

FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY

STRATEGIC PLAN 2005-2010

PUTTING CONSUMERS FIRST

Our purpose

We will protect consumers by improving the safety of food and by giving honest, clear information. We will make it easier for everyone to choose a healthy diet.

Our core values are:

- **to put the consumer first**
- **to be open and accessible**
- **to be an independent voice**

Our key aims for the next five years are:

Food safety:

- to continue to reduce foodborne illness
- to reduce further the risks to consumers from chemical contamination¹ of food

Eating for Health:

- to make it easier for all consumers to choose a healthy diet, and thereby improve quality of life by reducing diet-related disease

Choice:

- to enable consumers to make informed choices

We aim to continue to be the UK's most trusted provider of independent advice on food safety and standards, and to earn that trust by what we do and how we do it.

¹ including radiological contamination

Chairman's Foreword

Five years ago the Food Standards Agency was set up with the task of improving public confidence in food safety in the UK. In the wake of the food crises of the 1990s, we committed ourselves to acting only in the public interest and putting consumers first.

We believed that transparency was the key to restoring public confidence. From the outset we made all food policy decisions at Board meetings open to the public. Whenever we advised Ministers about food safety we made the advice public. We published the evidence on which our decisions were based. We jealously guarded our independence.

Five years on, food safety is no longer seen as one crisis after another. Our advice may, from time to time, be questioned but it isn't disbelieved.

Though public concern about food safety has gone down and public confidence in the FSA appears to have risen, we must never take either for granted. If something goes wrong we must be open about it, find out why it happened, and learn and share the lessons. We must remain vigilant and never lose our focus on food safety.

One of our early targets was to reduce food poisoning by an ambitious 20%. We are on track to achieve that. We have investigated 2800 incidents and acted to prevent them threatening food safety. We have reviewed BSE controls in public using expert scientific evidence and, in doing so, acknowledged the uncertainties that still surround the disease.

We have sought to be a trusted source of advice to consumers by providing information based on sound evidence. Whether it is the benefits of oily fish, how much coffee to drink while pregnant or how to make a healthy lunchbox, we help consumers make healthier choices every day.

As a public protection body we have to weigh up all food risks and diet is clearly a public health issue. It is estimated that poor diet contributes to more than 100,000 deaths a year from heart disease, stroke, and cancer.

Yet food plays a unique role in public health. It is largely about individual responsibility and personal choice. But that can be hard if the labelling is inadequate or there is a lack of information. It is not always easy to achieve a balanced diet because of what may be in processed or ready-made foods, and some people may need help to get the balance that is right for them. People on low incomes are more likely to suffer from diet-related disease and poverty limits choice. Children are vulnerable and we have a duty to work with parents, carers and institutions to improve the dietary health of young people.

The new targets outlined in this plan mark a significant development for the FSA. Diet and health are central to our aspirations and driven by public protection.

Many in the food industry have shown that they can respond positively in making a contribution that benefits public health. Recent changes, whether reducing salt in processed food, stopping super-sizing or the introduction of healthy eating ranges in

fast-food chains, indicate the strength of consumer demand in generating change that can improve their health. But there is much more to be done.

So we seek a balance between information, regulation and voluntary action across both the private and public sectors to secure change. We will always aim to seek a consensus but, when necessary and on the basis of evidence, we will act firmly in the public interest.

To make a difference we work in partnership across the UK. More than 200 groups, companies and individuals contributed to the development of this strategic plan. We considered all of those views carefully, including distinct contributions from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and they helped shape our priorities. This is the start of a process and we will continue working with our partners to develop the ideas and actions necessary to turn these plans into effect.

It is no simple challenge. But success will mean that many people who would otherwise die before their time will live longer lives, that we will improve the well-being for many more, and that with a healthier diet our children will get the best possible start in life we can give them.

JOHN KREBS

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CHAPTER 1

PUTTING CONSUMERS FIRST: THE STORY SO FAR

The Government set up the Food Standards Agency in April 2000 to ‘put an end to the climate of confusion and suspicion about the way that food safety and standards issues have been handled’ [1]. Our remit covers food² safety, nutrition (jointly with the UK health departments) and protecting the interests of consumers in relation to food. Our Executive Agency, the Meat Hygiene Service, operates in Great Britain. It publishes its own strategic plan³.

The Food Standards Agency is an independent Government department, governed by a Board appointed to act in the public interest and put consumers first. Our Board discusses and decides food policy in public. Our advice and information is published free of political influence.

From the beginning, we have committed to three core values:

- **to put the consumer first**
- **to be open and accessible**
- **to be an independent voice**

You can find out more about our core values in the appendix (‘About Us’).

We have:

based our policies on the best evidence available

increased public trust in the way the safety of food is protected [2] through:

- putting consumers first
- being honest about food risks and uncertainties
- involving stakeholders in policy making
- developing a distinctive culture that puts our core values into practice

strengthened the enforcement of food law: through our Executive Agency, the Meat Hygiene Service, in Great Britain; through the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in Northern Ireland; and in collaboration with local authorities across the UK

² including drink (except for piped drinking water)

³ available at www.food.gov.uk/enforcement/meathyg/mhservice/mhssp

We have protected consumers and their interests by:

- securing an 18% reduction in foodborne illness. We are on track to meet our target of a 20% reduction by 2006
- establishing the evidence linking salt and health and, in collaboration with UK health departments, encouraging food industry action to help reduce salt intake and raising consumer awareness of the evidence
- producing an action plan to set targets and timetables for improving the balance of children's diets and their health after securing and evaluating the evidence
- completing three major reviews of BSE controls to protect consumers by taking account of the latest knowledge and uncertainties
- dealing with over 2800 incidents⁴ with the potential to affect food safety, taking action where necessary to protect consumers

Through our offices in **Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland** we have protected consumers and their interests through action which reflects the circumstances in their countries. For example:

- The Eat Safe Award Scheme was launched by the Food Standards Agency Northern Ireland in June 2003. Businesses must achieve high standards of food hygiene to win an award.
- The Food Standards Agency Northern Ireland and Food Safety Promotion Board (FSPB) have jointly sponsored a "Decent Food for All" initiative organised by Armagh and Dungannon Health Action Zone. This initiative is committed to addressing food poverty issues.
- The Food Standards Agency Wales has set targets for improving the diet of Welsh people (*Food and Wellbeing*) and is overseeing an action plan to achieve them.
- The Food Standards Agency Wales and Welsh local authorities have launched the Welsh Food Hygiene Award.
- The Food Standards Agency Scotland is supporting national initiatives to reinforce key food hygiene messages.
- The Food Standards Agency Scotland is a partner in implementing the recommendations of the Scottish Executive's Scottish Diet Action Plan (www.scotland.gov.uk). We also provide factual information for the Scottish "healthyliving" campaign.

