thought to be responsible for about a quarter of all cancer deaths. Research has shown that people who are economically and socially disadvantaged often have poor diets, which may contribute to other health inequalities. As a further cause of concern, a recent study by the National Audit Office noted that nearly two-thirds of all adults in England are now either obese or overweight, and the trend is still upwards.

The Food Standards Agency's role begins with getting sound evidence on which to base our advice and action. We do this by commissioning research and dietary surveys, and by seeking advice from expert advisory committees. We have a major role to play in enabling, motivating and informing people about diet, and in identifying what steps people can take to change their eating habits for the better. Our aim is to find out what information the general public and specific groups need about healthy eating, and the best means of getting the facts to them. Accurate and informative labelling will play an important part in this (see chapter 3).

Education is an important part of this process and part of our strategy will be to get this information through to children in a way that is meaningful to them, and to ensure that they have practical food and cooking skills. Therefore, we will work closely with the education departments.

There is a great deal of work already being done by the Agency and by other organisations in enabling and promoting a healthy diet. So a key role for the Agency will be to achieve better communication and joint working between the different players, including Local Authorities. We will evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of action taken to promote, and improve access to a healthy diet.

Nutrition and diet:

- a healthy balanced diet will improve people's health and reduce the incidence of the major causes of premature death and disability, like heart disease and cancer

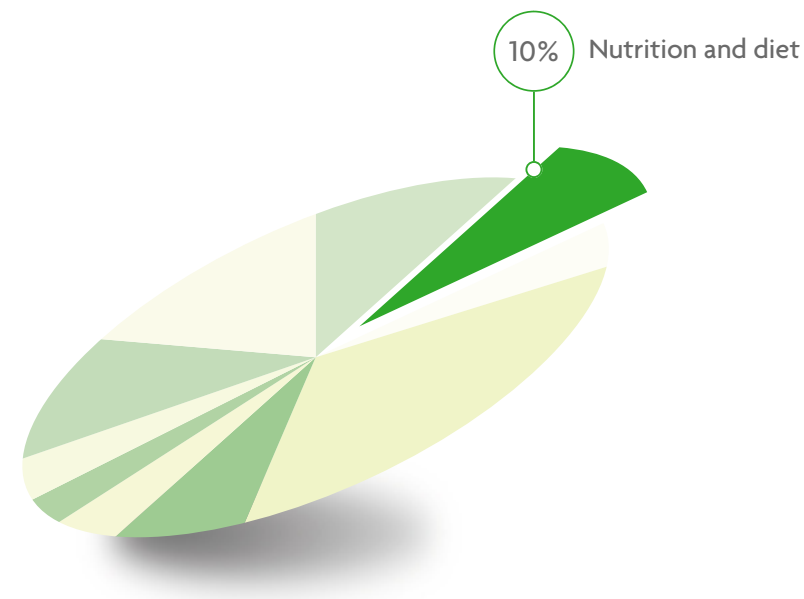
Nutrition & Diet Analysis
Planned Expenditure (£m)



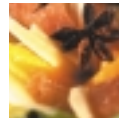
We will also ensure an effective approach to consultation with stakeholders, including the Nutrition Stakeholder Forum, and involve them in the development of nutrition policy. We are also working closely with the Devolved Administrations in Scotland and Wales, for example in the Scottish Diet and Nutrition Forum.

The way we will do it:

- establish a new Nutrition Stakeholder Forum in 2001
- work with the Health Departments and other agencies (including the all-Ireland Food Safety Promotion Board on specific issues)
- work with the UK food industry to improve nutritional quality in processed foods, for example, by reducing their salt content
- help people understand how to achieve a healthy diet in practice
- identify and promulgate the most effective ways of encouraging adoption of a healthy diet, on the basis of advice from expert advisory committees, our own research and other relevant sources of information such as health and education professionals



5 food law enforcement



What we want to achieve:

