

Improving Service Delivery
The Food Standards Agency



REPORT BY THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL
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Preface

This report is one of four¹ which consider the action government bodies are taking to improve the services they provide to the public.

The Food Standards Agency is a Non-Ministerial Department responsible for protecting public health and consumer interests in relation to food. It was established in April 2000 when public confidence in the safety of food had been seriously undermined by the Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) crisis and other food safety problems and scares. Operating at arm's length from Ministers the Agency is free to publish advice without the need for political agreement. It employs 667 staff² with annual expenditure of some £97 million. The Agency has a wide remit, involving food safety across the whole supply chain - 'from farm to fork', nutrition, food standards and food labelling. The Agency is both a government department and a regulator, with responsibilities for negotiating in the European Union on behalf of the UK Government. The Agency then leads on the implementation of European Union food law as applied through domestic legislation.

The effectiveness of the Agency depends in part on the extent to which it is trusted by the public to provide reliable and impartial advice. Improving public confidence in food safety and standards arrangements is therefore one of its main aims.

Overall, the Agency has made progress in meeting this objective. In 2001-02 some 506 recorded incidents with the potential to affect food safety were investigated and 47 Food Hazard Warnings were issued to local authorities alerting them to potential dangers to health, or requiring them to remove food from sale. Some £6 million is spent annually on research and surveys into nutrition.

The Agency has also sought to demonstrate its openness and independence by ensuring that its decision-making is transparent, both through holding its Board Meetings in public and through regular consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, particularly organisations representing consumer interests.

When asked the question "have you ever heard of the Food Standards Agency" in 2002, 76 per cent of the population said that they had, compared with 58 per cent in 2000. Sixty per cent said they were very or fairly confident in the role played by the Agency in protecting public health with regard to food safety (compared with 50 per cent in 2000); one third considered that the Agency provided advice that was independent and unbiased. In respect of the public's awareness of the Food Standards Agency as a possible source of information about food standards and safety, 13 per cent identified the Agency as a possible source of information in 2002 (compared with 8 per cent in 2000).

¹ The other three related reports are: *Improving Service Delivery: The Veterans Agency (HC522)*; *Improving Service Delivery: The Forensic Science Service (HC523)*; and a summary report *Improving Service Delivery: the Role of Executive Agencies (HC525)*.

² 570 in London, 19 in Wales, 50 in Scotland and 18 in Northern Ireland. Excludes the Meat Hygiene Service. (Source: Food Standards Agency Annual Report and Accounts, 2001-02).

There is scope for the Agency to make further progress by (i) setting out the approach used to reach judgements about where to concentrate the Agency's efforts to improve food safety and standards and determining priorities when responding to food incidents; (ii) having comprehensive information on the costs of its work to assist in deciding how best to match its resources to priorities; (iii) developing more focused indicators to monitor and manage its operational performance covering, for example, the balance between planned and reactive work; and (iv) adopting a more systematic approach to assessing the impact its specific actions have on improving food safety and standards.

The report examines how the Agency identifies risks to food safety and standards; the action it takes in response to such risks; the ways it provides advice to consumers; and the transparency of its decision-making. The report also highlights good practice which other public bodies might adopt to improve service delivery.