⁴ since April 2000

- providing authoritative information via campaigns, the media, and our award-winning website (www.food.gov.uk)
- delivering a significant improvement in local authority and port health authority enforcement of imported food controls
- exposing labelling frauds⁵ and establishing a task force to help local authorities tackle meat scams
- completing and publishing 236 audit reports of food law enforcement by local authorities throughout the UK

We have started to deliver real improvements for consumers, but we are still learning and there are some things we would do differently now:

- to begin with our assessment of local authorities' performance was not as comprehensive as it needed to be. We are now working with local authorities to develop and publish indicators that include their work in helping businesses improve their standards
- many small businesses found our first attempt at guidance on food safety management systems⁶, to help them comply with EU regulations, too complicated. We are now piloting a simpler toolbox approach, which reflects the needs of different sectors across the UK. This is attracting interest from other countries
- the National Audit Office said we needed to do more to learn from experience in handling food safety incidents. We now review all incidents, and major ones with stakeholders, to identify the lessons that need to be learned
- in response to Public Accounts Committee recommendations, we will improve our performance in providing feedback to our stakeholders on how their views have been taken into account in our policies and decision making

More than 90% of new food regulation is developed in the European Union. We have established good links with food agencies in other countries and with the European Commission. We are working with the new European Food Safety Authority. We are strengthening and developing these ties through closer working and joint projects.

⁵ through surveys to check whether food is as described on the label

⁶ based on HACCP principles. HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point) is a safety management system which involves identifying what steps in processes or procedures are most likely to go wrong and taking action to ensure that these are effectively controlled. For more information see www.food.gov.uk

CHAPTER 2

THE NEXT FIVE YEARS: RESPONDING TO A CHANGING WORLD

We need to respond to changes in the world around us:

- the trends towards using convenience foods and eating out:
 - mean it is even more important that consumers can get clear information about what is in their food
 - make it more difficult for people to control how much salt, fat, or sugar they eat
 - mean that effective hygiene controls in food production and catering are even more important
- obesity is rising amongst children and more children are developing type 2 diabetes
- emerging technologies for food production and processing may raise new safety concerns, challenges and opportunities
- other new technologies, such as extra information from bar code readers in shops or through internet shopping, could make it easier for people to choose the best diet for their particular needs

Meals and snacks eaten outside the home tend to be higher in fat (with around 40% of calories coming from fat)

Source: National Food Survey, 2000

It is clear that people are overeating in relation to their energy needs

Source: Select Committee on Health Third Report, May 2004

The growth of overweight and obesity in the population of this country – particularly amongst children – is a major concern

Source: Chief Medical Officer, Annual report 2002

Obesity in 6 to 15 year olds trebled (5% to 16%) in 11 years (1990-2001)

Source: Royal College of Physicians, 2004

The globalisation of food production and processing means that both the food industry and regulators must take an international approach to consumer protection.

Our new strategy

In our strategic plan, we set new targets for improvements in:

- food safety
- eating for health
- choice

Our first priority must continue to be **Food Safety** (Chapter 3) in which our Executive Agency, the Meat Hygiene Service, plays a key role.

But diet-related diseases cause far more illness and premature deaths. We will play our part by promoting **Eating for Health** (Chapter 4). Many of our stakeholders have said they want us to do more to help consumers to make healthy eating choices.

We want consumers to be able to choose a healthy diet, and to be able to do so without having to cook every meal from scratch. We want to make sure that the next generation has a better understanding of all aspects of food. With our partners in UK education departments we can help children to have a healthy diet and handle food safely by giving them the necessary skills and information.

We were set up to protect the interests of consumers. Consumers want accurate and reliable information so that they can make their own choices. **Choice** (Chapter 5) plays a vital role in our work on safety and standards and in helping people to eat safely and healthily.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of this strategic plan set out, for each priority area in turn:

- our key objectives
- what we aim to do
- challenging targets and milestones to help us:
 - meet our aims
 - help stakeholders assess our progress
 - identify where success depends on forging partnerships with other key players

We will review these targets, and our progress in meeting them, in 2007.

This document sets our general strategic direction and our priorities across the UK. However, through our offices in each of the devolved administrations, we are able to ensure that we deliver these priorities in ways that reflect local priorities, circumstances and administrative arrangements.

Chapter 6 ('How we will deliver') we describe the key principles underlying the way we will implement our plan. We set out how we will take sustainable development into account in all our activities and policy decisions. And we highlight the importance we attach to working in partnership with all our stakeholders to meet the targets. This plan sets out our priorities for the next five years. It does not attempt to describe everything we will do to support these priorities⁷. For example:

- we will continue to gather evidence by commissioning research, both on our own account⁸ and in collaboration with other funders

⁷ Information on the continuing programme of work can be found in the Food Standards Agency's annual Department Reports: <http://www.food.gov.uk/aboutus/publications/busreps/>

⁸ see for example, the most recent annual research report: <http://www.food.gov.uk/science/research/researchinfo/researchportfolio/researchannualreports/>

- we will ask our expert advisory committees to evaluate the evidence so that we can provide up-to-date and targeted advice⁹ for different groups of consumers
- we will continue to support Ministers in the four countries of the UK in dealing with Parliamentary and Assembly business in our areas of responsibility

Next steps

In developing this plan we consulted widely, both informally and through a formal 12 week consultation. Many of the responses to this consultation included suggestions about what we might do to achieve our targets, and strongly supported our intention to work in partnership with others. These comments will help us to produce action plans for delivering our strategic aims. We have developed these strategic aims with partners and stakeholders, and will continue to work closely with them as we develop these action plans. We cannot meet our targets without their help.

