



Food Standards Agency

Annual Report 2007/08

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safe food and healthy eating for all...



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Chair's foreword

We are pleased to lay the Food Standards Agency (FSA) Annual Report for 2007/08 before the Westminster Parliament, the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly. The report outlines what we have done during the year to protect public health and consumers' interests in relation to food.

Our eighth UK-wide Consumer Attitudes to Food Survey (2007) shows that the number of consumers describing themselves as confident about our role in protecting health with regard to our top priority – food safety – remains at a high of 65%, increasing from 50% in 2000. Trust in us also remains high at 60% (61% in 2006), an overall increase of 16 points over six years.

This report demonstrates how the Agency continues to respond in a timely, decisive and proportionate manner to protect public health. While driving forward initiatives that improve food safety and make healthier eating easier for all, we remain alert to the need to balance public protection and consumers' other food-related interests with the conditions that allow businesses to innovate, compete and flourish.

Alongside these continuing challenges there are four distinct, yet related trends which will continue to influence demands on the Agency: the growing awareness of the contribution of poor diet to disease and ill health; the implications for food safety in an increasingly global food chain; the implications of unprecedented rises in commodity prices; and the implications for the planet of not managing food in a more sustainable way.

Our judgements will continue to be based on evidence that is rigorous, transparent and independent because we believe our success lies in continuing to use the best available scientific evidence and advice when working with the many valued organisations that show an active interest in food issues. We will continue to work actively with EU countries and institutions as critical partners in the development of food regulation.

We are very grateful to John Harwood who joined the Agency in March 2006, initially as interim Chief Executive but then remaining in the post for two years. We would pay tribute to his leadership during a critical period of change which has laid the groundwork for the Agency's future development. We are now delighted that Tim Smith, who brings valuable and broad ranging experience from the food industry, has joined the Agency as its new Chief Executive.

We are also grateful for the continuing support of the many organisations that work in partnership with us and take an active interest in food issues.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Deirdre Hutton', with a large, stylized initial 'D'.

Dame Deirdre Hutton CBE
Chair

Chief Executive's report

This is the first time I have made a contribution to the Annual Report and I am delighted to be able to do so but I should also acknowledge that in looking back I am reflecting on the work of my predecessor and his team.

Food safety

In the past 12 months, a range of food hygiene initiatives has underpinned our work to improve food safety. This includes 'Safer food, better business' (SFBB), an innovative risk-based food safety management package to help catering and retail businesses provide safer food. Evaluation of this programme, and similar programmes in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, is very positive. To help take-up among managers and staff in catering across a range of businesses, including those where English is not the first language, we launched an accompanying DVD in 16 languages.

We issued new guidance on managing outbreaks of foodborne illness to provide a clear framework for the investigation and control of infectious intestinal disease caused by eating microbiologically-contaminated food.

Each year across the UK about 500 people die from food poisoning and an estimated further 850,000 become ill, some very seriously. Besides this human cost, the cost to the economy is estimated at £1.5 billion.

As food poisoning tends to rise in the summer months, we sponsored Food Safety Week for the first time in June 2007. We are continuing this in 2008 with a new campaign – GermWatch – to give advice on how consumers can protect themselves from foodborne illness in the home. This campaign was put together in partnership with the food industry, local authorities, health promotion teams, community groups and schools.

We published guidance for businesses and enforcement authorities on preventing and responding better to food incidents. During the year we handled 1,390 investigations into incidents and improved our handling of incident information by launching a new online incident reporting system.

The Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) continues to work on our behalf to ensure that the meat hygiene regulations are enforced to safeguard consumers. The MHS has made considerable progress in becoming more efficient and this will be important, as over time we will be looking to the industry to absorb a greater part of the costs of these regulations.

Eating for health and making informed choices

The key to making healthy eating easier is to ensure that consumers have the opportunity to make informed choices about what they eat. For that, people need both clear, meaningful information about food, and the ready availability of healthier options from which to choose. Progress has been made in both these areas over the past year.

In September 2007, we launched the 'eatwell plate', a diagram of a healthy plate of food, illustrating the types and proportions of foods that make up a balanced diet. It gives clear information about what food groups people should try to eat more of, and those people should try to eat less of.

Our recommended traffic-light colour-coding of key nutrients on the front of food packets continues to help people even more with their food choices. Support for the system grew during the year – a further 16 retailers, manufacturers and service providers are using it, plus the first restaurant chain. Other forms of front-of-pack labelling are being used by other retailers and manufacturers. Independent research, to be completed by the end of 2008, will establish which approach or elements best help consumers.

With traffic-light labelling, consumers can see, at a glance, the levels of salt, fat, saturated fat and sugar in thousands of processed foods. This encourages them to look for and demand healthier food and gives an incentive to businesses to produce that food. This complements our work to reduce salt and saturated fats in UK diets to protect public health and help tackle obesity.

Since the Agency was set up, it has taken the lead in making food safety regulation more risk-based, with science a fundamental part of that assessment. Last September we published research from Southampton University that we had commissioned to assess the risks to children of artificial colours in food and drink. The results showed that certain mixtures of artificial colours, together with sodium benzoate, are associated with an increase in hyperactivity in some children.

In the light of these findings we have advised the four UK Governments that, working with the food industry, there should be voluntary action to remove them by 2009 from children's food and drink products. In addition, there should be action to phase them out throughout the EU.

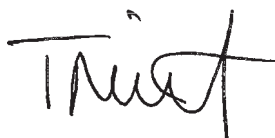
In March, our Board undertook to strengthen consumer choice by agreeing to develop and support a UK-wide 'scores on the doors' scheme to provide consumers with information about hygiene standards in food businesses. Under this scheme, businesses are given a score by local authority enforcement officers to show their level of compliance with food hygiene rules. Each food outlet may display this score on its door or window, and consumers can also look them up on a website. After consulting on proposals for this scheme, we aim to launch it in 2009.

The future

Our delivery will be helped by review of our Strategic Plan. This will measure and report progress against the targets we want to achieve by 2010. Our internal change programme will enhance delivery further by ensuring we operate effectively to protect consumers.

The commitment, knowledge and expertise of our staff continues to be crucial to delivering our vision for safer food and healthier eating for all.

Our work relies heavily on partnerships throughout the food supply chain and elsewhere. In meeting those critical to our future delivery, I have been keen to emphasise that we work best when we work together.



Tim Smith
Chief Executive

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Our vision

Our vision at the Food Standards Agency is 'safe food and healthy eating for all'.

Everything we do is reflected in this vision and the core values:

1. putting the consumer first
2. openness and independence
3. science and evidence-based

Putting the consumer first

We always make food safety our first priority. Above all, we work to give consumers the chance to make informed choices about the food they eat so they are able to understand the risks and benefits in different cases.

Openness and independence

It is vital for us to be impartial and honest in the way we act to protect consumers. Decisions should always be balanced, based on reliable evidence from the best expert advice, and published whenever possible to make it accessible.

Openness demonstrates fairness, competence and efficiency – characteristics that underpin confidence and trust in any regulator. We are answerable to the general public and should therefore allow all stakeholders to challenge any aspect of our policy and regulatory decision making.

As well as stakeholder confidence and trust, we hope to build further on the high level of international respect for UK food safety and nutritional standards.



Science and evidence-based

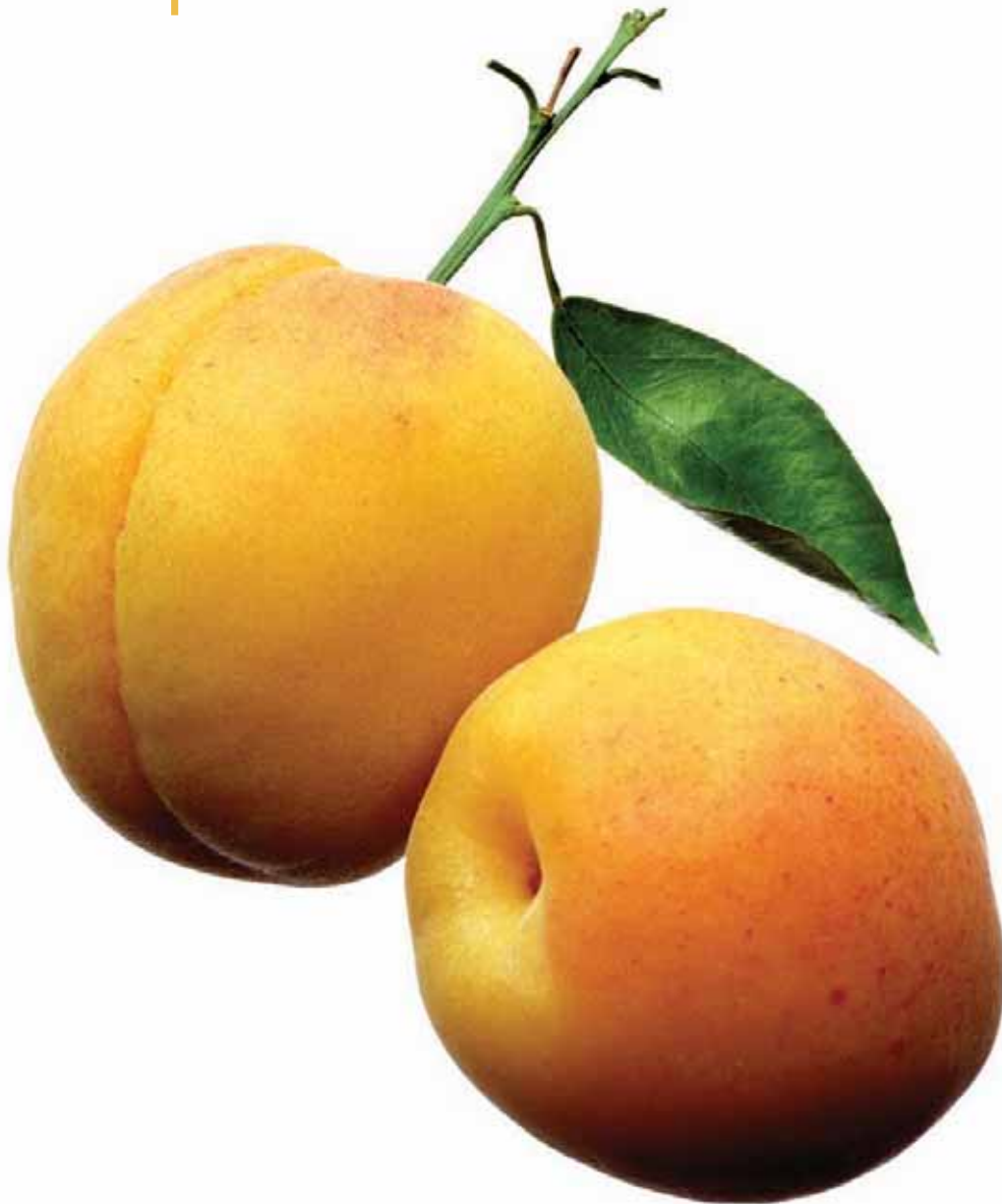
It is vital that all the policies we develop are based on the best available science and evidence. We always aim to communicate clearly what is known and not known about food safety and dietary health. We also strive to fund work that addresses uncertainties in science, while assessing the effectiveness of our own policies.

Our principles in practice

At the FSA, we value honesty, integrity and objectivity, and we continually push for the highest levels of efficiency. As an organisation, as an employer, and as individuals, we strongly advocate diversity, co-operation and respect.

You can read more about us in appendix 1. We've published an organisation chart in appendix 2, and details of our Board and Chief Executive can be found in appendix 3.

diversity,
cooperation
and respect...



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Assessing performance

Our vision is detailed in our 'Strategic plan to 2010', which is published in full on our website (see full addresses').

The plan sets out our targets for work under the three main areas of 'food safety', 'eating for health' and 'choice'.

Food safety

We will continue our work on reducing foodborne illness and will seek to build on the trust of stakeholders in our handling of food safety issues. Read more about our work with food safety in chapter 3.

Eating for health

We will continue with efforts that enable consumers to choose a healthier diet and reduce diet-related diseases. Read more about eating for health in chapter 4.

Choice

We will continue to help consumers make informed choices about food, while protecting them from food fraud and illegal practices. Read more about choice in chapter 5.

The principles underlying the way we will implement the plan are set out under '**Effective delivery**' in chapter 6. In particular, we stress how we will take sustainable development into account in all our activities and policy decisions. We also highlight the importance we attach to working in partnership with all our stakeholders to meet the targets we have set. We are committed to promoting diversity.

To read more about our performance against planned targets, see appendix 4.

1. You can read our Strategic Plan in full at www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/strategicplan2010e.pdf (English) and www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/strategicplanto2010welsh.pdf (Welsh). You can order copies from Food Standards Agency Publications by phoning 0845 606 0667, faxing 020 8867 3225, or emailing foodstandards@ecgroup.uk.com.



protecting
consumer interests
and public health...

3

Food safety

Food safety continued to be the top priority for us in 2007/8.

We are always aiming to set new standards for protecting consumer interests and public health. We also make every effort to ensure these standards are rigorously maintained.

Food Safety Week



We sponsored National Food Safety Week for the first time in 2007. Scheduled for June every year, the UK-wide campaign raises awareness of good food hygiene practice, encouraging communities, local authorities and schools to focus on the best ways to avoid food poisoning.

In 2007, our 'Bugs like it hot' campaign warned about the rise of food poisoning cases during the warmer summer months. In our completely rebranded for 2008, 'GermWatch' campaign we will give advice on how families can protect themselves from foodborne illness.

You can read more about Food Safety Week at www.eatwell.gov.uk/germwatch

Managing outbreaks of foodborne illness

In February 2008, we published revised guidance on managing outbreaks of foodborne illness in England and Wales.

The document succeeds the 1994 edition – published by the Department of Health – and it provides a framework to help health professionals manage outbreaks of infectious intestinal disease caused by eating microbiologically-contaminated food. It is targeted specifically at environmental health professionals, consultants in communicable disease control, and those involved in the investigation and management of such cases.