- to improve the effectiveness of Local Authority and MHS enforcement
- to ensure proportionate and more consistent enforcement
- to improve transparency of enforcement arrangements for stakeholders
- to promote the wider implementation of risk-based systems for improving safety standards across the food chain

As with any system of legal controls, the effectiveness of food law depends on how well it is enforced. When the Food Standards Agency was created it was given a new role in ensuring the effectiveness of enforcement of food law across the UK. Our work to improve the enforcement of food law will also help us to achieve our other strategic objectives. Better enforcement will have a particular role to play in reducing food poisoning, in protecting the public from the effects of BSE and from chemicals in food, and in ensuring that the food consumers buy is what it claims to be. Imports must also meet the required standards of quality and safety, and so we ensure that regulations are enforced rigorously for all food.

The aim of good enforcement is to ensure that controls are effective in protecting public health and the interests of consumers, and to ensure fair trading, without imposing unnecessary burdens on the businesses involved. It is equally important that our policies and regulations to improve food safety and standards take account of the enforcement implications.

Enforcement of the law on the safety, composition and labelling of food and animal feed at the local level is carried out by Local Authorities, generally through their Environmental Health and Trading Standards Departments. In licensed meat premises, the Meat Hygiene Service ensures that operators obey the regulations.

Food law enforcement:

- effective enforcement of food law is essential to protect consumers
- responsibility for enforcement is shared between central and local government bodies in the UK
- the Food Standards Agency has a key role in ensuring the effectiveness and consistency of enforcement
- better enforcement will help us to achieve our other strategic objectives

Food Law Enforcement Analysis
Planned Expenditure (£m)



The Food Standards Agency aims to improve consumer protection by better enforcement of food and animal feed law. We provide guidance and support for local enforcement officers, and monitor and audit Local Authority enforcement arrangements. We are responsible for maximising the effectiveness and efficiency of the Meat Hygiene Service in the interests of public health. In Northern Ireland we monitor and audit the meat hygiene enforcement activities of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, which acts on our behalf.

We investigate suspected breaches of meat hygiene legislation and take enforcement action including prosecution of offenders, where appropriate.

The way we will do it:

- publish reports on Local Authority enforcement services, as well as those already published for the MHS
- provide more information about the standards of food safety in individual food businesses so that consumers can make more informed local choices
- work with Local Authorities to develop and improve their enforcement services
- negotiate and implement a new risk-based EU meat inspection regime to protect public health, reflecting HACCP principles
- develop and implement a strategy to ensure the application of HACCP-based procedures in the food industry, in particular the catering sector (see chapter 2)



6 consumer confidence

What we want to achieve:

- to deliver a measurable improvement in public confidence in the way food safety and standards are managed across the UK
- to be the UK's most trusted source of food advice and information
- to ensure that issues of public concern are debated openly

Genuine safety issues (and food scares) over many years had led consumers to lose confidence in the safety of food and in the arrangements for ensuring its safety. The most effective way in which the Food Standards Agency can improve consumer confidence is to deliver real improvements in food safety and standards. The way we do this is also important. In the past, a climate of secrecy – or even a wish to ‘protect people from being worried by bad news – led consumers to doubt whether they were being told the whole truth.

The Food Standards Agency aims to be an authoritative source of reliable advice on food safety and other consumer concerns about food. We shall publish our advice and information as soon as we can. We shall issue information when we have it, and, whenever possible, we will issue authoritative advice at the same time. Our commitment to being open and honest runs through all the work that we do. This includes the scientific basis for our decisions, the costs and practicability of possible actions and the feasibility of enforcing new regulations. We acknowledge that it is rarely, if ever, possible to eliminate all food safety risks; our aim is to reduce risk to a level within the generally acceptable range. If there is uncertainty, we shall take a precautionary approach.