⁹ for example, advice on eating oily fish

CHAPTER 3

FOOD SAFETY

We want to:

- reduce foodborne illness further
- deliver proportionate BSE and TSE controls based on the latest scientific knowledge
- reduce the risks to consumers from chemical and radiological contamination
- help people with food allergies and intolerances to make the food choices they need to make

Foodborne illness

Foodborne disease costs the country around £1.5 billion a year [3]

At the peak of the BSE epidemic, there were over 37,000 new cases in cattle per year. In 2003, this had fallen to less than 600 cases, and is expected to fall further to under 400 cases in 2004. By the beginning of 2004, a total of 145 cases of vCJD – the human disease linked to BSE – had been reported so far. The final number is still not known

Contamination with micro-organisms

In our last strategic plan we set ourselves the tough target of reducing foodborne illness by 20% by 2006. We also said we would reduce salmonella contamination of UK-produced retail chicken by 50%. **By working closely with our stakeholders, we have achieved the second of these targets and are on track to meet the first.**

A key role in preventing foodborne illness is undertaken by the 468 local authorities and port health authorities in the UK. These are responsible for the day-to-day enforcement of most food safety and standards legislation

But we believe consumers have the right to expect more. All sectors of the food chain should play their part in preventing harmful micro-organisms from contaminating food. In particular:

- ***in primary food production***
 - we will work with agriculture departments to reduce contamination at source
- ***in food processing, distribution, and service***
 - working in partnership with local authorities, we will assist the catering industry to implement effective food safety management systems, based on HACCP principles
 - we will help those in the meat processing sector to establish risk-based controls for the safe production of meat
- ***for today's consumer preparing food at home***
 - we will promote awareness of the key steps everyone needs to take to ensure the safety of their food
- ***for tomorrow's consumer***
 - we will help children learn about food hygiene

We want to see further significant reductions in foodborne illness.

BSE and TSEs¹⁰

We have carried out three major reviews of BSE controls to ensure that these take account of developments in the understanding of BSE (and TSEs in other food animals) and of the development of new tests for TSEs.

We will:

- ensure that BSE controls in the food chain are based on the latest scientific knowledge
- protect consumers by implementing and enforcing proportionate and effective controls in relation to both UK-produced and imported meat

Our Executive Agency, the Meat Hygiene Service, helps to protect the public against foodborne illness through fair, consistent and effective enforcement of hygiene, inspection and welfare regulations in Great Britain.

In Northern Ireland, the equivalent functions are carried out on our behalf by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

¹⁰ 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. In 1996, a new variant of CJD (vCJD) was identified in people and the majority of experts agree that the most likely cause of vCJD is exposure to BSE

These targets and milestones will help ourselves and others to assess our progress:

Primary production

- we will work with industry to achieve a 50% reduction in the incidence of UK-produced chickens which test positive for *Campylobacter* by 2010. We will consult stakeholders in 2005 to help us set an appropriate baseline against which to measure progress. We will review the appropriateness of the 50% target in the light of that baseline
- we will work with industry to achieve a 50% reduction in the incidence of pigs which test positive for *Salmonella* at slaughter by 2010
- we will promote and aid the development of a sensitive, rapid live test for TSEs by 2010

Food processing, distribution, and service

- we will commission research to identify new measures of slaughterhouse hygiene by 2007, to enable plants to monitor and where necessary improve their performance. We will then use these measures to set targets to secure improvements by 2010
- we will develop tailored guidance on food safety management (based on HACCP principles) especially for small businesses. Guidance for the catering sector will start to be rolled out in 2005 following tests of the guidance in 2004
- we will evaluate hygiene award schemes¹¹ for caterers by 2006 and, if the results are positive, use them to help us promote the schemes more widely

Enforcement

- we will change the way we report on local authority enforcement activity by 2006 to recognise their important educational and advisory roles in helping local businesses to deliver higher standards of food safety, and work with local authorities to improve the accuracy, timeliness and relevance of local authority performance data

Promoting safe handling of food in the home

- by 2005 we will develop and publish a strategy for improving awareness and application of the **four Cs** (cleaning, cooking, cooling and avoiding cross-contamination) concentrating particularly on work with schools and support for local food safety initiatives

More comprehensive measures of the impact of our action

- by 2006 we will develop our current indicators to provide a reliable measure of the effectiveness of our foodborne illness strategy in cost-benefit terms, taking account of disease incidence and severity

¹¹ different approaches have been tried out by the FSA in Wales and Northern Ireland and by some local authorities in other parts of the UK

Food chemical contaminants

Since April 2000, we have:

- dealt with over 2800 incidents¹² that had the potential to affect food safety
- through our comprehensive surveillance programme, identified food contamination incidents and taken action to deal with them [4], for example:
 - 3-MCPD in soy sauce
 - illegal veterinary medicines in animal products from China and other Far Eastern countries
 - mycotoxins in nuts

Chemical (including radiological) contaminants get into food in many ways – some are present naturally, others as a result of human activity. The challenge for all those involved in food production and its control is to work together to make sure that contaminants do not threaten people's health.

Too many food contamination incidents arise because sections of the agriculture and food industries¹³ do not pay enough attention to vulnerable stages of their operation, especially the quality of their raw materials. All parts of the food chain have a responsibility to ensure that the feed and food they sell (whether UK-produced or imported) is free from illegal or unsafe levels of contaminants.