It covers:

- the arrangements that should be in place in advance of an outbreak
- ways in which outbreaks are detected
- ways outbreaks are investigated and controlled – including microbiological sampling and epidemiological investigation
- advice on communications

The main updates to the guidance relate to the organisations involved in controlling foodborne illnesses, and their roles and responsibilities. The new document reflects post-devolution arrangements in Wales and organisational changes like the establishment of the Food Standards Agency and the Health Protection Agency.

'Management of outbreaks of foodborne illness in England and Wales' can be downloaded from our website (see full address²). Guidance issued by FSA Scotland is currently under review and is due to be completed for electronic download sometime during 2008/9.

Responding to food and feed incidents



Dealing with food and feed incidents makes up a significant part of our activity. An incident is any event where there are concerns about actual or suspected threats to the safety or quality of food that could require intervention to protect consumers' interests.

In May 2007, we published the 'Annual Report of Incidents 2006'. A first of its kind, it details how we responded to 1,342 reported cases during the year. Highlighting how consumer interests were protected in each case, the major categories of incidents were:

- environmental contamination (fires and spills/leads): 28%
- natural chemical contamination (mycotoxins, algal toxins and others): 13%
- microbiological contamination (including salmonella, listeria and e.coli): 11%
- physical contamination (including plastic, glass, metal): 10%

In addition, an average of one to two food recalls or withdrawals were reported per week during the year, typically due to incorrect or missing allergy labelling or other allergy risks.

2. www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/outbreakmanagement.pdf

At the FSA, we always aim to be risk-based and proportionate when responding to food and feed incidents. Although absolute safety can never be guaranteed, we do strive to make sure there is no appreciable risk to consumers, based on the best available evidence. After seeking the advice of independent experts, we work closely with any relevant local authority and partner organisation. We also take into account vulnerable groups, as far as this is possible.

In the 2006 report, we stress the need for working in partnership with stakeholders in order that incident handling systems can be improved. We also encourage more comprehensive reporting. Looking to the future, we hope that the Annual Reports of Incidents will help to give an increasingly accurate picture of food and environmental contamination in the UK.

You can read more about the report on our website (see full address³).

Guidance for food incidents

In April 2007, we published guidance to help businesses and enforcement authorities prevent and respond better to food incidents. The document gives step-by-step advice on prevention and the identification of potential hazards. It also offers practical recommendations on responding to cases if they happen – from notification to post-incident actions.

The guidance is designed to help anyone who is responsible for handling incidents in the food industry, as well as relevant representatives in local authorities. It was developed by our Food Incidents Task Force, which brought together experts from the food industry, consumer groups and enforcement authorities.

In 2007/8, we also established a working group with the food supplements industry. The goal for the group is to develop improved detection methods and strategies for irradiated foods and ingredients – and specifically, to reduce cases of illegally irradiated food supplements entering the market place.

'Principles for preventing and responding to food incidents' can be downloaded on our website (see full address⁴). A summary version has been developed for small businesses.

3. www.food.gov.uk/news/pressreleases/2007/may/incidentreportpress

4. www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/guidancenotes/incidentsguidance/principlesdoc

Incident prevention

We have developed an incident prevention strategy in partnership with industry, consumer representatives and enforcers. The strategy identifies activities that have the most impact on preventing incidents. It also sets out an Agency-wide programme of work to tackle the issue across the whole food chain.

As part of this programme of work, we are committed to:

- exploring ways to share information on the food supply chain
- greater intelligence-driven border controls
- increased international surveillance activities
- the promotion of food safety initiatives abroad, and raising the awareness of existing EU food safety legislation

We have also begun a programme of regional workshops to study current incident response and prevention.

Online incident report form

In August 2007, we launched an enhanced online system for businesses recalling or withdrawing food or animal feed products. This system was developed in partnership with stakeholders and in response to a recommendation from the Food Incidents Taskforce.

It is a significant step in consolidating data and improving the handling of incident information. Once information is verified, it is included on our incidents database. The user then receives an automatic electronic receipt and an individual reference number.

You can read more on the incident form on our website (see full address⁵).

South Wales *E.coli* public inquiry

A report on the 2005 *E.coli* O157 outbreak in South Wales was published in September 2007. Originally completed during 2006, its publication had been delayed pending legal proceedings.

The report details the comprehensive investigations undertaken as the outbreak developed, and the measures taken to control it. The FSA and Meat Hygiene Service have been major participants in the public inquiry, set up by The National Assembly for Wales and chaired by Professor Hugh Pennington. Both organisations have cooperated fully.

5. www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/incidentformguidance.pdf

As part of the process, we have provided documentary evidence and witness statements – including evidence at oral hearings during February and March 2008. We continue to work with the inquiry at all stages of its proceedings.

You can read the report on the Health of Wales Information Service website (see full address⁶).

Safer food, better business



'Safer food, better business' (SFBB) is an innovative and practical approach to food safety management, developed to help small businesses establish food safety management procedures and comply with food hygiene regulations. As part of this initiative, there are a number of SFBB packs available which are designed to meet the specific needs of different types of businesses – including small catering companies, small retail companies, restaurants and takeaways that serve different cuisines.

A major evaluation of the programme took place in 2007. Based on local authority inspections, compliance with food safety management requirements for all food businesses has improved from 30% (in 2002) to 45% (in 2006) and 48% (in 2007). We believe that the 2007 figure still underestimates current compliance, as many businesses helped by the programme have not yet received a follow-up inspection (as the average inspection frequency of the target businesses is once every 18 months). In addition, many businesses are close to compliance and actively working toward it.

Evidence shows that, where support has been provided, 66% of businesses are 'broadly compliant' shortly after intervention – where 'broadly compliant' means the business is either 'compliant' or 'very close to being compliant, with only minor improvements required'. The remaining businesses are making progress towards compliance.

In February 2008, we launched a DVD designed to help small caterers and retailers across the UK implement SFBB into their food businesses and improve food safety. The DVD complements the main SFBB packs, and provides additional support to businesses that are implementing food safety management procedures and training staff. The DVD is aimed at managers, food handlers, trainers and local authorities. It uses realistic scenarios to demonstrate 'Safer food, better business' in action.

Read more about the programme on our website (see full address⁷). The DVD is available with voiceovers in 16 different languages.

6. www.wales.nhs.uk/sites3/news.cfm?orgid=719&contentid=7415

7. www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/regulation/hygleg/hyglegresources/sfbb/

Research into certain artificial colours

In September 2007, we advised parents of children showing signs of hyperactivity that cutting certain artificial colours from their diets might have some beneficial effects.

Sunset yellow (E110), Quinoline yellow (E104), Carmoisine (E122), Allura red (E129), Tartrazine (E102) and Ponceau 4R (E124) were studied as part of research commissioned by the Agency and carried out by the University of Southampton. The research followed up on an earlier government-funded study, which investigated the adverse effects of certain artificial food colours and benzoate preservative on hyperactive behaviour in two age groups of children.

As part of the new study, the behaviour of children was assessed by parents, teachers and independent observers in a classroom setting. Results suggest that eating or drinking certain mixes of these artificial food colours at the same time as the preservative sodium benzoate could be linked to a negative effect on some children's behaviour.

Our advice followed the evaluation of research findings by the independent Committee on Toxicity. After considering their opinion, we revised our advice to consumers – namely, that 'if a child shows signs of hyperactivity or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, then eliminating the colours from their diet might have some beneficial effects'. You can read the Committee on Toxicity's statement on their website (see full address⁸).

We have shared the findings of the research with the European Food Safety Authority, which is conducting a safety review of all food additives approved for use in the European Union (EU). This review has been actioned at the request of the European Commission.

You can read more about our advice on food colours on our website (see full address⁹).

Study into acrylamide and domestic cooking

Acrylamide is a chemical that can be produced naturally when starchy foods are cooked at high temperatures through the methods of baking, frying, grilling and roasting. Acrylamide is genotoxic, which means that it has the potential to damage DNA. It is known to cause cancer in animals, and it is considered probable that it could also cause cancer in humans – though this is not certain.

8. cot.food.gov.uk/statements/cotstatements2007/colpreservechildren

9. www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2007/sep/foodcolours

Acrylamide was first discovered in 2002, and international research has since continued to improve our understanding – including details of its toxicology, its formation, analytical methodology, and potential methods of reducing levels in food.

In February 2005, the Joint Food and Agriculture Organisation and World Health Organisation Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) carried out a safety evaluation on its presence in food. JECFA concluded that, at the current dietary intake levels, acrylamide may be a public health concern, and that appropriate efforts should continue to reduce concentrations in foodstuffs.

In July 2007, we published research investigating the levels of acrylamide produced when cooking potatoes in the home. The findings from this study show that acrylamide is formed in potatoes cooked at the high temperatures typically used in domestic cooking. It is formed in roast, sautéed, chipped and baked potatoes, but not in boiled or microwaved potatoes. The research confirms that chips made from fresh potatoes cooked to a lighter colour have lower acrylamide levels than chips cooked to a darker colour – with the same results found in tests on fried and roast onions. It also found that levels of acrylamide are minimised if frozen chips are cooked according to the instructions on the packaging.

The research confirms that the level of acrylamide formed in potatoes is linked to the amount of sugar in the potatoes. Storing potatoes in a fridge causes an increase in their sugar content, which may lead to higher acrylamide levels when cooked. But, chips made from fresh potatoes that have been soaked in water for 30 minutes prior to frying were found to have almost 70% lower levels of acrylamide than those not soaked.

Based on independent expert scientific advice, we believe that exposure to DNA damaging, cancer causing chemicals like acrylamide should be as low as reasonably achievable. We have not changed our advice following any of the studies. We continue to recommend that people eat a balanced diet, including plenty of fruit and vegetables, bread, other cereals and potatoes, and that they should limit the amount of sugary and fatty foods they eat – including fried food like chips and crisps.

You can read more about acrylamide on our website (see full address¹⁰).

10. www.food.gov.uk/safereating/chemsafe/acrylamide_branch/



expert scientific
and evidence-
based advice...

Mycotoxins sampling advice

In July 2007, we published sampling advice on legislation regarding mycotoxins in foodstuffs and the official methods of sampling certain foods for mycotoxins.

Mycotoxins are toxic substances produced by some fungi. They can be hazardous to human and animal health – even at low concentrations – and can be present in our diet as a result of the growth of specific fungi on food crops, either in the field or in storage.

The toxins are found in a wide range of foods from around the world, but particularly in foods from countries with climates of high temperature and humidity. There are a number of contaminants covered by mycotoxins – including aflatoxins, ochratoxin A, the fusarium toxins and patulin.

'Sampling advice: mycotoxins in foodstuffs' was drafted specifically for enforcement authorities and food business operators. The guidance should be read in conjunction with the relevant legislation, and it can be downloaded from our website (see full address¹¹).

Guidance notes for the General Food Law Regulation

In 2005, we ran a public consultation on the European Commission's General Food Law Regulation, (EC) 178/2002. It revealed that following the guidance resulted in disproportionate costs for small businesses. It also suggested that the European Commission's guidance was complex, not as helpful as it could be, and did not necessarily help businesses comply with the legislation.

In July 2007, we published guidance notes that relate to the EC's document but improving the document's clarity, simplicity and relevance to UK businesses. The notes offer advice on compliance with the legal requirements covering food safety, traceability provisions and the need to withdraw and/or recall products that do not conform to the food safety requirements under the regulation.

You can read more on the guidance and download a copy from our website (see full address¹²).

11. www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/mycotoxinsguidance.pdf

12. www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/guidancenotes/foodguid/generalfoodlaw

Monitoring for shellfish toxins

We have been leading an extensive programme of work to find a replacement for animal testing in the case of statutory monitoring for the detection of marine biotoxins in shellfish.

We have funded a programme to develop and evaluate a high-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) method, which has been shown to provide a sound basis for replacing mouse bioassay in the shellfish monitoring programme for paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) toxins. The research findings have allowed a staged implementation of the method. It was introduced as a qualitative screen in November 2006, saving over 3,500 mice in the first year of implementation.

Work continues for the use of the HPLC as a full quantitative replacement of the mouse bioassay. Its implementation for some shellfish species (covering over 80% of samples tested) was introduced in May 2008.

This strategy has allowed a quick progression towards our target of reducing reliance on animal tests, while providing at least the same level of protection for public health.

Guidance on the provision of allergen information for unpackaged foods

Food businesses selling food prepared or wrapped on site are not required by law to indicate whether it contains ingredients that people may be allergic to, such as nuts, wheat or eggs. We want to help businesses improve the information they make available to customers who have food allergies or intolerance.

In January 2008 we published best practice guidance to help food businesses assist customers who need to avoid certain ingredients. The guidance is targeted at businesses selling food that is not pre-packaged, such as restaurants, cafés, deli counters, sandwich bars and bakeries.

A booklet accompanies the guidance. It gives advice on ingredients that can cause problems and how to address customer questions. A poster is also available to use as a staff training aid. Both are being promoted via trade organisations representing retailers, caterers and catering suppliers, and through local authority enforcement officers.

You can read more on our website (see full address¹³).

13. www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/guidancenotes/labelregsguidance/nonprepacked

Setting allergen management thresholds



In 2006, we published best practice guidance on allergen management, which set out a qualitative approach to assessing the risks of allergen cross-contamination and the need for advisory labelling like 'may contain' warnings. We are now addressing the issue of setting quantitative levels to be used in such decisions.

We collaborated with a large EU-funded research project on food allergy (EuroPrevall) to hold an international workshop to discuss possible approaches to food allergen risk assessments. The workshop investigated whether approaches already being used for toxicological risk assessments could also be used for food allergens, and considered the advantages and limitations of the different approaches.

Gaps in knowledge were identified by the workshop, and we have subsequently called for research proposals in two of the areas that were identified.

It is hoped that projects will be commissioned towards the end of 2008 to look at extrinsic factors that affect the severity of allergic reactions, as well as the dietary patterns and food choices of food-allergic consumers.

Top challenges for the year ahead

Foodborne illness

We believe there may be a risk that case numbers of foodborne illness rise again due to trends like more meals being eaten out of the home; the globalisation of the food industry; climate change; and a population that is getting older.

We know that a large number of cases caused by *Campylobacter* and *Salmonella* still occur every year. We also know that listeriosis is twice as common now as it was in 2000. We need to establish the reasons, so we can revise our guidance and advice to vulnerable groups.