Consumer confidence:

- delivering real improvements in food safety and consumer protection will improve consumer confidence
- the way we work is important: we must live up to our core values of openness and honesty
- confidence was undermined by a climate of secrecy in the past

Consumer Confidence Analysis
Planned Expenditure (£m)

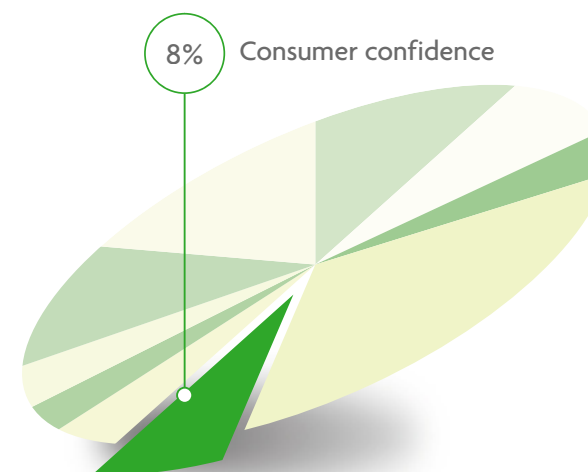


We have found that by being open and by listening we can improve the quality of the decisions we make. Involving key stakeholders at an early stage in our review of the BSE controls helped us identify new issues on which we needed to take action. We have held workshops with stakeholders and outside experts to help us develop a strategy for reducing food-borne illness. We are also developing ways of working with stakeholders in all our areas of work. We want to generate open debate on issues of concern and we have begun to use open meetings for the public to do this.

In a food safety emergency we will keep the public informed about what we know, what we are doing, and what our advice is.

The way we will do it:

- commission and publish annual surveys of consumer confidence and attitudes to the Food Standards Agency
- carry out all our work as openly and transparently as we can
- find out the views of consumers and other stakeholders and take them into account
- establish a new Consumer Committee to help the Agency understand and address consumer needs
- ensure that the Agency's policies take into account the needs and views of disadvantaged groups



7 our role as a government department

What we want to achieve:

- to advise and inform the UK government, the devolved administrations and international bodies, so they take decisions which reflect our primary objectives of protecting public health and the interests of consumers

The Food Standards Agency is a non-Ministerial government department. We are accountable through Health Ministers to the Westminster Parliament for our UK-wide activities and for those in England, and to the devolved administrations for our work in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. We operate at arms' length from Ministers. We are responsible for advising them on all issues relating to food safety and other consumer concerns about food. We therefore assist them in their Parliamentary duties relating to issues within the Agency's remit, such as correspondence, questions and debates. Our wide powers to publish information and advice, including our advice to Ministers, guarantee our independence.

- The Agency has similar powers and responsibilities to other government departments, but is headed by a Chairman and a Board. It is accountable to the Westminster Parliament and the devolved administrations through Health Ministers.

Our Role as Government Department Analysis
Planned Expenditure (£m)

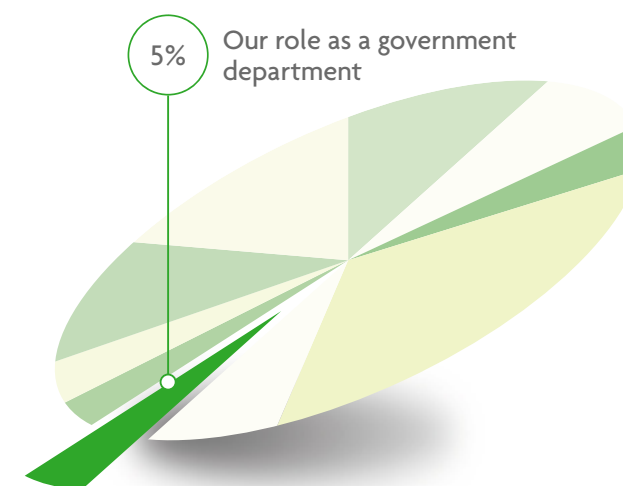


We operate within a framework of European and international law. Global markets mean more choice for consumers – but also require an international approach to setting standards for food safety and composition. We negotiate in Europe and other international fora on behalf of the UK. We aim to protect UK consumers by helping to develop the framework of European food law and contributing to international standard-setting. We work with international partners to improve standards, and with the Food Safety Promotion Board of Ireland on the issues within its remit.