To help raise standards we will:

- work to reduce contamination throughout the food chain, starting with primary production, and identify and encourage best practice to reduce food risks in a proportionate way
- increase collaboration with local authorities on surveys to check for food and feed contamination, backed up by enforcement action where necessary
- prioritise those contaminants on which to work within the EU for new or tighter controls
- improve working partnerships with Government agencies including the Health Protection Agency, the Environment Agency and equivalent organisations in the devolved administrations to ensure prompt action over food safety incidents and to enhance our capacity to deal with malicious contamination of food

¹² chemical, radiological and microbiological

¹³ both companies and individuals

These targets and milestones will help ourselves and others to assess our progress:

- we will work with the food industry and local authorities to achieve more comprehensive reporting of incidents and establish an agreed system for classifying their severity by the end of 2005
- we will establish for 2006 a baseline measure of the number of incidents of each type
- we will work with industry to reduce the number of high and medium risk cases by 25% by 2010

Allergy

Up to 2 people in every 100 in the UK have a diagnosed food allergy [5], and an additional 1 person in 100 has an intolerance to gluten, a protein found in cereals such as wheat [6]. This is equal to a total of 1.5 million people. About 10 deaths a year due to food allergy are reported

Repeated reactions are still seen in about 50% of those with a diagnosed food allergy, despite their efforts to avoid the foods to which they react [7]

The Agency has two aims with its work on allergy: to ensure that people have the right information to ensure their safety and to prevent their choices from being restricted unnecessarily.

This target will help ourselves and others to assess our progress:

- we will develop by 2006 guidance on appropriate and proportionate use of label statements to warn allergic consumers of the risk of contamination with nuts or sesame seeds. In doing this, we will build on existing guidance, and will ensure that the guidance is also relevant to other allergens

CHAPTER 4

EATING FOR HEALTH

We want to:

- encourage consumers to choose a healthy diet
- make healthy eating an easier option
- help to reduce diet-related diseases

Diet affects consumer health in many ways, for example:

- Too much salt is associated with increased blood pressure [8]
- People with high blood pressure are three times more likely to develop heart disease and stroke and twice as likely to die from these diseases than those with normal levels [9]
- About a third of all deaths from coronary heart disease (over 120,000 in total [10]) are attributable to diet [11]
- In January 2004, representatives of EU national food agencies said:

“All European countries are facing similar health problems related to nutrition, among which the increasing prevalence of obesity, especially in children, is of particular concern.”

- If current trends continue, by 2020 at least one-third of adults, one-fifth of boys and one-third of girls will be obese [12]
- More children are being found to have Type 2 diabetes [12]
- Obesity costs the economy at least £2.5 billion a year [13]
- Diet is thought to play a role in about one-third of all deaths from cancer [14]. More than 158,000 people in the UK died from cancer in 2001 [10]

The incidence of diet-related disease is affected by the choices people are able to make, and by the choices they actually make. Diet, lifestyle, and exercise can each have an impact.

I remain optimistic that Scotland can achieve improvements in health status. We can reduce the incidence of cancer and we can reduce the levels of obesity but only if people make choices that promote their own health.

Source: Chief Medical Officer for Scotland

The Food Standards Agency shares responsibility for nutrition with health departments, but we have a distinct role in ensuring that people have the information they need to make choices and in helping them to decide what changes they need to make to their diet and to put these into practice. We cannot achieve this on our own; we will need to work in partnership with others, including health, education and other relevant Government departments, local authorities, schools, the NHS, and the food industry. To enable us to monitor progress, we will continue to work with health departments and others to collect appropriate information on people's diet and nutrition.

We are already working with our partners to help deliver national nutrition action plans in the different countries of the UK - the Food and Health Action Plan in England, the Welsh Nutrition Strategy 'Food and Wellbeing', the Diet and Nutrition Strategy for Scotland and the Food and Nutrition Action Plan for Northern Ireland which is currently being developed.

We have developed teaching materials for schools. We have sponsored the FSA Cooking Bus to help schools teach children about healthy eating and food hygiene, and given priority to schools in areas of high deprivation. We have started work with education departments across the UK to improve the food children eat while they are at school.

We have secured new evidence showing the importance of reducing salt consumption, and are working with health departments and the food industry to make it easier for consumers to do this.

In the next 5 years we will help to:

- make it easier for consumers to choose a healthy diet
- encourage consumer demand for healthier options through national campaigns and promotion of best practice at the local level
- encourage the public sector to provide healthy food in schools, hospitals and other institutions
- influence the eating habits of the next generation:
 - by encouraging others to strengthen the 'healthy eating' part of the curriculum and to improve what children eat at school
 - by securing changes to the way food is promoted to children

- by contributing to the work of health departments on the nutrition of very young children

We want to make healthy eating choices easier for all. As part of our strategy, we will listen to vulnerable and 'hard to hear' consumers. We will use evidence from our Low Income Diet and Nutrition Survey, our recent consultation on low income issues and information from the Food Vision database¹⁴ of local initiatives on healthy eating to help us to identify priorities for helping disadvantaged and vulnerable people to improve their diets.

These more detailed targets and milestones will help ourselves and others to assess progress:

Targets for changing people's diet

- we will work with health departments and other stakeholders to reduce the average salt intake of UK adults from the current 9.5g to 6g per day by 2010, and to reduce salt intake of children in line with Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition age-specific recommendations, also by 2010. We will monitor progress to ensure that we remain on course to achieve the target
- we will work with health departments and other stakeholders to reduce the average intake of saturated fat (for everyone from age 5 upwards) from the current level of 13.4% to below 11% of food energy by 2010 [15]
- by 2006 we will develop, in collaboration with health departments, targets for achieving a balance between Calorie intake and energy output
- we will seek expert advice on the health implications of low micronutrient intakes in some population groups. We will look again at our priorities in 2007 if this evidence suggests we need to take action