Major outbreaks

There is an ever-present risk of a significant outbreak of foodborne illness or a major food incident. We know from previous incidents – like the *E. coli* outbreak in South Wales and the Sudan I in chilli powder – that the effective management of these incidents often requires resource to be diverted from other areas of the Agency. This can result in delayed delivery or non-delivery of programmed outputs.

Incident prevention

There are several strands to our work on incident prevention. One such progression is a project to study susceptible ingredients. We will also work towards establishing methods for the sharing of intelligence with the food industry.

Monitoring for shellfish toxins

Following our success in introducing chemical tests to replace the mouse bioassay for paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) toxins, we will begin a two-year study to develop and validate the liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry (LC-MS/MS) method for the detection of Diarrhetic Shellfish Poisoning (DSP) toxins.

Allergen management

Over the next year we will be starting work that will enable us to develop allergen management thresholds. This is a complex area, and it will involve collaboration with the food industry and an international level of support.

New framework for meat hygiene

We aim to deliver a new framework for meat hygiene charging that has broad stakeholder support. We are pushing for more risk-based controls on meat hygiene across the European Union, and supporting the continued transformation of the Meat Hygiene Service.



4

Eating for health

Improving diet and health are central to our objectives at the FSA.

We share responsibility for nutrition with government health departments, but we have a distinct role in ensuring consumers have the information they need to make informed, healthy dietary choices.

We work in partnership with health and education officials, local authorities, schools, public health interest groups, consumer groups, the food industry, and others. To monitor progress, we collect appropriate information on people's diet and nutrition. We work with partners to help deliver UK nutrition policies through the:

- Food and Health Action Plan (in England)
- Welsh Nutrition Strategy 'Food and Wellbeing'
- Obesity, Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Action Plan for Scotland
- Food and Nutrition Action Plan for Northern Ireland

Our consumer-facing website (www.eatwell.gov.uk) is packed with practical advice and tips on eating more healthily and understanding food labels. It also contains detailed information on shopping, cooking and storing food safely.

The site was developed as part of our strategy to help consumers make informed choices, make it easier for people to choose a healthy diet, and to reduce diet-related disease. All advice is based on the latest scientific evidence.

The answer to healthy eating... on a plate



In September 2007, we launched the 'eatwell plate' – a visual tool that illustrates the types and proportions of foods that make up a balanced diet.

The eatwell plate is a useful reminder of the types of foods we should try to eat more or less of to maintain a balanced and healthy diet. It updates the previous model – the 'balance of good health' – by renaming some of the food groups to make them easier to understand,

shaping the eating habits
of the next generation...



giving the tool a modernised design, and incorporating photographs of real foods that reflect current eating patterns.

Why not put your own diet to the test at www.eatwell.gov.uk/healthydiet/eatwellplate

Obesity strategy



In January 2008, we welcomed the publication of the government's 'Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives' strategy for England.

The document clearly demonstrates that everyone has a part to play in the effort to stem the rise of obesity. Improving diet is highlighted as a major theme, and as the FSA we have a key role to play in this area.

The strategy document can be downloaded on the Department of Health website (see full address¹⁴).

Reducing saturated fats

In February 2008, we announced the next steps in our work to help people in the UK reduce the amount of saturated fat they eat and balance their energy intake and needs.

A diet high in saturated fat and calories can contribute to developing a range of serious diet-related illnesses like cardiovascular disease, diabetes and some cancers. In the UK, intakes of saturated fat are around 20% higher than official government recommendations. Meeting government recommendations – by reducing average intakes of saturated fat from 13.3% to below 11% of food energy – could help prevent up to 3,500 deaths a year.

A key part in helping to achieve this will be developing and building on positive and collaborative partnerships with industry, and improving consumer awareness. Our programme therefore outlines our focus on building on partnerships with the food industry to:

- encourage further voluntary reformulation of specific food groups to reduce the amount of saturated fat and added sugar they contain
- increase the range of healthier options and step up the promotion of healthier products to consumers
- make smaller portion sizes more readily available
- publish food industry commitments to reformulate
- increase consumer awareness of the adverse health effects of a diet that contains too much saturated fat and encourage people to choose a healthy diet lower in saturated fat

14. www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_082378

- hold an independent academic workshop to examine evidence on portion sizes, chaired by Dr Susan Jebb, Head of Nutrition and Health Research at the Medical Research Council

All of this activity complements ongoing work to reduce salt and trans-fatty acids in UK diets, as well as our work with caterers to help people make healthier choices when eating out.

To read more about our strategy and activities, visit our website at www.food.gov.uk/healthiereating.

Voluntary approach for trans-fats

In October 2007, the Westminster Health Secretary asked us to undertake a review on trans-fats, following action in Denmark and New York to impose mandatory restrictions on these types of fats.

A review of the evidence showed that voluntary action by the UK food industry to reduce levels of artificial trans-fat in foods has been successful in reducing consumer dietary intakes to low levels. Average dietary intakes in the UK have come down to just 1% of food energy – half of the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition's (SACN) recommended maximum intake of 2% of food energy. Therefore, imposing mandatory restrictions for trans-fats would not deliver any significant consumer benefit.

It is impossible to completely eliminate trans fats from some foods, as they naturally occur in some meat and dairy products. Saturated fats pose a far greater health risk for the UK population because the amount of saturated fat people eat is about 20% higher than the recommended level – at 13.3% rather than 11% of energy. Saturated fat is a major contributor to heart disease, the leading cause of premature death in this country.

The Board has recommended that, alongside continued monitoring of consumer intakes of trans-fats, our current priority should be to work with industry to accelerate its reformulation of foods to reduce saturated fat levels, while maintaining the improvements made in trans-fat levels. We continue to encourage consumers to choose a diet low in saturated fat.

You can read more on the Board's advice on our website (see full address¹⁵).

15. www.food.gov.uk/news/pressreleases/2007/dec/boardtransfatadvice

Salt reduction

About 75% of the salt we eat is already in the foods we buy – the majority from processed foods. In March 2006, we published voluntary salt reduction targets for industry. They aim to help reduce average salt intakes for adults to no more than 6g a day and to help guide the food industry as to the levels of reduction we consider achievable. In 2008, we plan to review progress towards meeting the salt reduction targets and will publish a consultation paper on our options for the way forward.

All sectors of the industry have responded positively to calls for salt reduction – from retailers, manufacturers and trade associations, to caterers and suppliers to the catering industry. We have commitments to reduce levels of salt in food from 70 organisations across all sectors, and some considerable reductions have already been achieved. Major retailers like ASDA, Budgens, Co-op, Iceland, Marks and Spencer, Sainsbury's, Somerfield, Spar, Tesco and Waitrose are working towards the targets.

In August 2007, we published a self-reporting framework to collect current data on salt levels in food. We worked with stakeholders to develop this framework and establish the type of data the food industry was able to provide. The data submitted will be collated and used to track the food industry's progress towards achieving the voluntary targets, while also informing the review of salt targets.

You can read more about salt and our salt targets at www.salt.gov.uk. Details of the progress with industry can be found at www.food.gov.uk (see full address¹⁶).

The salt campaign

We have delivered phase three of our salt campaign, which aimed to encourage consumers to use label information to identify lower salt options when choosing packaged foods.

To help take the message to a more local level, we developed eight key partnerships with the voluntary and community sectors, local government and primary care trusts. We set up social cooking sessions in Sikh and Hindu temples, worked with a housing association, children and their parents.

We also ran a salt experiential roadshow during July 2007 which toured 24 Tesco car parks educating consumers on how to reduce salt in their diet.

For more about the third phase of the campaign and details of the organisations we are working with, visit www.salt.gov.uk/our_partners.html.



¹⁶. www.food.gov.uk/healthiereating/salt/saltprogressstatement/

Diet and nutrition surveys: building the evidence base

Low income diet and nutrition

In July 2007, we published a report on our low income diet and nutrition survey, a major survey looking at the diets of consumers on low incomes.

This is the most comprehensive survey of its kind in the UK. It provides, for the first time in one dataset, detailed information on eating habits and nutrient intakes in this population group and the factors affecting these. We, and our partners in other government departments and non-government bodies, will be using the data to help us understand and address barriers to healthy eating in this group.

The full report and a short summary of the results are available on our website (see full address¹⁷).

National diet and nutrition

We have also completed pilot work for a new National Diet and Nutrition Survey programme, the main fieldwork of which began in April 2008. This survey is the major component of our dietary survey programme and it collects detailed information on diet and nutrition across the whole UK population from the ages of 1½ years and above.

Detailed data is provided on foods consumed by individuals and their nutrient intakes, with additional information on diet and lifestyle habits. The data is used both in government and by external partners to monitor the diet and nutrition of the population, and to help to assess risks from exposure to food chemicals.

Folic acid

In June 2007, we recommended to UK health ministers that bread or flour should be mandatorily fortified with folic acid. In October 2007, the Chief Medical Officer wrote to the Chair to request a further expert view on the evidence regarding folic acid and colorectal cancer risk.

In January 2008, a group of experts – including members of the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition and the Committee on Carcinogenicity – met to consider further evidence. In February, the outcome of the discussion was considered by the full Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition. The committee concluded that they should defer agreeing final advice on folic acid and cancer risk until the results of ongoing trials are available in early 2009.

17. www.food.gov.uk/science/dietarysurveys/lidnsbranch/

Accessing healthy food in Scotland



In February 2008, we published a new study on the availability of affordable healthy food in Scotland. The study ran between 2005 and 2007, and it was managed by the Centre for the Study of Retailing in Scotland at the University of Edinburgh and led by Professor David Marshall and Professor John Dawson.

To start, a map of food shops and supermarkets in Scotland was constructed using geographic information system techniques. Nine sample areas were selected on the basis of urban-rural location and affluent-deprived conditions. Then a 'healthy eating indicator shopping basket' was created.

This virtual basket was made up of 35 items drawn from the five major food groups – including fresh fruit and vegetables, potatoes, baked beans, porridge oats, wholemeal breads, rice, oven chips, meat, fish and some low fat fresh dairy produce. It provided a starting point to study the availability and cost of the healthy foods on the shelves.

The results from the study showed a very complex picture. In general though, the provision of food shops selling a range of healthy food was not found to be a major issue. A wide range of prices was identified for the 'shopping basket', and the availability and price of healthy foods depended more on the size of the food shop than actual geographical location.

Though results of the study did not cause concern about the provision of healthy food, they underline the importance of finding ways to assist small general food shops in offering affordable, healthy foods. We are currently working in partnership with the Scottish Government Neighbourhood Shops Project to develop strategies with this objective in mind.

The full report – 'Accessing healthy food: a national assessment and sentinel mapping study of food retailing in Scotland' – can be downloaded from our website (see full address¹⁸). It is also available in CD format from the FSA Scotland library. For more details, email sandra.cruickshank@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk.

18. www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/accessfoodscotexec.pdf

Homelessness and food poverty in Northern Ireland

In July 2007, we published the findings of research we commissioned on food poverty and homelessness in Northern Ireland. The aim was to deliver a better understanding of the impact of poverty and social exclusion on the diet of homeless people in the country.

The survey involved interviews and dietary assessments of those staying in temporary accommodation and sleeping rough. The findings will inform decisions on how we can strengthen partnerships with key stakeholders to support, encourage and develop effective policy responses to tackling food poverty and homelessness.

You can read more about the research on our website (see full address¹⁹).

Taking stock of 'Food and Well Being' in Wales

In November 2007, we published the interim evaluation of 'Food and Well Being', the joint FSA Wales and Welsh Assembly Government nutrition strategy for Wales.

The Food and Well Being strategy has played a significant role in putting food on the agenda across the country, and it has been found to be central to the work of many key players. Although it is difficult to attribute all developments in Wales directly to the Food and Well Being strategy, it is clear that new organisational structures, mechanisms and resources have facilitated better communication, the sharing of information and good practice. These include the Nutrition Network for Wales and the Award for Food Action Locally awards.

As almost inevitable for any mid-term review, a patchwork effect was observed from the activities, with uneven geographical and population group coverage. For example, much work has been done to improve the diets of children and young people, but much less has been achieved to date with older people. The team that conducted the review at Warwick University were, however, impressed with the levels of activity and commitment across the country as a whole.

The review has highlighted recommendations for the way forward, including committing more efforts on our engagement with the food industry. You can read more about the review on our website (see full address²⁰).

19. www.food.gov.uk/northernireland/researchni/ninutritionhomeless

20. www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2007/nov/nutstratmidterm

Shaping the eating habits of the next generation

In December 2007, we published the food competences framework, a set of core skills and knowledge to help children and young people make healthy food choices now and into adulthood.

The framework is broken down into different age stages and applies to young people from 5 years old to 16+. It covers the themes of diet and health, consumer awareness, cooking, food preparation and handling, food safety and other wider food issues.

The food competences support wider government work which is aimed at improving the health of young people, and it will contribute towards helping schools develop a 'whole school approach' to diet and health. Because each age stage is progressive and cumulative, the framework helps children develop a consistent set of food skills and knowledge. Importantly, the competences apply to learning experiences inside and outside school, so competencies can also be met at home or through other external activities.

The framework is being targeted at schools and community-based organisations, and it will be promoted through a UK-wide network of existing practitioners who already work on schemes like the 'What's Cooking' programme, the 'Cooking Bus' and 'Healthy Schools'. We also hope to encourage other relevant organisations to adopt the framework.

You can read more about food competencies on our website (see full address²¹).

The food competences framework falls within our core principles, published in January 2008. These outline the fundamental objectives of our work with schools across the UK. More information about the core principles can be found on our website (see full address²²).

Working in partnership to deliver healthy options in Wales

In April 2008, we launched an All-Wales Healthy Options Award – a national prize that rewards caterers that make it easier for their customers to eat healthily.

The award was based on a similar idea developed by Caerphilly local authority, and it was set up in partnership with local authorities, the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, National Public Health Service and the Welsh Assembly Government.

The scheme was piloted by local authorities last year and will be delivered by local authorities in the coming years.

21. www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/competenciesconsensus.pdf

22. www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/schoolcoreprinciples.pdf

Workplace caterers commit to healthier food

In January 2008, we published the first stages of our work with workplace caterers to give people improved access to healthier meals at work.