When it is established, the European Food Agency will have a key role in European food safety issues and we shall work closely with it to protect the interests of consumers.

The way we will do it:

- provide Ministers, on request or otherwise, with our best advice based on objective evidence and in line with our primary objective of protecting the interests of consumers
- be consistent in the advice and information we give Ministers in all four governments, enabling them to make decisions appropriate to their particular circumstances
- work closely with other government departments and agencies using our influence to ensure they take account of public health issues and the interests of consumers in relation to food



8 developing our staff and the way we work



Developing Our Staff & Our Organisation Analysis
Planned Expenditure (£m)



What we want to achieve:

- to continue to develop open, consultative, evidence-based policy making that better protects consumers
- to ensure that our staff have the expertise, knowledge, and skills and develop the internal culture necessary to deliver our strategy in line with our core values
- to continually review our operations to ensure efficiency and value for money
- to continue learning and developing as an organisation

Since its creation last year, the Food Standards Agency has developed better policies and proposals by working in a more consultative way, holding Board meetings in public and being more open about the information on which we base our decisions. We aim to work in a joined-up way - both externally with our partners in central and local government and with our stakeholders, and internally, to ensure we get the greatest possible benefit from our creation as a single UK organisation.

In all our work we are committed to making our decisions on the best evidence available. We gather this evidence from a wide range of sources. We seek advice from experts, both within the Agency and outside, and especially through a network of scientific advisory committees. We commission research to inform decisions on our key policy concerns. We carry out surveys to monitor food safety and standards and to gather information on what people eat.

We consult consumers about their preferences; we consult our partners in the enforcement field to ensure that our proposals can be enforced in practice; we consult the food industry on the costs of regulatory proposals; and we are developing our capacity to make our own assessments of the costs and benefits of our policies and decisions.

We have set ourselves challenging targets with measurable outcomes – reducing food-borne illness, improving the enforcement of food safety and standards and improving public confidence in the national food safety and standards arrangements.

Developing as an organisation:

- to implement our strategy effectively we need to develop our staff, our ways of working, and our supporting infrastructure

However, we are still a new organisation, and we know we are still learning. Therefore, we have also set ourselves targets for improving the way we work. As a first step, we are devising and implementing a human resources and organisational development strategy which will enable our staff to give of their best, in the interests of consumers.

The way we will do it:

- develop the skills of our staff to ensure that they are able give of their best
- benchmark our performance against the Investors in People standard
- establish diversity targets for our staffing, develop innovative ways to increase the diversity of our recruitment and take action to bring on talent within the Agency
- develop and implement an e-strategy to support innovative ways of working in line with Modernising Government
- improve the effectiveness and efficiency of our operations through Better Quality Service and other efficiency reviews
- complete and implement reviews of our arrangements for obtaining advice from scientific advisory committees and for commissioning and managing research



contact details

For more information about the work of the Food Standards Agency contact:

- **England**
Tel +44 20 72768000
Food Standards Agency
Aviation House 125 Kingsway
London WC2B 6NH
- **Northern Ireland**
Tel +44 28 9052 2675
Food Standards Agency (Northern Ireland)
10B and 10C Clarendon Quay
Clarendon Dock Clarendon Road
Belfast BT1 3BW
- **Scotland**
Tel +44 1224 285100
Food Standards Agency (Scotland)
St Magnus House
6th Floor 25 Guild Street
Aberdeen AB11 6NJ
- **Meat Hygiene Service**
Tel +44 1904 455501
Foss House, Kings Pool
1-2 Peasholme Green
York YO1 7PX
- **Wales**
Tel +44 29 2067 8999
Food Standards Agency (Wales)
Southgate House
1st Floor Wood Street
Cardiff CF10 1EW

You can e-mail us at helpline@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk
Our website is at <http://www.foodstandards.gov.uk>