Helping consumers make healthier choices by influencing supply

- by 2006 we will establish targets for the salt content of the 10 food categories contributing most salt to the diet
- by 2005 we will implement survey programmes to track the key nutritional components of meals in major institutions, including schools. We will work with other Government departments to set targets to improve the nutritional quality of such meals in line with the UK national targets for Calorie, fat, salt, and sugar intakes

[Continued on next page]

¹⁴ developed as a partnership between the FSA, the Local Government Association and the Local Authority Co-ordinators of Regulatory Services

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Helping consumers make healthier choices by improving information and understanding and by encouraging them to take action

- by 2005 we will have set up a programme of surveys of the Calorie, salt, fat, and/or sugar content of foods and will publish the results to help consumers make informed choices about what they eat
- by 2006 we will develop and promote a simple system for highlighting the salt, fat and sugar content of foods as part of a strategy for reducing intakes of salt, sugar and fat
- by 2005 we will review existing evidence on influences on food choices to identify which are practical and effective and to see where there are gaps in our current knowledge
- we will work with local authorities to develop the Food Vision database of local initiatives on healthy eating to encourage and spread good practice. We will give priority to initiatives which help disadvantaged and vulnerable people

Influencing the next generation

- we will encourage all schools that have not already done so to adopt a ‘whole school’ approach to diet and nutrition
- we will work with the industry to achieve changes in the way food is promoted to children to redress the imbalance between less healthy foods and healthier alternatives

CHAPTER 5

CHOICE

We want to:

- make it easier for consumers to make informed choices

Since 2000, we have helped to secure improved allergen labelling rules within the EU and identified improved nutrition labelling formats. We have also issued advice on a number of topics, including, clear labelling, country of origin and assurance schemes; and the use of potentially misleading terms such as fresh and traditional.

Consumers need information to make choices. In the future, developing technologies will widen the range of ways that information can be delivered. Different consumers want different types of information and may want to avoid certain foods for religious, ethical or cultural reasons. It is our role to ensure that the right information is provided, that it is accurate, and that it does not mislead.

We will protect the interests of consumers by:

- promoting best practice in the provision of information
- ensuring that the regulation of food supplements and health claims is based on evidence and is proportionate
- protecting against food fraud

These targets and milestones will help ourselves and others to assess our progress:

Promoting best practice in providing information to consumers

- we will set targets for improvements in consumer understanding of 'use by' information and agree a delivery plan by 2007
- we will monitor the uptake of the advice we issued in 2002 on clear labelling, origin declarations, and the use of terms like "fresh". We will review in 2006 the effectiveness of the impact of this advice
- we will assess how the new GM labelling regulations implemented in April 2004 work in practice for consumers and use this information to inform the European Commission's review of the regulations in 2006
- we will review in 2006 how far assurance schemes have adopted our guidance. By 2008, we will publish a compendium of information about assurance schemes so that consumers can compare the standards they deliver
- we will work with others to develop, by 2005, guidance on the minimisation of pesticide residues in food. By 2006, we will assess the consumer demand for specific rules on labelling of pesticides use on crops after they have been harvested

Ensuring that regulations are proportionate and evidence-based

- we will press for a proportionate, safety-based approach to the European regulation of food supplements

Protecting consumers from food fraud and illegal practices

- we will develop an Agency food fraud database by 2005 to assess and monitor reported food fraud
- in the light of evidence of trends in food fraud and other major local authority food law investigation work, we will review in 2007 the cost-effectiveness of our current approach, including take-up of the 'fighting fund' to support local authority fraud investigations and the work of the Illegal Meat Task force, and change our approach if necessary
- we will establish in 2005 a risk-based approach for the Meat Hygiene Service and Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in Northern Ireland to police animal by-product controls
- we will improve controls and support enforcement officers dealing with illegal imports. In particular we will, by 2006, secure increases over 2003 baselines for sampling checks (+25%) and checks at ports on non-animal food products (+50%). We will then set targets for further improvements

CHAPTER 6

HOW WE WILL DELIVER

Partnership

In the chapters on Food Safety, Eating for Health and Choice, we have shown the targets we will achieve in the next five years. There are few we can deliver by ourselves and we recognise that success will depend on strengthening our links with those who will be key to securing the outcomes we have set out to achieve.

Working with consumer interests and the voluntary sector

We will continue to work in partnership with the main consumer organisations across the UK, and to develop our links with wider public interest groups. We will continue our work with community food initiatives, for example through the Agency's *Dame Sheila McKecknie award* for community food projects.

The Agency's campaign to raise public awareness of the dangers of consuming too much salt, launched in September 2004, received unprecedented support from a wide range of stakeholders. These included: public health charities such as the British Heart Foundation, the Stroke Association, the Blood Pressure Association and the National Heart Forum; professional bodies such as the Royal College of Physicians and the British Dietetic Association; and from consumer organisations including the National Consumer Council, "Which" (formerly the Consumers' Association) and the National Federation of Women's Institutes; as well as from a wide range of trade associations and other industry groups. This support reflected a shared view that significant salt reductions across the population would be best achieved through co-operative effort involving all the key players. We will continue to build and develop these relationships to support our future work to reduce salt consumption, and seek to extend this approach to other areas of our work.

Working with industry

Our work with the industry on developing guidelines for product recalls and withdrawals has shown the effectiveness of joint working to improve food safety and to reduce the number of food safety incidents. But the number of such incidents remains far too high, so we need to build on this successful partnership working to secure further improvements¹⁵.

We have been working closely with industry and local authority partners on helping UK food business prepare for new EU food hygiene legislation from January 2006. Our strategy has been agreed at UK level, and taken forward in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in the context of local circumstances and the resources available. For example, building on the practical experiences of businesses and

¹⁵ see targets in Chapter 3 ('Food Safety')

local authorities in those countries we are piloting a number of different toolkits across the UK. In England we are testing out *Safer Food, Better Business*, in Scotland the *CookSafe Food Safety Assurance System* and in Northern Ireland the *Safe Catering* guidance. In addition in Wales we have joint funded the development of individual Local Authority guidance materials. Based on the outcomes of the pilots, and taking account of the needs and circumstances of each country, we will decide which approach, or combination of approaches, to roll out more widely.