Food Standards Agency website: www.food.gov.uk

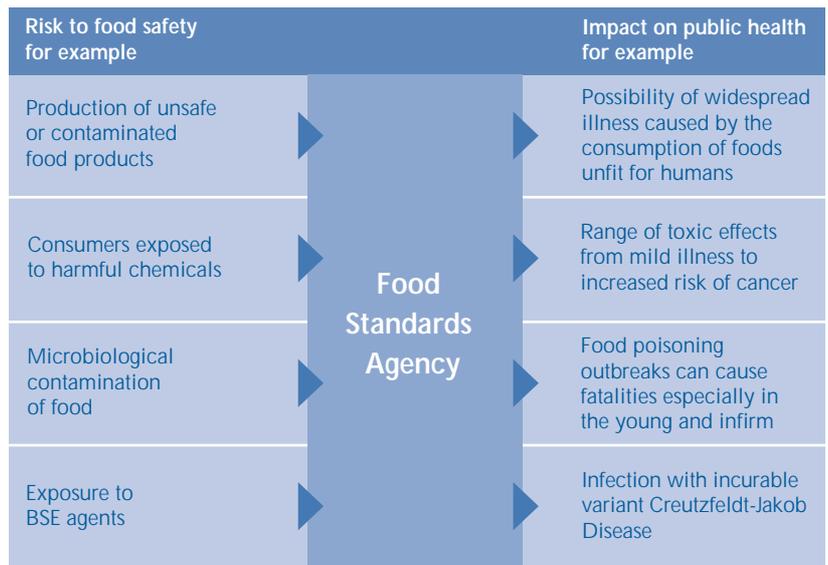
executive summary

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1 UK households spend some £1.5 billion a week on food, of which £0.8 billion is spent on food purchased from supermarkets. Changes in the way food is produced - for example, chickens may be reared outside the European Union, packaged in another country and imported into the UK or incorporated into processed food sold in the UK - the potential contamination of food from chemicals; and the number of reported cases of food poisoning have all led to growing public concern over food safety. The Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) crisis, in particular, seriously undermined the public's confidence in scientific advice provided by departments.

1 Risks to food safety and their potential impact on health



Source: Food Standards Agency

2 To help restore public confidence in the regulatory system, the Food Standards Agency was established in April 2000 to promote food safety and food standards as a Non-Ministerial Department - at arm's length from Ministers - focusing on the protection of consumers and their interests. The Agency has wide powers to publish information and advice, including advice to Ministers. The Agency is led by a Board appointed to act in the public interest. The Board is required to be independent and its openness is subject to public scrutiny at Board meetings held in public. The Agency is accountable to Parliament and the devolved administrations through Health Ministers. The Agency's key performance targets are set out in **Figure 2**.

2 The Food Standards Agency's performance against its 2001-02 targets

Target	Achievement
<p>AIM 1</p> <p>Measurably improve public confidence in the national food safety and standards arrangements</p>	<p>Public confidence has improved as measured by the three surveys of consumer attitudes so far commissioned by the Agency for 2000, 2001 and 2002.</p> <p>These surveys show an increase in confidence in the Agency between 2000 and 2002 from 50 per cent to 60 per cent amongst the general population. Just under one third of the public considers that the Agency provides information which is independent and unbiased.</p>
<p>AIM 2</p> <p>Reduce foodborne illness by 20 per cent over the next five years, including reducing levels of salmonella in UK produced chickens on retail sale by at least 50 per cent by the end of 2004-05.</p>	<p>The Agency's achievement against the 20 per cent target will be assessed on the number of laboratory reports about five main foodborne bacteria (salmonella, campylobacter, <i>E.coli</i> O157, listeria and <i>clostridium perfringens</i>) recorded each year over a five year period, excluding cases reported to have been acquired abroad. This only includes a small proportion of actual cases since most are not confirmed by laboratory testing.</p> <p>Based on the cases reported in 2000, the baseline figure against which progress will be assessed is 65,209. In 2000, the levels of salmonella in UK produced chickens on retail sale was some 20 per cent. By June 2001 this had reduced to an average of 5.8 per cent across the UK. Since the Agency has achieved this target ahead of schedule, it has now shifted its focus to campylobacter, which is the single biggest identified cause of food poisoning in the UK.</p> <p>The Agency published its five-year campaign to reduce the incidence of foodborne illness in humans in July 2001.</p> <p>The Agency launched its five-year food hygiene campaign in February 2002.</p>
<p>AIM 3</p> <p>To protect consumers through improved food safety and standards by:</p> <p>a) Improving local authority enforcement, by developing a new framework agreement with local authorities to promote consistently high enforcement standards;</p> <p>b) Promoting the use of HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points), by implementing HACCP standards in 30 per cent of food premises; and,</p> <p>c) Improving the safety of meat through Meat Hygiene Service action to ensure the effective enforcement of hygiene controls, by setting targets to ensure the application of clean livestock policy, health marking and strict enforcement of controls.</p>	<p>Framework Agreement with local authorities operational from April 2001. The Agency monitors the enforcement performance of local authorities and carries out audits of them. In England in 2001-02, the Agency audited ten per cent of local authorities, meeting its target. Food Standards Agency Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will each operate their own audit programme within the Framework Agreement in parallel with that for England.</p> <p>The Agency's strategy for HACCP implementation was published in November 2001.</p> <p>Targets are set on an annual basis in consultation with key stakeholders, including the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. They are published in the Meat Hygiene Service Annual Report.</p>