Although people prepare and eat the majority of their meals at home, food eaten in the workplace is playing an increasingly important part in our daily diet. About three million meals are eaten at work every day, two million of which are prepared by contract caterers. It is important therefore that people are given the opportunity to choose food that is lower in salt, fat and sugar, enabling them to take positive steps towards a healthier, balanced diet.

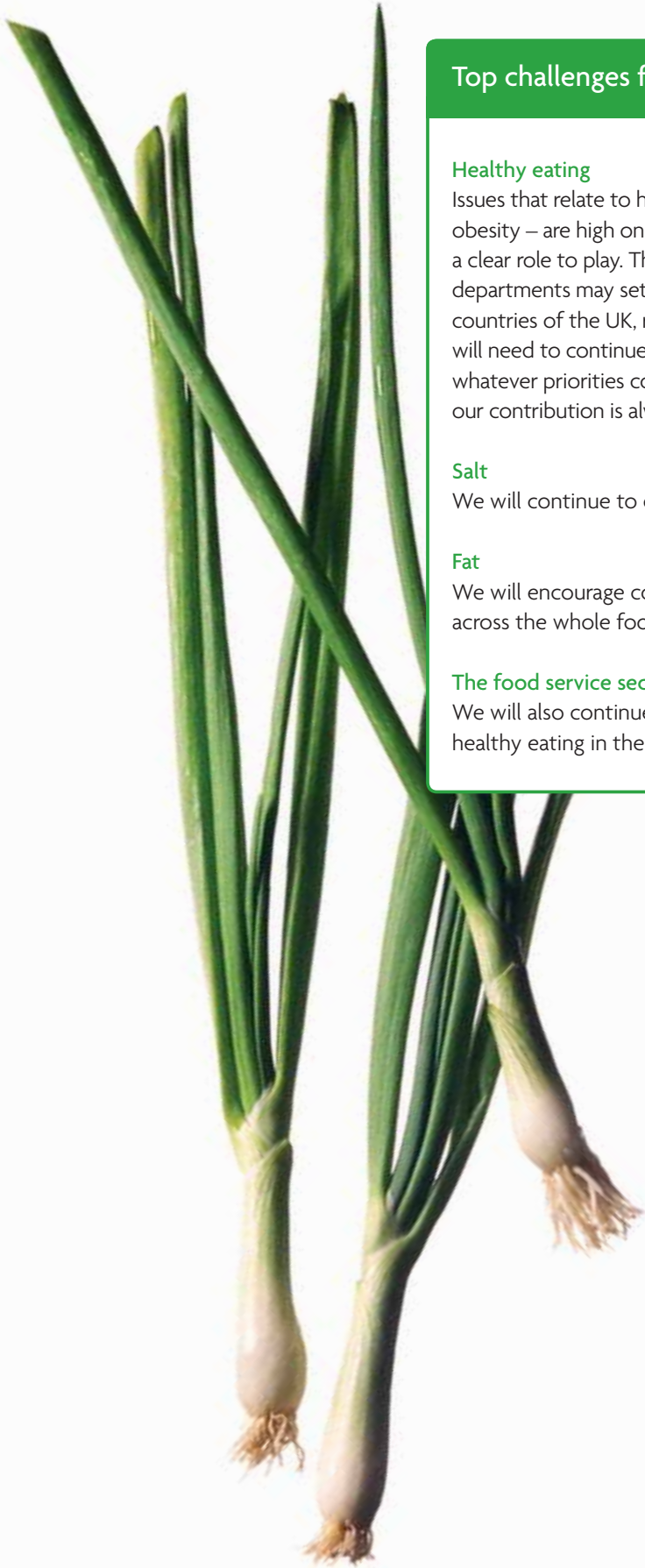
We have worked in partnership with major caterers, ARAMARK, BaxterStorey, Compass Group, Elior and Sodexo, and the two biggest food product suppliers to the catering sector, 3663 and Brakes, to help them develop individual commitments to provide healthier food for their customers at work.

The voluntary commitments made by these businesses have focused on the types of products and ingredients businesses buy, how dishes are prepared in the kitchen, the menu choices that are available, and nutritional information provided to customers in work canteens. The businesses involved will report back to us every six months, allowing us to monitor progress. And further details of this activity will be published throughout 2008.

Building on our progress with workplace caterers, we are extending our approach to include major providers across the following sectors: quick service restaurants, pubs, casual dining chains, and coffee and sandwich shop chains. We will work with a wide range of catering businesses to contribute to this programme, ensuring that the way we work fits the style of their business and meets the needs of their customers.

For more information on our work with caterers, visit our website (see full address²³).

23. www.food.gov.uk/healthiereating/healthycatering/cateringbusiness/



Top challenges for the year ahead

Healthy eating

Issues that relate to healthy eating – such as increasing rates of obesity – are high on the political and public agenda, and we have a clear role to play. The challenge is that Health Ministers and departments may set different priorities for action in the different countries of the UK, reflecting social and cultural differences. We will need to continue to respond to all these priorities, ensuring that whatever priorities come to the fore, and whatever actions are taken, our contribution is always timely and rigorously evidence-based.

Salt

We will continue to encourage consumers to reduce salt intake.

Fat

We will encourage commitments on saturated fat reductions across the whole food sector.

The food service sector

We will also continue efforts to encourage continued actions on healthy eating in the food service sector.

putting the
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Choice

We want to make it easier for consumers to make informed choices about the food they eat.

For religious, ethical and cultural reasons, different consumers want different types of information and may want to avoid certain foods. Our role as the FSA is to ensure the right information is provided, that it is accurate, and that it does not mislead.

Signposting



Support for our recommended traffic light colour signpost labelling continued to grow during the year. The decision by a number of retailers and manufacturers to introduce traffic light colour-coded information on their front-of-pack labelling was warmly welcomed by consumer groups, organisations concerned with the impact of diet on health and public health professionals.

Two additional retailers, ASDA and Boots, and a further 14 manufacturers or service providers, and the first restaurant chain have joined the major retailers and manufacturers who are now using traffic light colours. There are also eight new supporters, including the British Medical Association, Royal College of General Practitioners and Royal College of Nurses.

Front-of-pack traffic light colour coding should deliver three main benefits. It should:

- make it easier for consumers to eat more healthily
- encourage consumers to look for and demand healthier foods
- provide businesses with an incentive to produce foods that are lower in fat, saturated fat, salt or sugars

In January 2008, we ran a second phase of the traffic light labelling campaign. The activity used the same successful style as the first phase and comprised 10 second television advertisements that ran daily on GMTV, bus side posters and special advertorial features in TV Quick, TV Choice and Total TV Guide.

Independent evaluation of the three main types of front-of-pack nutrition labelling schemes in the UK is now under way. This will

establish which approaches or elements best help consumers with the accurate interpretation of key nutritional information. The study is expected to be completed by the end of 2008.

Read more about traffic lights at www.eatwell.gov.uk/foodlabels/trafficlights.

Scores on the doors

'Scores on the doors' is an important step in empowering consumers to make informed choices about the food they eat by giving them full accessibility to the food business hygiene ratings of food outlets.

Local authority enforcement officers are responsible for inspecting food businesses to make sure they meet the legal requirements on hygiene. Each business will be given a score, and these scores will be made available online – with some outlets choosing to display them at point of sale.

In March 2008, the Board agreed that a single nationwide 'scores on the doors' scheme should be established. This decision was based on experience with over 100 schemes running over the past two years. Feedback shows that the introduction of a single nationwide scheme is clearly supported by stakeholders, and we will work with local authorities and food businesses to put this in place.

We currently recommend a voluntary approach to the display of scores. At this stage we do not believe a mandatory approach is in line with the principles of better regulation.

You can read more about scores on the doors on our website (see full address²⁴).

Consumer attitudes survey



The general public are increasingly more confident about the food they eat, according to our latest annual survey on consumer attitudes to food. Since the initial survey in 2000, the number of people concerned about issues such as food poisoning, additives and general food safety has been steady. But, the latest survey reveals the first dip in the number of people concerned about these food safety issues.

The results also reveal some other encouraging trends – in particular, relating to increased awareness and claimed consumption of '5-a-day'.

Food safety highlights

Consumer concern over many food safety issues has decreased since 2006: additives (38% to 35%); food poisoning (42% to 36%); and genetically modified foods (25% to 20%).

24. www.food.gov.uk/safereating/hyg/scoresonthedoors/

Food labels remain important to shoppers, who look for a range of information like 'best before', allergy advice and additives. Half of respondents said they check some form of labelling information when buying food. Though, almost half of respondents did not know the difference between 'use by' and 'best before' dates on food.

Diet and nutrition highlights

More than three quarters (78%) of consumers are now aware that we should be eating at least five portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables each day – an improvement on last year. 58% claimed to be putting this into practice by eating at least '5-a-day'.

Amounts of fat, saturated fat, salt and sugar in foods are still the main issues of concern among consumers. The quantity of fat and salt are the most commonly checked nutritional information on labels. However, the percentage of people who are concerned about these ingredients is down slightly on 2006 numbers: fat (46% to 40%); saturated fat (44% to 37%); salt (54% to 50%); and sugar (43% to 39%).

Nine out of ten respondents claimed that healthy eating is important to them. 87% believed that a limited budget is not a barrier to healthy eating, with those aged over 50 more likely to agree with this opinion than any younger age group.

Findings from the four UK countries

Northern Ireland is the worst region in the UK for consuming five or more pieces of fruit and vegetables a day. In terms of the claims made, the results were England (59%), Scotland (54%), Wales (50%) and Northern Ireland (45%).

Consumers in Northern Ireland have listed 'healthy eating' in their top three concerns, ahead of house prices and behind crime levels and drugs.

In Scotland, almost half (45%) of respondents claimed to 'always' or 'usually' look at labels on products when buying them for the first time. However, compared to the rest of the UK, they are less likely 'always to refer' to labels (25% in Scotland compared to 31% in the UK overall).

In Wales, nearly nine in ten respondents claimed that healthy eating is important to them. 88% believed that a limited budget was not a barrier to healthy eating. There was also overwhelming agreement (83%) that parents should be strict with children and make them eat healthily.

In England, just over three quarters (76%) of consumers are aware that they should be eating at least five portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables each day. In an improvement on last year, 50% claimed to be putting this into practice.

Nearly half of respondents did not know the difference between 'use by' and 'best before' dates. Just 54% of English respondents correctly stated the meaning of 'use by'. Awareness was lowest in the South West (42%) and highest in Yorkshire and Humberside (66%).

Awareness of the FSA and its role in providing clear consumer advice

Consumer awareness of the FSA remains at a constant high of 82%. Trust in the Agency is also high at 60% (up from 44% when this question was first asked in 2001).

65% of consumers now describe themselves as confident in the FSA's ability to protect health with regards to food safety (compared with 50% in 2000).

A third of consumers view the FSA as an organisation they would go to for information on food safety and food scares. One in five cited the FSA as a source of advice on healthy eating.

The apparent drop in concern about how much fat and salt there is in our food shows how critical it is that we continue to raise awareness around healthier eating, as well as provide clear information and advice, backed by scientific evidence.

You can download a summary of our eighth consumer attitudes survey from our website (see full address²⁵).

UK health claims submitted to Europe

A new European regulation, aimed at increasing consumer protection in relation to nutrition and health claims made on food, requires such claims to be on a Community list of permitted claims. The regulation will provide food manufacturers with a list of clear claims, backed by scientific evidence, that can be used on labels. We submitted a list of UK health claims to the European Commission in January 2008. This moves forward action to give shoppers food labelled with health claims they can trust. We received more than 2500 claims submitted by food manufacturers.

The European Food Safety Authority will scrutinise the scientific evidence, to produce an authorised list of health claims. If a claim such as 'keeps bones strong' or 'maintains heart health' appears on a label, consumers will know there is evidence to back it. The Commission should agree a final list by early 2010. In the meantime, health claims continue to be subject to national rules.

Read more about claims on our website (see full address²⁶).

25. www.food.gov.uk/science/socsci/surveys/fodsafety-nutrition-diet

26. www.food.gov.uk/foodlabelling/ull/claims/

EC food information proposal

The European Commission adopted in January 2008 a proposal for new legislation on provision of food information to consumers. This is the first stage in the development of new EU regulations consolidating general and nutrition labelling into a single text. We launched a public consultation in February 2008. Work will continue with our stakeholders throughout 2008/09.

You can read more about the proposals on our website (see full address²⁷).

Community food award schemes

Community food initiatives play an important role in encouraging people to think about the food they eat and where it comes from.

Our Community Food Initiative Awards celebrate the valuable contribution initiatives make to local communities in improving access to high quality food at affordable prices. Two initiatives are chosen every year, and each receives £15,000 (£5,000 a year for three years).

The judging panel for this year's award were the Agency's Chair Dame Deirdre Hutton, Presenter and Broadcaster Jon Snow and Professor Tim Lang. The winners of the Award will be announced at the end of June 2008. Members of the Agency's Board will be making presentations to the winning projects at their community locations. Recipients of this year's Award include a community food initiative operating as a social enterprise with a profit making trading function and an initiative that has developed a training week at a college specifically for 14 and 15 year olds in cooking, serving and professional catering skills.

The Community Food Initiative Awards honour the late Dame Sheila McKechnie, commemorating the contribution she made in helping to set up the FSA.

Awards for Food Action Locally (Wales)

The annual Awards for Food Action Locally scheme in Wales recognises individual or team contributions to local nutrition initiatives – ideas that have made a positive impact on the diet or eating habits of residents in the communities they serve.

The awards enable us to identify good practice and encourage others to take on similar awareness-raising activities. There are five winners, and each is awarded £2,000 and a celebratory fruit bowl. Five runners up also receive £1,000 and a celebratory fruit bowl.

27. www.food.gov.uk/foodlabelling/ull/labellingproposals/

The award winners in 2007 were:

- Cardiac Cooking Companion
- Flintshire Breast-feeding Peer Support Programme
- Physical Fun and Fine Food
- Riverside Community Food Cooperative
- The Nutrition and Health Team, Alive and Ticking

You can read more about the awards on our website (see full address²⁸).