Working with partners in government and the wider public sector

The FSA and health departments across the UK share the common goal of enabling people to make healthy choices, and we are working closely together to achieve this. For example, in England, the government's *Choosing Health* White Paper highlights the need for clear information that people trust, and the importance of developing partnerships with industry to promote health. Our target to develop a system for highlighting the salt, fat and sugar content of foods, and our work with the industry to reduce the levels of salt, fat and sugar in processed foods, are very much focussed on achieving these outcomes.

We will continue to collaborate with other departments and public bodies to achieve shared objectives, for example:

- we are working with agriculture departments across the UK to develop a proportionate and practical way to implement new primary production legislation on farms
- we work closely with the Health Protection Agency and with the environment agencies, eg on handling food safety incidents
- to achieve our food hygiene and healthy eating targets we will need the help of those in the education sector across the UK. For example, in Northern Ireland we are working with the Department for Education on piloting nutritional standards across schools, and with the Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment on the diet and nutrition component of new Key Stage 3 curriculum proposals. In England we have already contributed to the Department for Education and Skills' "Healthy Living Blueprint for Schools", we will continue to work with them to improve access to healthy food options for children and young adults

The FSA Cooking Bus, a partnership venture with the campaign Focus on Food, gets across healthy eating and food safety messages to school children in an engaging way. During term time the bus works with schools, and in holiday periods it has joined up with community led local events, including for example, local SureStart initiatives, school holiday play schemes, and a 'Fat Camp'. Schools in socially deprived areas are given first consideration.

Working together on Enforcement¹⁶

We have worked closely in our first four years with local authorities and their representative and professional bodies to develop a shared agenda. We have strengthened and developed links with local authority food law practitioners through our government and local authority Enforcement Liaison Group. For example we jointly developed the Framework Agreement on local authority food law enforcement. More recently we have launched a new Code of Practice; this moves away from linking inspection frequency simply to the types of food being handled, and gives more weight to how effectively food businesses are managing risks. The Code also gives local authorities the flexibility to develop alternative measures to inspection for very low risk food premises.

We will also continue to work closely with Customs and Excise, the four UK agriculture departments and local and port health authorities across the UK to ensure that imported food controls are in place at borders and inland.

Working locally

We will help to tackle food safety, dietary health and food poverty issues effectively by developing better partnerships with those working both at the national level within the devolved countries, and at regional and local level across the UK. We will do this by:

- working with local enforcement authorities, and their representative bodies, on public health and education matters

- contributing to food and health strategies and action plans at the regional or local level. In the English Regions, for example, we will pilot staff secondments or exchanges, and participation in steering groups for regional food and health action plans. In Wales, we will continue to work with relevant public health networks such as local health boards

In the next five years we will:

- monitor and review the Framework Agreement on local authority Food Law Enforcement
- develop and implement our communications strategy, building on the new enforcement portal on the Agency website
- provide low cost training for local authority enforcement officers
- support local authorities dealing with major food fraud investigations
- review the effectiveness of the food alerts system
- publish good practice acquired from Agency audits of local authorities and findings from our enforcement research programme
- provide guidance and technical advice on enforcement issues
- develop ways to measure the outcomes of food law enforcement work and improve timeliness and relevance of local authority performance data
- publish information on enforcement performance to inform consumers and encourage better local authority performance
- support local authorities in raising standards in food safety management systems and work with industry on developing guidelines to the new hygiene regulations
- play our part in wider initiatives to streamline enforcement and inspection regimes whilst maintaining excellent public protection outcomes

¹⁶ see Appendix ('About Us') for meat hygiene enforcement

- working with other public bodies in the devolved administrations such as the Welsh Development Agency, Invest NI, and Enterprise organisations in Scotland
- working with consumer organisations who operate at a local level such as the National Federation of Women's Institutes
- working directly with local communities on activities such as the *Award for Food Action Locally* scheme in Wales that aims to promote positive action on diet and healthy eating at community level

Sustainability

The FSA and Sustainable Development

“The Food Standards Agency’s remit is to protect the interests of consumers in relation to food, both now and in the future. In doing so the Agency will take sustainable development into account in all of its activities and policy decisions.”

We will contribute to the Government wide policy by taking sustainable development into account in all of our activities, including in the full range of our policy and decision making, and in advising consumers.

Our work to embed sustainable development will be on two fronts:

- running our business sustainably
- taking forward our remit in a sustainable manner

In doing so we will take into account the four pillars of sustainable development:

- environmental protection
- social progress
- prudent use of natural resources
- economic growth and employment

Our prime concern will remain to protect the interests of consumers in relation to food. In doing so we will take account of sustainability considerations in ensuring that our decisions are both proportionate and appropriately precautionary.

The Government’s Guiding Principles

When considering our actions we will also continue to contribute to furthering the Government’s 10 guiding principles relevant to sustainable development, to which we already make significant contributions where they are relevant to our functions (see the box).

Sustainable Development	
Government’s 10 Guiding Principles	FSA Policy
Putting people at the centre	Our No.1 core value is to put consumers first
Taking a long term perspective	In assessing the sustainability of our policies, decisions and advice we will seek

	to take a long term view
Taking account of costs and benefits	We manage food risks proportionately by balancing risks and benefits
Combating poverty and social exclusion	We give priority to initiatives which help disadvantaged and vulnerable consumers
The precautionary principle	We adopt a precautionary approach through action to protect and inform consumers
Using scientific knowledge	We take an impartial view based on the best available scientific evidence and advice
Transparency, information, participation and access to justice	We listen and develop our food policies openly and transparently; are honest with consumers and do our best to explain our decisions and advice in clear non-technical language
Creating an open and supportive economic system	We aim to be an effective regulator and act proportionately
Respecting environmental limits	By embedding sustainable development we will assess the environmental and resource implications of the way we do things and our policies
Making the polluter pay	We will liaise with appropriate regulators when this is an issue