Source: Food Standards Agency

3 The Agency provides services to the public in four ways (Figure 3).

3 How the Food Standards Agency delivers its services

	The Agency:
 <p>1</p> <p>Food safety</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Investigates food-related incidents ■ Takes action to ensure consumers are protected in relation to food safety incidents ■ Conducts surveys examining the chemical and microbiological safety of food ■ Issues information and advice for consumers on the safety of food ■ Runs campaigns promoting improved food hygiene in the catering industry and at home ■ Develops, negotiates and implements relevant national and international controls on contaminants in food and the means to enforce them properly
 <p>2</p> <p>Public information, labelling and choice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Negotiates for the UK internationally on labelling initiatives such as for genetically modified foods ■ Works with consumer organisations, local authorities and food manufacturers to improve information for consumers ■ Surveys food in shops to check that it is what it says on the label
 <p>3</p> <p>Nutrition and diet</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Shares responsibility for nutrition with UK Health Departments ■ Conducts research into nutrition ■ Provides advice to consumers about healthy eating ■ Works with industry to improve the nutritional value of processed foods
 <p>4</p> <p>Food law enforcement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ensures consistent and effective enforcement nationally ■ Liaises with local authorities and others to ensure food standards are enforced locally ■ Tests effectiveness of food import controls ■ Is responsible for the Meat Hygiene Service and takes enforcement action where meat hygiene legislation is breached ■ Provides guidance and technical support to enforcement officers

Source: Food Standards Agency

4 The Agency's effectiveness depends, in part, on the extent to which it is trusted by the public to provide reliable and impartial advice. Securing this trust largely depends on how the Agency identifies and takes appropriate action in response to risks to food safety and the public's concerns; the extent to which the public recognise the Agency as the authoritative source of advice and information on food standards; and how transparent the Agency is in its decision-making and engages those who have an interest in food standards. This report considers how well the Agency meets these requirements, examining in detail how the Agency responded to protect the public in six cases (Annex 1). The report also highlights some good practice which other agencies might adopt in the drive to improve the delivery of public services.

Findings

On identifying risks to food safety

- 5 The Agency carries out annual consumer surveys to identify the public's main concerns about food safety. The risk of food poisoning, BSE, the use of pesticides, the use of additives and the feed given to livestock were the five top concerns of consumers in 2002. In addition, the Agency typically has 50 scientific surveys of specific foods underway throughout the year, intended to identify risks which affect (i) food safety such as the levels of chemicals in foods and (ii) food authenticity - that the description of food is accurate so the public are not misinformed.
- 6 In 2001-02, 84 per cent of survey work covered risks to food safety covering, for example, chemical contaminants, microbiological safety and organic environmental contaminants. The remaining 16 per cent addressed food authenticity and nutrient value. The Agency is also notified by local authorities of serious localised food incidents and those where there are wider problems, for example where a local producer supplies outlets nationally. The Agency also receives notifications of food and feed incidents arising in other European Union Member States and third countries via the European Commission's Rapid Alert System For Food and Feed (RASFF). In 2001-02 there were 1,622 rapid alert notifications of which 22 resulted in some action in the UK, whilst the remainder were assessed as not representing a risk to the UK public or were for information purposes only. To assist it in reviewing procedures for responding to the findings of its scientific food surveys or to incidents notified to the Agency, the Agency has recently set up a stakeholder group on incidents and surveys including representatives from industry, enforcement and consumer groups. The first meeting of the stakeholder group was held in February 2003.

On the action taken in response to risks

- 7 The Agency responds to risks to food safety and standards, and public concerns in the following ways:
 - **Informing the public** so that they can take action based on impartial advice to protect themselves. In 2001-02 the Agency informed the public through, for example, press releases, media campaigns and its website. Examples ranged from the "Beat the Barbecue Bugs" campaign³ which advised the public how to deal with food safety risks from barbecuing food, to sending direct mailshots to farmers living in proximity to pyres used to dispose of cattle during the foot and mouth outbreak.
 - **Enforcing food standards.** Local authorities are responsible for enforcing food safety, hygiene and standards in their areas but the Food Standards Act 1999 gives the Agency powers to influence and oversee local authority enforcement activity. Since April 2001, the Agency has had a framework agreement with local authorities which sets out national standards for food law enforcement and against which the Agency monitors and audits local authorities. If the Agency's surveillance work indicates that a food represents a risk it may alert local authorities through a Food Hazard Warning which can, for example, lead to a product being removed from sale⁴. In 2001-02 the Agency issued 47 such warnings covering food ranging from confectionery products found to be contaminated with salmonella (August 2001) to a batch of Bramley apple juice found to contain a toxin - patulin - which was recalled by the manufacturer. The public was advised not to drink the product (March 2002). In 2001-02 the Agency investigated 506 food incidents with 180 arising from manufacture or processing.