Review of fish consumption advice

Fish consumption and sustainability is a key issue for many consumers. In February 2008, we began a review of our advice, reflecting growing concern about the sustainability of fish stocks and the wider environmental impact of fishing and fish farming.

The review – which reflects our commitment to take sustainable development into account in all of our activities and policy decisions – will involve all interested stakeholders, including other government departments, consumer and health groups, environmental organisations, and representatives of the fishing and food industries. We aim to publish a full public consultation in September 2008.

Our current nutritional advice is that consumers should eat more fish and should aim to eat at least two portions of fish a week – one of which should be oily.

There may be low levels of pollutants in oily fish and certain large non-oily fish. This can build up in our bodies and could particularly affect an unborn baby. Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, and girls and women who might have a baby in the future should not eat more than two portions of oily fish a week. Those who are pregnant or planning a baby should avoid eating shark, swordfish and marlin. Other people can eat up to four portions of oily fish a week, but no more than one portion of shark, swordfish or marlin.

Compositional standards

Food quality standards continue to be an important aspect of our work to protect consumers.

Water

In October 2007, we produced consolidated UK legislation on bottled water. Together with new guidance, this will make the compositional standards for bottled water easier to understand and comply with – benefiting industry, enforcers and consumers alike.

You can read more on water guidance on our website (see full address²⁹).

28. www.food.gov.uk/wales/nutwales/afal/

29. www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/guidancenotes/foodguid/waterguidance

Fish and quick frozen foods

We have produced and widely distributed easy-to-follow quick guides on both fish labelling and the production and control requirements for quick frozen foods.

The aim of the fish guide was to improve the labelling for consumers, particularly in relation to the correct name of the fish and where it was caught or farmed. The guide on quick frozen foods was primarily to inform food businesses and enforcement authorities about changes in the legislation.

Codex Alimentarius

On the international stage, there has been considerable activity in Codex Alimentarius commodity committees covering Fats and Oils, Milk and Milk Products, Fish and Fishery Products and Natural Mineral Waters. Codex Alimentarius is a joint WHO/FAO body that produces international standards to facilitate trade and provide protection for both industry and consumers. In November 2007, we completed the smooth transfer of the hosting of the Fats and Oils committee from the UK to Malaysia. Intensive negotiations in the Milk and Milk Products and Fish and Fishery Products Committees saw us protecting compositional and safety standards for such commodities as fermented milk drinks (e.g. probiotic yoghurts), smoked fish, frozen scallops and bivalve molluscs (e.g. mussels and oysters). All of these commodities are important to the UK and the standards ensure safe and fair international trade, protecting both industry and consumers worldwide.

You can read more on Codex on our website (see full address³⁰).

Top challenges for the year ahead

Working with local authorities

We need to work with local authorities across the UK to deliver improved food safety management and compliance by food business operators so that we will meet our strategic plan target by December 2010.

Food Information Regulation

The proposed Food Information Regulation provides an opportunity to consolidate and improve existing European Union labelling requirements. We will be working with stakeholders to make sure that the regulation meets the needs of UK consumers, including other government departments and food businesses.

Sustainability and health

One of our challenges is how to set up informal discussions around sustainability and health, and then provide clear advice for consumers.

30. www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/regulation/Codexbranch/

openness and
independence...



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Effective delivery



Effective delivery' sets out the principles underlying the way we will implement our Strategic Plan to 2010.

In our strategic plan, we highlight how we will consider sustainable development in all of our activities and policy decisions. We stress the importance of working in partnership with stakeholders to meet targets, and that we are committed to promoting diversity.

You can download our Strategic Plan to 2010 from our website (see full address³¹).

Tomorrow's Agency

This year we have embarked on our Tomorrow's Agency strategy, a substantial change programme that sets out to ensure that we are equipped to meet our future challenges.

The programme is focused on three outcomes:

1. being a better place to work, with a culture built on high standards of leadership, effective staff development, stronger performance management, and personal ownership and accountability
2. flexible, efficient and customer-focussed systems and processes that deliver consistent, best practice approaches
3. ensuring value for money by using our resources in flexible, sustainable and more innovative ways

The first phase of the programme started as 10 constituent projects. Two of these projects are complete, with most of the rest likely to be completed in the first half of 2008/09. The second phase is now under way, and focuses more on our external-facing activity.

31. Read our Strategic Plan in full at www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/strategicplan2010e.pdf (English) and www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/strategicplanto2010welsh.pdf (Welsh). You can order copies from Food Standards Agency Publications by phoning 0845 606 0667, faxing 020 8867 3225, or emailing foodstandards@ecgroup.uk.com.

Sustainable development

Sustainable development is about meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

This is a big challenge. The government is committed to integrating sustainable development principles into all of its activities and policies, and we are committed to taking sustainable development into account in all of our activities and policy decisions.

We have made significant progress in meeting overarching government targets on estates management, including areas such as energy use, waste and recycling, and procurement. In March 2008, the government's independent watchdog, the Sustainable Development Commission, awarded us five stars for progress on estates management sustainability, making us one of the top departments. We are continuing work to improve on water consumption and travel, in particular.

Environmental protection is an important aspect of sustainability. A copy of our environmental position statement is included at appendix 5. This underlines our commitment to incorporating sustainability into how we manage our business.

The biggest challenge we face is embedding sustainability considerations fully into policy making. To address this, we conducted a series of workshops which culminated in a major stakeholder workshop in December 2007. On the basis of this work, we have proposed an approach that will be put to our Board for approval in September 2008, following public consultation.

Key aspects of the new approach are that we:

- ensure we achieve our statutory remit of protecting consumer's interest in relation to food
- maximise positive impacts in all other areas of sustainability
- take greater responsibility for significant negative impacts

Underpinning this is the recognition that we need to work in partnership with other government departments and other organisations to deliver sustainable policies.

Find out more about the consultation, and download the FSA sustainable development action plans and progress reports, on our website (see full addresses³²).

You can read more on the government's sustainability targets at www.sustainable-development.gov.uk

32. www.food.gov.uk/consultations/ukwideconsults/2008/sd0803 (consultation details) and www.food.gov.uk/aboutus/how_we_work/sustainability/ (sustainability reports).

Openness

'Openness' is one of our core values at the FSA.

Being open means that we will use plain language and communicate in a timely way; that we will explain the reasons for our decisions and advice; and that we will publish our targets and our achievements against them.

Our Statement of General Objectives and Practices document confirms our commitment to operating in an open and transparent way. This code of practice gives more detail on how we will act to meet our objectives and corporate values. It also provides information on how you can request information from us. You can read more about how we work on our website (see full address³³).

Disclosing information

Disclosure of information is the norm. We aim to publish actively any information or advice we provide to others. Where we do not actively publish information or advice, we will normally make it available in response to specific requests. We release information as swiftly as is practical, and the same arrangements apply to advice or information we have received from others.

More detailed information about our openness policy, how we put it into practice, and how you can obtain information from us, can be found on our website (see full address³⁴).

Our role as a regulator

We have a statutory objective to protect public health and consumers' interests in relation to food and drink. We are, however, aware that excessive or unclear regulations can place an unnecessary burden on business, the public and third sectors – thus hindering effective delivery of the intended benefits.

We implement regulations using our Framework for Regulatory Decision Making, which details the factors we consider when deciding on regulatory intervention and the different options available.

In December 2007, we published three better regulation reports:

- our second Simplification Plan
- a sector-specific study on the effects of food regulation on craft bakers and butchers that produce for and sell in the local market
- a report on a review of FSA guidance

You can read more about better regulation initiatives on our website (see full address³⁵).

33. www.food.gov.uk/aboutus/how_we_work/sgop

34. www.food.gov.uk/aboutus/how_we_work/copopenbranch/

35. www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/regulation/betregs/

Simplification Plan



Published in December 2007, our second Simplification Plan shows significant progress in minimising unnecessary bureaucracy, without compromising public health and consumers' interests.

It reports almost £450 million savings to business and the public sector since 2005: £232 million in the case of business (including £16 million in administrative burden reductions) and £216 million for the public sector. By making it easier for business to comply with regulations, they are more likely to do so. Better compliance means better protection for consumers.

The protection of public health and consumers' other interests always remains our top priority at the FSA. While the measures in our Simplification Plan ensure that burdens on private, public and third sectors are minimised, there will be no compromise to public health and consumer interests.

Key features of the plan

'Safer food better business' has been published to help businesses comply with European Union food hygiene requirements. This has generated an estimated £128 million saving – with potential further savings of £40-50 million.

There is new guidance that separates legal requirements from best practice in the case of record-keeping of food, feed and animals destined for the food chain. This has resulted in a £15.6 million saving.

Consolidation of bottled water regulations has saved the bottled water industry £80,000, and consumers will benefit from increased confidence in the standards of bottled water.

Enforcement procedures developed by the Agency and local authorities have reduced the inspection burdens for farmers who are members of recognised farm assurance schemes. Savings have been calculated at £300,000 each year for around 60,000 farmers.

The plan includes the results of three studies promised in last year's plan:

- a sector-specific study on the concerns of small-scale butchers and craft bakers around hygiene approvals and labelling
- a review of our guidance for business
- a review of forms we require businesses to complete

You can download our second Simplification Plan from our website (see full address³⁶).

36. www.food.gov.uk/aboutus/publications/busreps/

New food hygiene inspection scheme for farms

A change in the approach to how farms are inspected will lead to significant time and cost savings for thousands of farms and local authorities across the country – something which will also benefit consumers.

The initiative, which was announced in June following European Union legislation, will help focus inspections and make regulations simpler. Making compliance with the law simpler will increase levels of compliance.

Developed in partnership with local authorities and industry, the initiative recognises membership of an approved farm assurance scheme. This means a lower frequency of food hygiene inspections, reducing burdens on businesses and benefiting farmers, enforcement authorities and consumers. We estimate that savings each year will be around £571,000 for farmers and £2 million for local authorities across the UK.

Inspections will now focus on farming sectors identified as having a higher food safety risk. Focusing the efforts of local authorities on such premises should improve consumer protection, as enforcement action will be targeted where the risks occur.

We are considering the scope to reduce the burden of both statutory inspections and assurance scheme audits at milk production holdings. As part of this consideration, we have commissioned an independent study to evaluate and compare the statutory inspections undertaken on our behalf by Animal Health Dairy Hygiene and the audits undertaken on behalf of Assured Dairy Farms.

More information on the Better Regulation Initiative can be found on our website (see full address³⁷).

Our international role

We play an increasingly important role internationally, representing the UK government on joint international bodies, and making food safety information available to other countries and organisations.

37. www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/regulation/betregs/

Developing relationships with international organisations plays an equally important role. We have an interest in the work of several international organisations, including the:

- joint FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex Alimentarius)
- World Health Organisation (WHO)
- Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO)
- World Trade Organisation (WTO)
- Office International des Epizooties / World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE)

In particular, we negotiate on behalf of the UK government in the Codex Alimentarius Commission, which develops food standards, guidelines and related texts like codes of practice. By active involvement in meetings and by contributing to the European Union's input to Codex, we aim to influence the standards set for food traded globally and push for better consumer involvement in the development of standards.

Contacts with individual countries have been made through officials visiting the FSA and by FSA representatives travelling overseas. We also have links with food authorities around the world – including those in the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

We aim to ensure that imported foods meet the required UK standards to protect the safety and interests of consumers. This is particularly important considering the diverse range of global foods available to people in the UK, and also with free trade and markets across the European Union.

You can read more about international relations on our website (see full address³⁸).

Building our evidence base



We continually commission scientific research to help ensure that our policies and advice are based on the best available science.

In April 2007, we published our Research and Survey Programmes Annual Report for 2006. The report details the scientific research and survey projects commissioned and active during 2005/06. The corresponding report for 2006/07 was published alongside the Chief Scientist's Annual Report in November 2007.

38. www.food.gov.uk/aboutus/how_we_work/intrelations/

In the past, we have reported on the progress and achievements from all of our research and survey programmes according to their areas. For the 2006 and 2007 reports, we chose instead to detail what we consider to be the highlights of our research. We also introduced a fresh new look and style of presentation, designed to be more user-friendly and better show how our research contributes to our strategic targets.

The reports clearly show how our ongoing research contributes to these targets and those outlined in our Science Strategy 2005-2010. There are four main sections, reflecting our strategic themes of 'food safety', 'eating for health', 'choice' and 'how we deliver'.

The report can be found on our website (see full addresses³⁹). Research is commissioned from contractors through open competition.

New Chief Scientist Annual Report



We launched our new Chief Scientist Annual Report in November 2007.

The first of its kind, the report highlights the science underpinning our everyday work to protect public health and consumer interests in relation to food. It aims to:

- show how the science of food is relevant and central to people's everyday lives, their health and well-being
- show how we focus on consumer interests when translating hard scientific evidence into meaningful advice that can directly influence the food choices people make
- measure the progress being made towards better public health
- present our scientific work and achievements

Topics covered in the report include an assessment of the levels of foodborne illness; an overview of diet and health; and emerging risks on the horizon. You can download the report from our website (see full address⁴⁰).

We anticipate that the second annual report from the Chief Scientist will be published in September 2008 to coincide with the British Association Festival of Science Week. The report will be available at www.food.gov.uk. From now onwards, we will combine the Chief Scientist Annual Report and the Research and Survey Programmes Report to provide an overview of all of our scientific activities.

39. www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2007/apr/report (Research Annual Report 2006); www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/resreport2007 (Research and Survey Programmes Annual Report 2007); www.food.gov.uk/science/researchpolicy/scistrat (Science Strategy)

40. www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/board/fsa071005a.pdf



honesty, integrity
and objectivity...

The Chief Scientist blog

Chief Scientist Dr Andrew Wadge's blog was launched in November 2006.

The blog aims to communicate the science underpinning our policies to a consumer audience. It also hopes to promote the Agency as an open and maturing organisation that actively seeks public dialogue with stakeholders. Since launch, the blog has been used to explain our line on food safety, nutrition and regulatory issues – including organics, traffic light labelling and additives.

It was a finalist in the 'Information and Openness' category of the New Statesman New Media Awards 2007.

Read the blog at www.fsascience.net.

General Advisory Committee on Science

We have now established the new independent General Advisory Committee on Science, chaired by Professor Colin Blakemore.