These targets and milestones will help ourselves and others assess our progress:

Estates management

- we will implement an Environmental Management System based on ISO 14001 by 2006

The Agency as an employer

- there will be a mid-term external Investors in People assessment in late 2005
- an external benchmarking of our Human Resources Strategy will be completed by May 2005

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Policy development, decision making and advice

- we will complete a public consultation on the proposed mechanism to assess the sustainability implications of policy and other proposals by February 2005
- we will pilot the assessment mechanism by Autumn 2005
- we will begin to roll out the mechanism within the Agency by December 2005
- we will review progress in Spring 2006

Across Europe and internationally

Working with other countries and with international organisations

Today, UK consumers can choose from food that comes from around the globe. And food within the European Union can be traded freely, without barriers. This means we have to work with food authorities and agencies world-wide to ensure the safety of the food supply.

The Agency advises Ministers on EU legislative proposals and its staff negotiate food regulation on behalf of the UK, both in the EU and internationally. We aim to contribute to the development of EU policies at the earliest possible stage, including issues of eating for health. This involves maintaining effective working relations with the European Commission, the European Parliament and other Member States as well as stakeholders. The UK will assume the Presidency of the EU in the second half of 2005, during which time we will take forward the Council's work programme on food law issues, particularly those relating to nutritional information.

The EU now has its own body to provide scientific advice and information on food and animal feed safety - the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), which was established in 2002. We are developing close links with EFSA and take part in the safety assessments it carries out.

We have already started to build links with other European food agencies through initiating and hosting in 2003 the first of regular meetings between the Heads of these bodies. We will take action to ensure that we receive early warnings when EFSA or other agencies discover potential food safety problems.

We also aim to influence the standards set for food traded globally through the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission¹⁷, especially by ensuring that we contribute fully to the development of the EU input to Codex negotiations. And we will continue to press for better consumer involvement in the development of standards.

We will also continue to develop our links to food authorities outside the EU – including those in the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Working to check imported foods

- In 2004/05 we are funding 59 projects involving more than 140 local authorities to check imported foods

During 2003/04, we took the lead in a project to work with other Government departments to secure a step change in the co-ordination and delivery of local authority inspection and enforcement of controls of imported foodstuffs and animal

¹⁷ the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) is an intergovernmental body jointly sponsored by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO)

products. We will continue to work with partners across the UK to ensure that individuals do not bring illegal food imports into the country.

Our core values

In delivering the outcomes in this new strategic plan we will aim to:

- **be true to our core values**
- **work in an integrated way across the UK, ensuring a consistent approach which is flexible enough to take account of local differences**
- **develop our evidence base so that it takes account of the best available science**
- **follow better regulation principles**
- **demonstrate our commitment to developing our staff and the way we work through good management practices which meet 'Investors in People' principles**

Our core values

We will put the consumer first; be open and accessible; and be an independent voice. We form an independent view, taking into account the arguments and evidence from all our stakeholders, reaching our decisions openly and explaining them clearly to all those who are affected, particularly those who disagree.

We will develop our dialogue with consumers and their representatives and will continue to involve them in policy making. In particular we will continue to seek out the views of 'hard to hear' groups.

Working effectively across the UK

As a UK body, we advise and work with the devolved administrations as well as the Whitehall departments. Our Advisory Committees for Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland help us to develop policies and strategies that meet the particular interests and needs of those populations within an overall UK framework. This document sets our general strategic direction and our priorities across the UK. Through our offices in each of the devolved administrations, we are able to ensure that we deliver these priorities in ways that reflect local priorities, circumstances and administrative arrangements. In Northern Ireland, FSANI works with the Food Safety Promotion Board and the Food Safety Authority of Ireland on food issues that have an all-Ireland dimension, such as foodborne illness.

The Agency has developed a Race Equality Scheme¹⁸ which demonstrates our commitment to underpinning our policy making with the promotion of race equality.

¹⁸ as required under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000

Developing our evidence base

We base our policies on the best available evidence and we make clear what this is.

We have a substantial portfolio of research and surveys. We will develop this to make sure that it continues to help us to deliver our policies. We will also work closely with other research funders (such as Government departments, research councils and the EU) to ensure a cohesive and targeted approach to securing our evidence base.

We seek advice from experts world-wide, particularly through our network of scientific advisory committees. We use consumer research expertise and will improve our access to expertise in the social, economic and behavioural sciences to support delivery of our aims. We will develop our engagement of stakeholders in discussions of food risks. We are developing a horizon-scanning capability and will work with partners to learn from their expertise and knowledge.

Better Regulation

The function of the Food Standards Agency is to protect public health. We do this by providing information and advice for consumers, by advising Government on food safety and standards, through regulation and (through the Meat Hygiene Service and local authorities) inspection and enforcement. We seek to follow the five principles of better regulation: proportionality, accountability, consistency, transparency and targeting. We will consider alternatives to regulation, where the constraints of EU law allow this. Stakeholders should be able to understand how the various pieces of available evidence and information have been used by the Agency in making judgements about when to apply direct regulation and when to pursue alternative approaches. We will seek to ensure our actions:

- are proportionate, risk-based and outcome focussed
- drive improvement and reward good performance, whilst seeking firm action against those who persistently fail to meet acceptable standards
- are practical and deliverable

We will improve the range and detail of our work to gauge the potential impact of new regulations, taking into account the different requirements in the four countries of the UK. We will assess the impact of non-regulatory approaches to enable better understanding of potential costs and benefits.

We will in future distinguish more clearly between best practice guidance and implementation of regulation.

We will ensure that we understand the views of our stakeholders by consulting them regularly¹⁹. We will seek more active consumer involvement in our policy

¹⁹ both formally and informally, including through the FSA stakeholder fora. Three Stakeholder Fora were established in 2003 to enable the main consumer organisations and pressure groups, the industry, and enforcement authorities to raise matters of broad concern on an informal basis

development. We will provide feedback to stakeholders on how their views have been taken into account in developing policies.