³ Food Standards Agency campaign - Beat the Barbecue Bugs, 21 May 2002.

⁴ In many cases once the food manufacturer or retailer is alerted to a food risk they will recall the product.

- For the six cases we examined in detail it took the Agency between 17 days and ten months from identification of the safety issue to a point when the Agency issued a response. The response time was affected by, for example, whether it was necessary to tender for and commission a new scientific survey once a potential problem had been identified; the complexity of the relevant tests involved (for example, time might be needed to grow cultures of the relevant micro-organisms for analysis); and the degree of uncertainty in the science (it might be necessary to consult national or international experts).
- **Working with stakeholders to promote best practice.** The Agency works with food manufacturers, retailers, consumers and local authorities to promote and encourage best practice. For example, the Agency publishes advice to industry and consumers on clear labelling.
- **Seeking legislation and taking regulatory action.** Where necessary, the Agency seeks improvements to legislation or takes regulatory action to protect consumers and consumer interests. Improving legislation usually means making the case for changes to European Union rules. For example, in September 2000 the Agency called for compulsory European Union rules requiring listing of all ingredients in food that could cause allergic reactions.

- 8 The Agency provides advice to consumers through advertising, awareness campaigns, targeting particular sectors of the population who are most at risk because of their consumption of certain foods, and through information circulated to local authorities. The Agency has a website receiving an average of 100,000 visitors each week and a call centre which responds to requests for literature on food safety advice. The call centre (telephone: 020 7276 8000) received 16,000 calls in 2001-02. Separate telephone lines may be set up to respond to specific food incidents which the public can telephone for advice.

On how the Agency provides advice to consumers

- 9 The Agency was established to act at arm's length from Ministers so that its advice is impartial and is not perceived by the public to represent any vested interest. To reinforce this independence, the Agency seeks to promote openness and transparency in reaching decisions on food safety. It does so by holding its Board meetings in public; convening an annual stakeholders' meeting (to hear the views of all those who have an interest in food safety including consumers representative groups such as Sustain, the Consumers' Association and the National Consumer Council); having lay representation on its scientific advisory committee, and publishing all of its research findings on its website. The Agency commissions annual consumer surveys of views on food safety, standards issues and the regulatory system for food.

On how the Agency demonstrates transparency and openness

Conclusions

- 10 The Agency has taken a range of actions to address the public's concerns about food safety and food standards and to protect them from food risks. Since it was set up, the Agency's ability to respond to a major nation-wide food alert affecting the public's health has been tested through the Agency's participation in government exercises (for example post September 11 exercises assessing how a radiological threat would be addressed), although it has not, as yet, been tested in a major real-life situation. The Agency is confident, however, that it is well prepared to deal with such an eventuality. It considers that it could quickly redeploy staff to respond to a crisis and, building on existing practice, it would work closely with local authority enforcement officers.
- 11 The public's awareness of the Agency and its role has increased. In 2002, a representative consumer survey of the UK population found that 76 per cent of people (58 per cent in 2000) when prompted had heard of the Food Standards Agency. Awareness of the Agency as a source of information about food standards and safety was much lower at 13 per cent (an increase from eight per cent in 2000). Sixty per cent were very or fairly confident (50 per cent in 2000) in the role played by the Agency in protecting health with regard to food safety compared with ten per cent who were not very confident (11 per cent in 2000). One third of the public considered that the Agency provided information that was independent and unbiased. Nineteen per cent in 2002 perceived the Agency to be reflecting the views of consumers and 28 per cent considered that the Agency reflected the views of the Government. Twenty three per cent thought it reflected the views of the food industry. The Agency recognises the importance of maintaining the public's confidence in the national food safety and standards arrangements, including raising the public's awareness of the Agency's role as an authoritative, independent voice.