The overall purpose of the new committee is to offer independent challenge and advice on how we collect and use scientific evidence. Its work will include horizon scanning, science governance, developing good practice and informing science priorities. The committee held its first open meeting in March 2008.

More information is available on our website (see full address⁴¹).

Working with consumers

Putting the consumer first is one of our core values, and a new Advisory Committee on Consumer Engagement (ACCE) will provide the Board with quality assurance of its interaction with consumers. This will include reviewing how it conducts and analyses research, and which tools it uses in its consumer communication and marketing.

The members of the new committee are all senior figures in their current fields. Between them they will offer specialised knowledge in the areas of consumer perspective, analysis of consumer data, performance measurement and marketing innovation.

Philip Cullum was appointed as chair in January 2008, and the ACCE will report annually to the Board. In addition to reporting on the effectiveness of our consumer engagement, it will make recommendations on how the engagement process might be strengthened.

You can read more about the ACCE on our website (see full address⁴²).

41. www.food.gov.uk/science/our_advisors/gacs/

42. www.food.gov.uk/aboutus/how_we_work/acce/

Welsh language

In order to engage with well over the 600,000 consumers who speak Welsh – and at the same time deliver our obligations under the 1993 Welsh Language Act – Welsh language translation and website content management work were brought in-house during 2007/08.

A new in-house Welsh Language Unit was set-up during the year, now located at our Cardiff offices. This has increased our capacity to engage in Welsh, including translation, proofreading, simultaneous translation and media work. Early successes include a Welsh language version of www.salt.gov.uk and www.eatwell.gov.uk. The Unit has started work on www.food.gov.uk.

We have secured the agreement of a new FSA Welsh Language Scheme with the Welsh Language Board, as required by statute. This will be implemented between 2008 and 2012. Members of the team already feature on two monthly food programmes on Welsh language radio stations, and they have already been able to deliver consumer information on several Welsh language TV programmes.

We are also developing a specialist terminology database with the long-term aim of standardising and publishing these terms to ensure consistent messages are delivered to Welsh speaking consumers.

You can find more information at www.salt.gov.uk/halen and www.eatwell.gov.uk/?lang=cy.

Working with industry

At the FSA, we are concerned with the whole food industry – from farming, food production and distribution, to retail and catering. We address food safety issues at every stage, providing information and guidance on best practice and legal requirements.

We regularly issue guidance to food industry representatives and other stakeholders, often as a result of new regulations coming into force. We publish leaflets, factsheets and guidance for people working within the food industries.

For more information on our work with the food industry, visit our website at www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry.

Food business engagement in Wales

FSA Wales' Food Business Engagement Strategy has provided the framework for engagement on our eating for health and consumer choice initiatives.

The strategic approach has been to establish influential links with 'gateway' organisations, as the means to food business engagement and constructive dialogue continues to be held with these organisations.

We plan to establish face-to-face meetings with relevant businesses in 2008/09.

Working with our partners in enforcement

We work very closely with local authorities. These offices enforce most food and feed law on a day-to-day basis, and we support them by funding training, providing grants, and making other resources and guidance available.

We have formal enforcement stakeholder groups in place to help with this support and to ensure we have an effective and coherent partnership with local councils and other key stakeholders. We host an Enforcement Liaison Group, which brings together local authority, industry and consumer stakeholders in addition to other government representatives who cover relevant food enforcement issues. We also manage an Animal Feed Law Enforcement Liaison Group, which oversees the official controls on the production and use of animal feeds.

We formally oversee local authority enforcement activities for food and feed law. We set and monitor standards and audit local authorities' activities to ensure enforcement arrangements are proportionate, consistent and transparent. Powers to enable us to monitor and audit local authorities are contained in the Food Standards Act 1999. Our audits aim to increase the standards of food and feed law enforcement by identifying and sharing good practice found in local authorities.

We are currently reviewing our audit process to ensure we follow a more targeted approach. The scope of audits and the selection of local authorities will be more risk-based, and will also take more account of authorities' own audit activity. The new approach was subject to a three-month UK consultation in January 2008.

You can read more about enforcement at www.food.gov.uk/enforcement

Working across the UK

We advise ministers in UK countries on all issues relating to food safety and standards. Food safety and standards are devolved matters. We have offices in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as a statutory food advisory committee in each country.

Our Regional Unit co-ordinates teams that work out of government offices for the English regions in order to strengthen links with our regional and local partners. In 2006, we established pilot teams of two staff in each of the government offices for the East Midlands, North West, South East and South West. They represent four of the nine regional government offices in England. The outcome of the pilot will determine whether or not we set up teams in the remaining five regions.

Imported food database launched

In April 2007, we launched the Guidance and Regulatory Advice on Import Legislation database to help local authority officers enforce controls on food being commercially imported into the UK from non-EU countries.

The database provides up-to-date imported food legislation and guidance on products of non-animal origin, fish and fishery products from non-EU countries. The database can also be used to search for import conditions for a specified combination of product, country of origin and contaminant. It does not include advice on personal imports.

The system includes a comprehensive 'A-Z' list of food law enforcement community contacts, details of new content, a news section and links to useful websites.

You can find the database on our website (see full address⁴³).

43. www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/imports/enforce_authorities/grail

UK National Control Plan

The purpose of the National Control Plan for the UK is to ensure effective control systems are in place for monitoring and enforcing feed and food law, animal health and animal welfare rules, and plant health law.

In February 2008, we published a revised plan covering the period from January 2007 to March 2011, following a review with the four UK agriculture/rural affairs departments.

The plan is a requirement of European Union Regulation 882/2004 on official controls. This sets out requirements for the regulatory and enforcement authorities in the feed, food, animal health and animal welfare sectors across the member states. Plans must be kept under review and revised regularly. We do this every six months.

You can find out more about the National Control Plan on our website (see full address⁴⁴).

Food Champion Awards



In October 2007, we launched a new Food Champion Awards scheme for local authorities. The awards celebrate local authority achievements in improving local food safety and standards, or in enhancing community diet and nutrition. They recognise good practice and offer an opportunity to make this good practice more widely available.

Increasingly, local authorities are both raising their standards of performance and going beyond their routine responsibilities for food safety and standards. They are finding new and inspiring ways of helping people eat safer and healthier food.

The Food Champion Awards were established in partnership with the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, the Trading Standards Institute, the Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services and the Improvement and Development Agency. Applications were open to all local authorities in England and Wales. Scotland and Northern Ireland could join the scheme after the initial pilot.

In total, 72 applications were received and food champion status was awarded to five authorities for food safety and standards, and six authorities for improving community diet and nutrition.

For more information on the Food Champion scheme and the winners for this year, visit our website (see full address⁴⁵).

44. www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/regulation/europeleg/feedandfood/ncpuk

45. www.food.gov.uk/enforcement/goodpractice/foodchampion/

Food fraud

In March 2008, the Board formally agreed the response to the recommendations of the independent Food Fraud Task Force, set up in 2006 to review the systems in place for tackling food fraud.

The chair of the task force, Dr Philip Barlow, presented the final report of the group's findings – including 16 recommendations for future action – to a Board meeting in September 2007. We have accepted many of the task force's recommendations, a number of which built on ongoing initiatives and recent policy developments. These included:

- the availability of financial and expert support for food fraud investigations
- the development of a national food fraud database
- work to raise the profile of food fraud
- the importance of sharing intelligence
- establishing networks for tackling food fraud, both domestically and across the European Union

A small number of recommendations were not accepted, particularly where existing arrangements were considered to be sufficient in meeting current needs.

Further development of the national food fraud database has seen significant progress. A programme of work to raise the profile of the database within the UK enforcement community resulted in an increase in the amount of intelligence being submitted to us. This in turn has enabled officials to analyse information held on the database and use it to coordinate investigations – including cross-border fraud involving a number of enforcement authorities.

In January 2008, we co-hosted a European Food Fraud Conference, attended by more than 70 senior officials representing a large number of EU member states, the European Commission and key UK stakeholders. The conference provided an excellent opportunity for a wide discussion on differing approaches and experiences. It generated several ideas for further development – including establishing a European Food Fraud Working Group to put in place a system for facilitating cross-Europe cooperation.

You can read more about food fraud at www.food.gov.uk/foodfraud

Top challenges for the year ahead

Simplification of regulations

It will continue to be a challenge to deliver our statutory objective of consumer protection in a way that works with the better regulation agendas of all the different UK countries – whether we are focused on reducing the burdens on businesses (in England) or on better delivery of services for citizens (in Wales).

Prioritising work

We face a period of falling budgets from Westminster and flat or modest increases in our budgets from the devolved administrations. This means we need to redouble our efforts to prioritise work, to learn lessons about what is most effective, and to achieve efficiencies of operation so that we deliver value for money.

Delivering strategic priorities

To deliver our strategic priorities, we need to listen actively to the views of others, so that we can improve the way we do business and ensure that our activities deliver against the needs of consumers and other stakeholders.

Critically, we need to engage with stakeholders not only on our agenda, but also on issues that matter most to them. We need to consider both the most appropriate vehicles for engagement and the key policy areas where we may want to concentrate our efforts.

Sustainable development

On sustainable development, the challenge is to identify and consider the main aspects of sustainability in developing our policy.

Our approach to how we will take sustainable development into account as part of policy making will be discussed by the Board in September 2008. We are also strengthening our sustainable development team to be more effective in integrating sustainable development into all our activity.



7

Our resources over the next three years

The Comprehensive Spending Review

The HM Treasury's Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 saw our programme and administration cost budgets for 2008 to 2011 decline in real terms. As a result, we have had to take a much tougher approach in resourcing allocation.

Details of the settlement are detailed in the table below.

	2007/08 Original Baseline Funding £m	2008/09 £m	2009/10 £m	2010/11 £m
Departmental Resource Budget for both the FSA and MHS	143.9	140.4	137.0	133.6
Near Cash Departmental Funding	141.1	137.6	134.3	131.0
Departmental Capital Budget	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6
Total Departmental Expenditure Limit	142.5	139.1	135.7	132.4



Tomorrow's Agency

We have been working under the guidance of the Tomorrow's Agency programme to build a more robust planning and performance framework. Key elements are an integration of financial and wider business planning; a shift from one-year to three-year business plans, and from divisional to group-level planning.

This overall change in approach was endorsed by the Board in October 2007, when it agreed a set of provisional budgets for 2008 to 2011. This included increases in spend on healthy eating and food safety, balanced by reductions in the Meat Hygiene Service subsidy and in relation to aspects of enforcement work, corporate and central costs.

To achieve the targets set out in the Strategic Plan to 2010, we need to be very focused about our allocation and use of resources. The plans and budgets we have proposed are designed to meet this need. The key messages include:

- scaling up our efforts in key areas, particularly around healthy eating
- progressively reducing the costs of the Meat Hygiene Service where this can be done without risk to consumer safety
- reducing enforcement costs
- investing in a smarter and more efficient corporate centre, and reducing our accommodation costs
- establishing tighter financial disciplines, and anticipating and managing future pressures

The Board approved this approach in March 2008.



stakeholder
confidence
and trust...

Appendix 1: About us

The Food Standards Agency

The Food Standards Act 1999 defines our main purpose as the following:

To protect public health from risks which may arise in connection with the consumption of food, and otherwise to protect the interests of consumers in relation to food.

The FSA is a UK-wide body – 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 the key to our success in maintaining public confidence.

In our role, we:

- advise ministers in all UK countries on all issues relating to food safety and standards
- negotiate on behalf of the UK in Europe, where much of the legal framework and standards for the food market are set; and sit on other international fora
- provide guidance to the public on healthy eating
- work with the food industry to make it easier for consumers to make healthier choices
- carry out surveys on nutrition and diet to monitor changing eating habits

Our remit is wide, involving food safety across the complete food chain. Our job is to protect consumers from health risks, and otherwise to look after their interests in all matters connected with food and drink. More detailed and regularly updated information can be found at www.food.gov.uk⁴⁶. A detailed contact list by subject is available at www.food.gov.uk/aboutus/contactus

As a government department, independent regulator, and consumer protection body, we use the best available evidence to underpin our work. We work with:

- **businesses** across all industry fields to help them keep consumers safe
- **local authorities** and other food law enforcement agencies to help them take proportionate, timely, and resolute action
- **consumers** to provide reliable and up-to-date information so that they can make healthy choices about food

46. We have two additional websites: www.eatwell.gov.uk offers advice to consumers on making healthier choices; and www.salt.gov.uk supports our salt campaign which aims to save lives by reducing the amount of salt people eat

The Board

The Board is responsible for our overall strategic direction and for ensuring our legal obligations are fulfilled. It consists of a chair, deputy chair and up to 12 other members.

The chair and deputy chair are appointed jointly by the Secretary of State for Health; Scottish ministers; the Welsh Assembly Government; and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) in Northern Ireland – named collectively as ‘the appropriate authorities’. Of the other current Board members, eight are appointed by the Secretary of State for Health, two by Scottish Ministers, and one each by the Welsh Assembly Government and DHSSPS.

Members of the Board each demonstrate substantial achievement in their chosen field.

The Chief Executive manages our operational work – appointed with the approval of the ‘appropriate authorities’ in the four countries of the UK, the Prime Minister and the Head of the Civil Service under normal Civil Service Commission rules. The Treasury appoints the Chief Executive as Principal Accounting Officer of the FSA, with responsibility for its day-to-day running. In particular, the Chief Executive has overall responsibility for preparing the Agency’s accounts and for transmitting them to the Comptroller and Auditor General.

More information about our Board can be found at appendix 3 and on our website at www.food.gov.uk/aboutus/ourboard/. Our staff are civil servants, accountable through the Chief Executive to the Board.

Accountability

We are accountable to the Westminster Parliament through the Secretary of State for Health. We are also accountable to the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly Government and the Northern Ireland administration through their health ministers or equivalents.

Food safety and standards are devolved matters: we have offices in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, each headed by a statutorily-appointed Director who is directly accountable to our Chief Executive. There is also a statutory food advisory committee in each country.

Scotland

In Scotland, we provide advice on proposed legislation and all food safety and standards matters to the Minister for Public Health. This ensures consistency of approach, while allowing specific Scottish circumstances to be fully taken into account in the implementation of food safety and standards policy across the country.