Developing our staff and the way we work

When the FSA was set up, our first priority was to build public confidence by showing that we were making a fresh start. Putting our core values into practice meant new, more open ways of working. That will not change. But our new plan means a shift of emphasis in our work, with a stronger focus on delivering outcomes. We want to develop more flexible ways of working to make the best use of our staff's skills and enthusiasm, encourage their creativity, and recognise and reward their contribution. We aim to promote and support diversity both in our policies and within our organisation. We want to continue to attract people with the right skills who are committed to helping the FSA deliver outcomes to protect consumers. We achieved Investors in People (IiP) accreditation in April 2004. We will continue to work within the principles and values of IiP. In particular, we will develop our staff so that the whole organisation can rise to the challenge set by our new strategy.

APPENDIX

ABOUT US

Who we are

The FSA is a non-Ministerial Government department, operating at arm's length from Ministers, and governed by a Board appointed to act in the public interest. This independence is crucial if we are to succeed in putting the consumer first. We are a UK-wide body, accountable to the Westminster Parliament and to the devolved administrations through the relevant Health Ministers.

The Board consists of a Chairman, Deputy Chair and up to 12 other members. Of other current Board members, eight were appointed by the Secretary of State for Health, two by Scottish Ministers, and one each by the National Assembly for Wales and Department of Health, Social Security and Public Safety in Northern Ireland. The Board is subject to public scrutiny through its open meetings.

The day-to-day operations of the FSA are managed by the Chief Executive. The FSA's staff are civil servants, accountable through the Chief Executive to the Board. Food safety and standards are devolved matters. The FSA has offices in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, each accountable to the FSA's Chief Executive.

- FSA Northern Ireland provides advice and draft legislation on issues across the food chain to the Northern Ireland Assembly Minister with responsibility for Health, Social Services and Public Safety. The statutory Northern Ireland Advisory Committee, chaired by the FSA Board member for Northern Ireland, provides independent advice on food issues in Northern Ireland. FSANI liaises closely with the Food Safety Promotion Board and the Food Safety Authority of Ireland on issues having an all-Ireland dimension.
- In Scotland, the FSA provides advice on proposed legislation to the Scottish Parliament through the Minister for Health and Community Care. The Scottish Food Advisory Committee, chaired by one of the two FSA Board members for Scotland, provides independent advice on food safety and standards issues in Scotland.
- FSA Wales advises the National Assembly for Wales through the Assembly Minister for Health and Social Services on food safety and standards policy and legislation. The statutory Welsh Food Advisory Committee (formerly Advisory Committee for Wales), chaired by the FSA Board member for Wales, provides independent advice on all food safety and standards issues in Wales.

Our purpose and values

Putting the consumer first means:

- Making food safety our first priority
- Ensuring that people have information and opportunities to make choices about food
- Enabling people to understand risks and benefits

We aim to take action that is proportionate to risk, basing our decisions on sound evidence. We recognise that there is no such thing as zero risk, rather we aim to reduce risk to a level acceptable to the ordinary consumer, whilst taking risks to vulnerable groups into account.

Where there is scientific uncertainty but there is a risk of serious damage to public health, we adopt a precautionary approach by acting to reduce risks to health. We do not allow the absence of certainty to delay proportionate action.

Openness means:

- Seeking people's views and being accessible
- Making our policy discussions public
- Explaining the reasons for our decisions and advice
- Communicating in a straightforward and timely way
- Publishing our targets

We are honest with consumers, and do our best to explain our decisions in a clear way and to communicate risk and uncertainty in non-technical language. We seek to identify the best media through which to deliver our messages, remembering people who do not have access to the internet and those for whom English is not their first language. We will continue to look for ways to improve openness and transparency.

An independent voice means:

- Being impartial and honest
- Basing our decisions on the best expert advice
- Gaining international respect for UK food safety and nutritional standards
- Publishing our advice

We are an independent voice within Government, able to give advice and publish it without asking politicians first. So that you can always be sure that you know what

we are saying to the Government of the day, we publish the advice we give to Ministers about action needed to protect public health.

Our role in food law enforcement

We work through our Executive Agency, the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) in York (and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) in Northern Ireland), and with local authorities and port health authorities, to ensure the proportionate and effective enforcement of food law. We work with local authorities and port health authorities to ensure high standards of food and feed law enforcement.

Our Executive Agency, the MHS helps us to protect the public against foodborne illness through fair, consistent and effective enforcement of hygiene, inspection and welfare regulations in Great Britain. Its principal functions are:

- the enforcement of meat hygiene legislation in licensed fresh meat premises
- the provision of meat inspection and controls on health marking in licensed red meat, poultry meat and wild game meat premises
- the enforcement of hygiene controls in meat products, minced meat and meat preparation plants, that are co-located with licensed slaughter houses
- the enforcement, in licensed fresh meat premises, of controls over Specified Risk Material and other animal by-products, and controls prohibiting the sale of meat from cattle over 30 months age
- The enforcement of animal welfare at slaughter rules in licensed slaughter houses

More information on the MHS can be found on our website – www.food.gov.uk

In Northern Ireland, the equivalent functions are carried out by DARD on behalf of the FSA

We audit individual local authorities and port health authorities against the provisions of the Framework Agreement on Local Authority Food Law Enforcement and Codes of Practice made under the Food Safety Act.

Find out more about us and our work

For information on the Food Standards Agency's policies and activities, visit our website at www.food.gov.uk

For a monthly update on what we have been doing, receive *FSA News*. To be added to the mailing list call 020 7276 8829.

Publications can be obtained from our website or from Food Standards Agency Publications.

To order copies:

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Information about the way we work

- Food Standards Agency. Statement of General Objectives and Practices. October 2000
- Code of Practice on Openness
- Code of Conduct (for Board Members)
- Standards of Service
- Food Standards Agency. Approach to Risk. May 2001

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