The statutory Scottish Food Advisory Committee provides us with independent information and advice on all food safety and standards issues in Scotland. The FSA in Scotland is funded by the Scottish Parliament.

Wales

We are accountable to the Welsh Assembly Government for our activities in Wales – through the Assembly Minister for Health and Social Services, who we also advise on food safety and standards policy and legislation.

The statutory Welsh Food Advisory Committee provides us with independent information and advice on all food safety and standards issues in Wales. In Wales, we are primarily funded by the Welsh Assembly Government.

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, we are responsible for providing advice and draft legislation on food issues to the Northern Ireland Minister responsible for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. The statutory Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee provides us with advice or information about matters connected with our functions in Northern Ireland. The FSA in Northern Ireland is funded from the Northern Ireland estimates.

In Northern Ireland, we have developed several links with other international organisations that have an interest in food safety and standards issues. FSA NI liaises closely on food or food related issues with the Food Safety Promotion Board (FSPB), which operates across the whole of Ireland, and the Food Safety Authority of Ireland, which operates in the Republic of Ireland only. We have also forged close links with the New South Wales Food Authority, and senior personnel from that organisation have visited FSA Northern Ireland. This has led to a greater understanding of food safety and standards practice and the increased sharing of information.

Wine standards

We aim to ensure that EU wine regulations are enforced in the UK. We also maintain the UK Vineyards Register, which records the area covered by vineyards and the annual harvest and production returns from growers and producers.

Our enforcement responsibilities apply to all premises and traders in the production and marketing chain – including wholesalers, warehouses and vineyards. Retail premises come under the control of local authorities trading standards (see www.lacors.gov.uk), as do licensing law requirements from 2005. Further details about licensing can be found on the Department for Culture, Media and Sport website at www.culture.gov.uk.

Our objectives are to:

- encourage growers and traders to comply with laws on wine by offering advice and education
- carry out a programme of inspections using risk analysis to deliver a targeted and cost-effective service
- identify breaches of the law and gather evidence for legal action in serious cases
- work closely with other regulatory bodies

You can find out more about this area of work at www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/winestandards/

The Meat Hygiene Service

The Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) operates in Great Britain is an executive agency of the FSA. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) provides a similar service in Northern Ireland in respect of some 60 licensed fresh meat premises.

The MHS provides assurance to consumers that food business operators produce hygienic fresh meat and that risks to animal health and welfare are controlled. This is achieved through the verification and audit of a food business operator's food safety management plan; meat inspection; and fair, consistent and effective enforcement where appropriate. These cover approved slaughterhouses, cutting plants, farmed and wild game facilities, and co-located minced meat and meat products premises.

The MHS also enforces the regulations concerning *bovine* and other *transmissible spongiform encephalopathies*, and animal by-products, in approved premises. The MHS has its own agency accounting officer – the MHS chief executive – and it publishes its own annual report and accounts. Copies of annual reports can be found at www.food.gov.uk/enforcement/meathygieneservice. More information about MHS enforcement can be found in appendix 6 to this report.

As the central competent authority responsible for official controls in approved meat establishments, we carry out audit work to provide assurance that these controls are being delivered effectively and in accordance with EU requirements. An amended audit scheme introduced for 2007/08 provides a risk-based approach and assessment of MHS structures that support the delivery of controls, in addition to reality checks on the work of MHS teams in approved establishments.

Food law enforcement: Animal Health Dairy Hygiene (formerly known as the Dairy Hygiene Inspectorate)

Animal Health Dairy Hygiene aims to protect the milk supply in England and Wales by ensuring a satisfactory standard of hygiene is maintained on dairy farms.

The organisation is part of Animal Health, an executive agency of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). It acts on our behalf to monitor and verify compliance with – and the enforcement of – food hygiene legislation at milk production holdings. In Northern Ireland, Animal Health Dairy Hygiene's equivalent is part of the Quality Assurance Branch of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. In Scotland, local authorities are responsible for inspections.

Our role as a government department

We work consistently with the three aims of modernising government:

- to ensure policymaking is more joined up and strategic
- to make sure consumers are the focus of our work
- to deliver public services that are high quality and efficient

We are committed to delivering policy results that matter and we aim to develop our policymaking to ensure we take account of and promote best practice.

We publish targets for our service standards on our website. These are in accordance with the 'six standards for central government', relating to answering correspondence; seeing callers; answering telephone calls; publishing contact points; publishing our complaints procedure; and consulting users.

Each year we publish details of the complaints we have received. A Board paper outlining complaints received and action taken in 2007/08 will be published following discussion at the July 2008 Board meeting.

We are committed to doing everything reasonably possible to make our services available to everyone – including people with disabilities, ethnic groups, disadvantaged groups and those with particular health needs; and in particular, promoting racial equality. We will continue to consult users and potential users regularly about the services we provide, and we will report our findings.

We are committed to promoting racial equality. The Race Relations Act 1976, as amended by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, gives public authorities a general duty to promote race equality in Great Britain. Under this duty, public authorities must aim to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination when they carry out their functions; promote equality of opportunity; and promote good relations between people of different racial groups.

We are currently solely responsible for five public bodies, all advisory committees. In addition, there are five committees and one or more other government departments that report to us. Our Annual Appointment Report can be found at www.food.gov.uk

To ensure that regulations on food safety and standards are enforced to protect consumers, we work with:

- the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) across Great Britain
- the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) in Northern Ireland
- local authorities and other government departments

We monitor the performance of local authorities through our audit scheme. The scheme is implemented on a UK level, with the FSA in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland each co-ordinating their own audit programmes.

Developing our people

It is through our people and the knowledge and skills they possess that we are able to achieve our key aims and objectives. Their development, in line with our core values and the principles of Investors in People (IiP), is critical to our success. We will continue to develop the organisation through growing its capability and capacity to deliver.

We successfully achieved IiP accreditation in April 2004. Our 2006 staff attitude survey indicated that staff increasingly value the investment we make towards their development, and our informal assessment against the new IiP standard in November 2006 showed that we had made good progress towards a full reassessment against the standard. We retained IiP accreditation after a review in November 2007.

We currently provide tailored learning opportunities through our learning and development programme. Following a major skills needs analysis, we have improved the programme further to support the skills needed for successful delivery of our Strategic Plan. This development will include activities to build on leadership skills and the ability to support the delivery of our strategic plan by working in partnership with key stakeholders. Our Leadership Programme for Members of the Senior Civil Service programme has had a positive impact on the leadership capabilities of our senior staff, and the process of structured development has been extended to middle managers.

Diversity

We continue to ensure that everyone who works in the FSA – and people who come into contact with us – is treated fairly and with respect. Our human resource policies support this aim, and we review these policies regularly to reflect changes in legislation and best practice. For example, our competency framework has been equality proofed and a recent review of all our policies will be subject to a similar assessment.

We are always looking at ways we can raise awareness of diversity. Our Diversity Forum continues to grow and develop. Our representatives, who have different diversity agendas, meet on a regular basis to identify, support and promote good inclusion practice. Our Diversity Strategy contains action plans that are aimed at delivering our challenging organisation-wide diversity targets.

We continue to support the Windsor Fellowship, an educational charity providing personal and management training programmes for talented and high performing undergraduates from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Recruitment

We follow the principle of fair and open competition in our recruitment campaigns, ensuring they are in accordance with the requirements of the civil service commissioners.

A recent audit by the commissioners highlighted our strengths in providing comprehensive job descriptions that outlines the qualities required of expected applicants. As emphasised by the commissioners, this assists in ensuring we attract the most suitable candidates for jobs. Our use of different assessment techniques was also supported by the commissioners, who incorporated a number of our practices in their good practice guide to recruitment.

We continue to ensure that our recruitment practices support our equal opportunities policies. Our Guaranteed Interview Scheme for applicants with disabilities ensures we obtain applications from under-represented groups, while we continue with our features in Hobsons Ethnic Minority and Science Guides.

We are conscious, however, that we need to do more to make sure we attract the right applicants for jobs. Our employer brand, which was developed with our recruitment consultants, Tribal Resourcing, has proved successful in helping us improve both the quality and quantity of applicants.

The interchange of staff with key stakeholders has continued, with a number of our staff being seconded to other organisations during the year. Secondments include moves to consumer organisations, enforcement bodies, the European Commission in Brussels, and the European Food Safety Authority. Staff have also taken the opportunity to complete secondments of up to a year in other food agencies – in countries like New Zealand, Holland and Australia. All of this aids the development of mutual understanding, as well as providing development opportunities for staff.

Accounts

Our accounts are published separately from the annual report. Copies of the accounts are available from The Stationery Office and on our website at www.food.gov.uk

Appendix 2: How we are organised



Chief Executive
Tim Smith



Director of Strategy
and Resources
Richard Calvert



Director of
Consumer Protection
and Enforcement
David Statham



Chief Scientist
and Director of
Food Safety
Andrew Wadge



Director of
Consumer Choice
and Dietary Health
Gill Fine



Director of FSA
Scotland
George Paterson



Chief Executive
Meat Hygiene Service
Steve McGrath



Director of FSA
Wales
Steve Wearne



Director of FSA
Northern Ireland
Morris McAllister



Director of Legal
Services
Vivienne Collett



Director of
Communications
Terrence Collis

A detailed contact list by subject is available at www.food.gov.uk/aboutus/contactus

If you cannot find the contact you need, please phone our helpline (020 7276 8829) or the switchboard (020 7276 8000).

Appendix 3: Our Board and Chief Executive

The Chief Executive

For further information, including biographical details of the current Chief Executive and Director profiles, please visit www.food.gov.uk/aboutus/



John Harwood
Chief Executive
(to March 2008)



Tim Smith
Chief Executive
(from March 2008)

The Board



1. Dame Deirdre Hutton CBE
Chair

2. Dr Ian Reynolds
Deputy Chair (Chair of the Meat Hygiene Service Board)

3. Professor Graeme Millar CBE
(Scotland/Chair of the Scottish Food Advisory Committee)

4. John W Spence
(Wales/Chair of the Welsh Food Advisory Committee)

5. Dr Maureen Edmondson OBE
(Northern Ireland/Chair of the Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee)

6. Professor Sue Atkinson CBE
(from February 2008)

7. Richard Ayre
(Term ended July 2007)

8. Tim Bennett

9. Chrissie Dunn
(Term ended February 2008)

10. Margaret Gilmore
(from March 2008)

11. Clive Grundy
(from February 2008)

12. Michael Parker

13. Christopher Pomfret

14. Professor Bill Reilly

15. Nancy Robson

16. Sandra Walbran
(term ended May 2008)

Appendix 4: Performance against our Strategic Plan targets

Food safety

Strategic Plan target to 2010	Commentary
<p>We will work with industry to achieve a 50% reduction in the incidence of UK-produced chickens which test positive for Campylobacter by the end of December 2010.</p>	<p>The current strategy for meeting this target has been reviewed. We will continue to focus on biosecurity on poultry farms and monitor trends from the retail survey. We have also commissioned additional research into the issue. An FSA Board paper on progress was discussed at the Open Session in February and is available on our website at www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/board/fsa080208.pdf</p>
<p>We will work with industry to achieve a 50% reduction in the incidence of pigs which test positive for Salmonella at slaughter by the end of December 2010.</p>	<p>The industry scheme (part-funded by FSA) is achieving little or no reduction because not enough farmers were targeted. A series of workshops for farmers took place in winter 2007. A new industry scheme started in April 2008 concentrating on integrated farmer processor approach.</p>
<p>We will secure improvements in slaughterhouse hygiene by the end of December 2010.</p>	<p>This target is being revised, following discussion at the FSA Board meeting in February 2008. The tool currently in development has taken longer to develop than envisaged and new research will be linked to the revised target.</p>
<p>Working with stakeholders, we will provide guidance and support to help small retail and catering businesses. By the end of December 2010, all food businesses are actively working to achieve compliance with food safety management requirements with at least 75% fully compliant.</p>	<p>Delivery of the target is on course. This is a challenging target due to a range of factors. However, the SFBB product range has been expanded, funding has been agreed and the 3rd phase of the SFBB grant scheme has recently been launched.</p>
<p>We will promote and aid the development of a sensitive, rapid and cost effective live test for TSEs by the end of December 2010.</p>	<p>This is an aspirational target and the FSA is funding a number of projects towards this goal. Following a scientific review of the TSE research programme, we are planning a further project, of about six months duration, to look at the cost/benefit of the work and how a rapid live test might be used in practice, given the decline in BSE and the uncertainties over sheep TSEs.</p>
<p>Develop effective interventions to tackle food safety problems at source before they become incidents, by the end of December 2010.</p>	<p>We are making good progress in this area. Future plans have been informed by lessons learned from incident reviews, including the recommendations from the independent review of the Sudan 1 incident published in September 2007. The Incident Prevention Strategy was discussed by the Board in March and we issued a draft plan for public consultation on 9 May 2008. Both the Board paper and the draft Incident Prevention Strategy Plan are available on our website at www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/board/fsa080306.pdf and www.food.gov.uk/consultations/ukwideconsults/2008/incprevplan</p>

Eating for health

Strategic Plan target to 2010	Commentary
<p>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 the end of December 2010 and to reduce salt intake of children, in line with Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition age-specific recommendations, also by the end of December 2010. We will monitor progress to ensure that we remain on course to achieve the target.</p>	<p>More than 70 businesses/trade associations have committed to reducing salt levels in processed foods in line with FSA targets set in 2006, and urine analyses reflecting salt intakes in 2005/06 indicate a reduction to 9.0g per day. Data on intakes in 2008 will be available shortly.</p>
<p>We will work with health and other departments and stakeholders to develop and implement, by the end of December 2008, a strategy for calorie intakes which contributes to achieving a balance between calorie intake and energy output.</p>	<p>Key areas of activity include portion sizes and reformulation. The FSA is working with DH to support the delivery of the Obesity Strategy for England. A timetable and milestones will be discussed with stakeholders in autumn 2008.</p>
<p>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 end of December 2010.</p>	<p>Focused partnerships in specific product categories are under development and key outcomes and timetables will be developed. A saturated fat awareness campaign will take place in early 2009.</p>
<p>By the end of December 2008, we will have completed the independent evaluation of the impacts of front of pack labelling on consumer purchasing behaviour and knowledge and begun discussions on future approaches with stakeholders.</p>	<p>The independent evaluation is under way and due to complete by the end of 2008. We will meet with stakeholders to discuss translating results into policy recommendations in the next few months.</p>

Choice

Strategic Plan target to 2010	Commentary
<p>By the end of December 2008, we will recommend a national scheme for publishing information to consumers on food hygiene in food businesses based on evidence from a series of pilots working in partnership with Local Authorities.</p>	<p>This work is already complete.</p>
<p>We will implement an action plan to deliver recommendations of the Food Fraud Task Force which fall within the period of this Strategic Plan.</p>	<p>Action Plan was agreed by the Board in March 2008, and the work is in progress to deliver the agreed outputs.</p>

Effective delivery

Strategic Plan target to 2010	Commentary
<p>For UK-related regulations, achieve a 25% reduction (on 2005 baseline) by the end of April 2010 of the administrative burden over whose implementation the UK has some control.</p>	<p>Too early to judge. While it is too early to make a firm judgement on whether we will meet the target, we have continued to make substantial progress in reducing administrative burdens, with an overall reduction now totalling £43 million – an increase of £28 million over the last year. In order to meet the target, we will need to deliver a further net reduction of around £93 million over the next two years.</p>

Appendix 5: Our environmental position statement

Introduction

We aim to pursue sound environmental practices at our offices so we can contribute to sustainable development and help the planet.

Global environmental problems include climate change, ozone depletion, pollution and using up non-renewable resources. Climate change is arguably one of the most pressing of these issues. Rising global temperatures will bring changes in weather patterns, rising sea levels, and increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events.

The main human influences on global climate change are thought to be emissions of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide (CO²) and methane. By reducing the number of these gases, even marginally, the rate of change should be less and there will be less impact on our planet and our lives.

Aim

As part of the wider implementation of the principles of sustainable development, we are committed to minimising the environmental negative impacts of our activities. We will seek to develop an ethos of environmental responsibility and promote the use of sustainable resources to reflect best environmental, social and economic practice.

Objectives

Our objectives are to:

- comply with all relevant legislation, regulation and other requirements
- monitor, review and report against performance and progress in relation to government targets
- promote awareness and understanding of sustainable operations among staff through publicity, performance information and the publication of this policy statement
- manage and conserve energy and water efficiently
- promote waste reduction and recycling
- review our activities and operations to identify sustainability aspects, risks, and prioritise action to address the impact of these

This policy and other relevant documents will be made available on our website and intranet.

Appendix 6: Meat Hygiene Service enforcement

The Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) Inspection Team

The MHS provides assurance to consumers that Food Business Operators (FBOs) produce fresh meat under hygienic conditions and in accordance with the Regulations, and that risks to animal health and welfare are controlled. This is achieved through verification and audit of the FBO's food safety management plan, based on HACCP (Hygiene Assessment and Critical Control Points) systems; meat inspection, and fair, consistent and effective enforcement where appropriate. The MHS is present in approved slaughterhouses, cutting plants, farmed and wild game facilities, and co-located minced meat and meat products premises in Great Britain only (there are separate arrangements for meat inspection in Northern Ireland). The MHS also enforces the regulations concerning bovine and other Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (TSEs), and animal by-products, in approved premises. The MHS operational workforce consists of around 1,450 full-time, casual and contracted staff in the 'front-line' meat inspection teams located in approved fresh meat premises throughout Britain. In addition, the MHS employs around 200 administrative and managerial staff at its headquarters in York and its five regional offices in York, Edinburgh, Wolverhampton, Cardiff and Taunton. Application of the health mark confirms that red meat and wild game has been produced in accordance with the regulations, and under the supervision of an Official Veterinarian (OV).

Transforming the MHS

A review of the delivery of official controls in approved slaughterhouses was undertaken on behalf of the FSA in late 2006 and early 2007 (The Tierney Report). In the face of competition from and FSA-appointed control body, the MHS embarked – in February 2007 – on an ambitious programme of transformation to cut costs and ensure that it operates more efficiently and effectively. In November 2007, the MHS declared 134 meat inspection posts to be redundant. This was followed in December 2007 by a wholesale restructuring of the MHS Operations Directorate, involving:

- the replacement of 29 Area Managers with 12 Business Managers
- the creation of 37 Lead Veterinarian posts;
- the closure of all five regional office by September 2008

A programme of Voluntary Early Retirement/Voluntary Severance was introduced for operational and office based staff, as a result of which 75 management posts are to go, saving £4 million by 2010/11.

A new charging mechanism is due to be introduced in 2009/10 to give the FBOs an incentive to work closely with the MHS to reduce costs. Closer working between FSA and MHS corporate services will further reduce costs, as will working with the FSA to eliminate specific tasks currently undertaken by the MHS (such as supervision of the removal of Specified Risk Material in cattle, sheep and goats) and encouraging the adoption – by the meat industry – of Plant Inspection Assistants (PIAs) in poultry abattoirs, to replace MHS Poultry Meat Inspectors.

The MHS Enforcement Policy outlines the major functions of the MHS, the principles of enforcement that the MHS has agreed to adopt, and the standards that will be applied when carrying out enforcement work. It also seeks to ensure that any formal action in which the MHS engages is reasonable, consistent, and proportionate to the risk posed to public health and animal welfare. The published enforcement policy can be accessed at www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/mhsenforcementpolicy.pdf

Those working for the MHS may speak directly to plant production staff, but will also inform the managers of approved premises of significant deficiencies. Written advice/warnings are appropriate when there is a minor contravention of the regulations which does not have an immediate impact on public health or animal welfare, or where the occupier fails to follow previous verbal advice. Where informal advice is not followed, the Official Veterinarian may escalate matters up to formal enforcement through the enforcement hierarchy.

Formal Enforcement Action

Statutory notices may be served due to defects in hygiene, unsatisfactory structural matters, to stop the use of particular types of equipment, to impose conditions on the meat production process, to close down the operation completely, or to stop a particular practice that contravenes the hygiene provisions of the legislation. Statutory notices must accurately reflect the non-compliance, refer correctly to the relevant legislation, and be clearly legible and unambiguous in order to be legally valid.

Formal and informal enforcement action taken by the MHS during 2007/08

Implementation of the EU Food Hygiene Regulations from 1 January 2006 did not materially affect the reasons for taking enforcement action, but it did herald a change in the layout of the formal notices that can be served, and in their titles.

	Number of Notices, 1 April 2006 – 31 March 2007	Number of Notices, 1 April 2007 – 31 March 2008
Formal Action		
Hygiene Emergency Prohibition Notice, served under the Food Hygiene (England) (Scotland) (Wales) Regulations 2006, giving an FBO a day's notice of the intention to apply to a court for the granting of a Hygiene Emergency Prohibition Order	Nil	Nil
Hygiene Improvement Notice served under the Food Hygiene (England) (Scotland) (Wales) Regulations 2006	777	563
Remedial Action Notice served under the Food Hygiene (England) (Scotland) (Wales) Regulations 2006	346	164
Informal Action		
Written warning	6,637	3,848

Source: Veterinary & Technical Directorate of the MHS

Prosecutions

Following a recommendation by the MHS, prosecutions are taken by the relevant enforcement authority. In England and Wales, they are taken by the FSA except in animal welfare, cattle identification

and some animal by-product and TSE cases where Defra are the prosecuting authority. In Scotland, the prosecutor is the relevant Procurator Fiscal.

Prosecutions are only taken after oral representations have been made to the plant management. In most but not all cases, a hierarchy of enforcement (including the provision of verbal and written advice and the service of statutory notices) will have been followed and found to be insufficient before a recommendation for investigation with a view to prosecution is made by the Official Veterinarian.

Those recommendations are subject to a robust quality control process, having been subject to a case review at the MHS before passing through the hands of FSA Investigations Branch, FSA Legal and, where appropriate, Defra lawyers. The final decision on whether or not to prosecute rests with prosecution lawyers acting on behalf of the FSA or Defra, in accordance with the Code for Crown Prosecutors. FSA lawyers will also take account of the MHS Enforcement Policy in making their decision.

In Scotland, the decision to prosecute rests with the relevant Procurator Fiscal, who will consider cases reported by FSA Legal following an MHS recommendation in accordance with the Prosecution Code issued by the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service.

In certain circumstances, an official caution (or, in Scotland, a formal warning) will be appropriate. Examples would include cases where the criteria for prosecution has been made out and there have been admissions by the food business operator, but the operator does not have a history of non-compliance, the offence is less serious or there is evidence of remorse on the part of the operator. In 2007/08, 23 official cautions or formal warnings were issued by the FSA to food business operators.

In 2007/08, the FSA Investigations Branch undertook to investigate 163 referrals by the MHS for possible prosecution. The breakdown of these referrals by legislation was as follows:

Referrals by the MHS for possible prosecution 2007/08

Legislation	Number of Referrals
Food Hygiene / Safety	87
Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies	42
Animal Welfare	17
Animal By-Products	13
Cattle Identification	4
Total	163

Source: Legal Services Group, Food Standards Agency

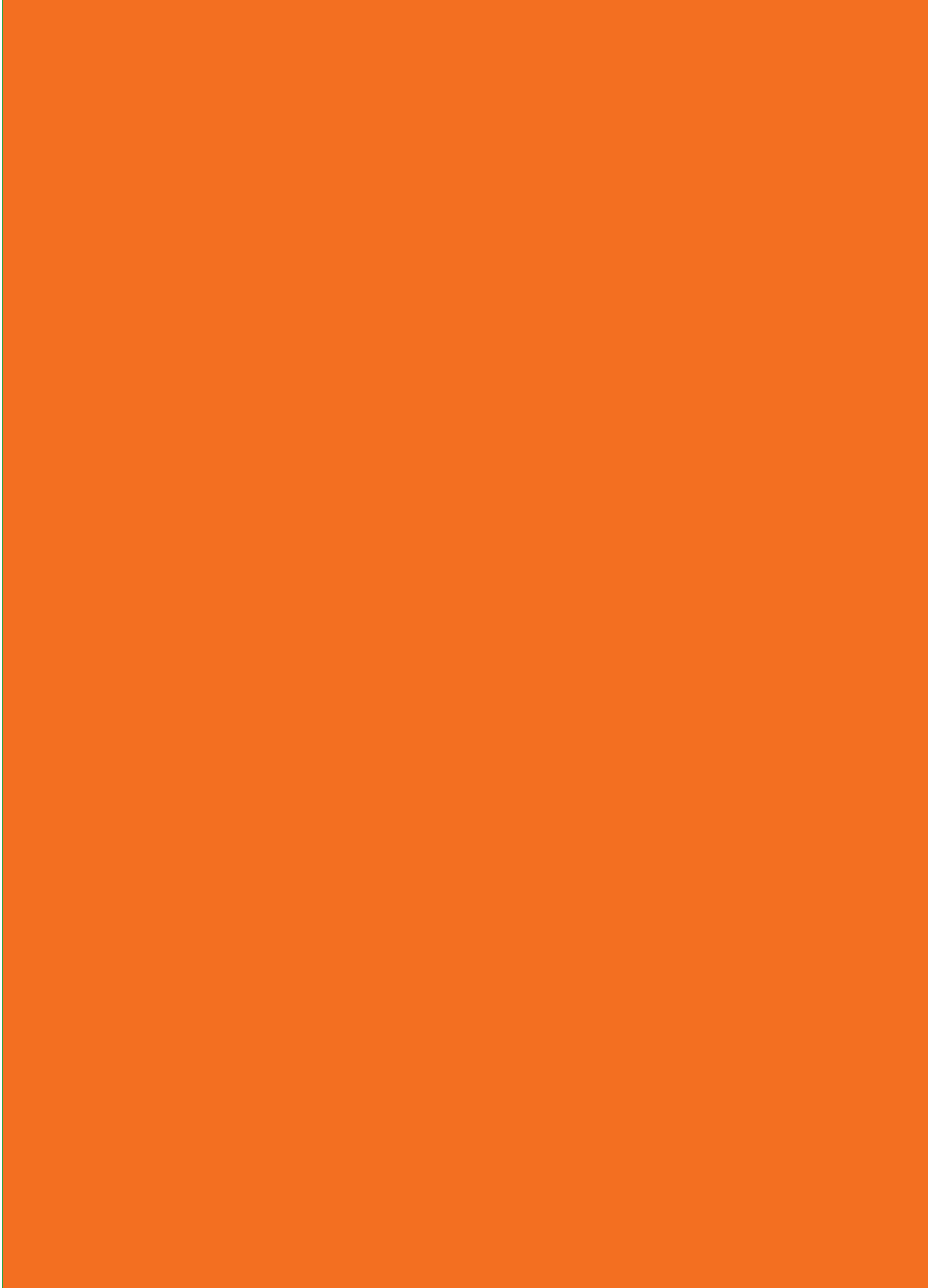
The timescales for prosecutions means that it is rare for a case to progress from referral to a final court hearing within the same reporting year. Therefore, many of the 163 referrals investigated in 2007/08 have yet to be concluded.

However, it is possible to report on all those cases that were concluded during 2007/08. Overall, 40 cases (comprising a total of 305 individual charges) were brought before the courts by the FSA or Defra during the year. The charges laid in these cases covered a total of 174 separate referrals from the MHS. Convictions were secured in 35 of the cases. Three cases resulted in acquittal with proceedings stayed on one occasion and one prosecution withdrawn.

Appendix 7: Glossary of terms

Food safety

Strategic Plan target to 2010	Commentary
ACCE	Advisory Committee on Consumer Engagement
BSE	Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy
DARD	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
DHSSPS	Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
EC	European Commission
EFSA	European Food Safety Authority
EU	European Union
FBO	Food business operator
FSA	Food Standards Agency
FSPB	Food Safety Promotion Board in Ireland
HACCP	Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point – a documented food safety management system widely regarded as the most effective way of managing and controlling hazards inherent in food handling and production. It is a structured approach based on seven principles, which may be applied flexibly in food businesses of all sizes to ensure that proportionate risk-based controls are in place and safe food is produced.
JECFA	Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives
MHS	Meat Hygiene Service
NI	Northern Ireland
SACN	Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition
SFBB	Safer Food, Better Business
TSE	Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy





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