Recommendations

12 We make four recommendations intended to assist the Agency in continuing to improve its performance.

- 1 **Set out the approach used to reach judgements about where to concentrate the Agency's efforts to improve food safety and standards and determine priorities when responding to food incidents.** The Agency has well developed systems for obtaining scientific information on risks to food safety and standards through its annual scientific survey work. It also keeps under review public concerns so that it can respond with appropriate action. The Agency's risk management decisions do, however, need to take account of many potentially conflicting factors such as the relative priority assigned to the risk or issue by the various Advisory Committees and the public's perception of the risks to their health. The Agency should set out the conceptual framework underlying its approach to dealing with different types of food risks, and clarify how it decides on their relative importance. To enhance transparency, such a framework should be made available to the public.
- 2 **Have comprehensive costing information available to assist in the allocation of resources and to support assessments of the cost effectiveness of its work to promote food standards and safety.** The Agency has focused its efforts on action most likely to secure public confidence in its work following a period when people's trust in scientific advice on food standards had been seriously undermined. In putting a priority on this the Agency has not always given as much attention as it might to assessing the value for money of its activities. Comprehensive cost information should be an important factor informing the Agency's decision-making process about how best to match its resources to priorities and deliver maximum benefit to the public. The Agency therefore needs to improve the range of costing information available about its programmes and other initiatives to promote food standards and safety.
- 3 **Develop more focused performance indicators to monitor and manage its operational performance.** Many factors can influence the Agency's operational performance, including how resources are allocated to different functions and productivity achieved; the length of time it takes to respond to a food incident (allowing for the differences in risk and underlying science associated with each incident); the performance of laboratories undertaking scientific analysis, and the balance between planned and reactive work. Although the Agency monitors its operational performance in some areas, its current monitoring systems do not cover all of its key functions. This should be remedied by developing a series of indicators to provide a basis for assessing how the Agency's resources are prioritised and used to deliver key activities or services.
- 4 **Adopt a more systematic approach to evaluating the impact of its work in promoting food safety and standards.** The Agency assesses the impact of its work in various ways. These include commissioning consumer surveys, evaluations of the impact of specific food safety initiatives and estimating the potential size of the audience reached. Some of this work, particularly evaluations, is somewhat selective in its scope.
 - (i) More needs to be done by the Agency to identify lessons from evaluations of specific food incidents which have a wider applicability across the Agency's work (for example, the Agency has drawn on a case where warnings of the risks in using certain brands of soy sauce required targeting of the Agency's communication to Chinese and South East Asian communities).
 - (ii) The Agency should make sure that arrangements are in place to enable it to assess its contributions to wider government programmes (such as the Food and Health Action Plan which the Government has agreed should be developed in the light of the Policy Commission's report on Farming and Food)⁵.
 - (iii) Although changes in consumer behaviour may take long periods to achieve, the Agency should examine how to assess the impact of its activities on consumers' behaviour and on improving standards in the food industry.

⁵ "Farming and Food: a sustainable future": Report of the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food, January 2002.

Annex 1

Summary of case study findings

Case example	Type of issue	Identification of risks and concerns	How the Agency responded	Providing advice and information	Promoting transparency and openness
Infant botulism	Food safety - risk from bacteria	A case of suspected infant botulism was diagnosed by a hospital and the Department of Health and the Public Health Laboratory Service informed the Agency.	It took the Agency two months from first identification of the case to a product recall being issued by the manufacturer in August 2001. Product recall was supported by an Agency media campaign to promote public awareness.	The issue generated publicity with a combined potential audience of 17.8 million ⁶ . Coverage in newspapers, while using attention grabbing headlines, accurately reported the Agency's advice in the body of the article.	The Agency contacted the manufacturers of the suspected products to help identify the source of contamination. The Agency consulted the Food Safety Authority Ireland to discuss what action should be taken, informed the European Commission, and met with the baby food industry to identify lessons learned.
Hygiene in catering	Food safety - risk from bacteria	The need to take action was identified as part of the Agency's strategy to reduce foodborne illness. Hygiene in food outlets has been a public concern raised consistently in the Agency's consumer surveys.	It took the Agency six months from collection of survey data to publication of the results of its Catering Workers Hygiene Survey in October 2002.	The Agency sought to promote awareness by sending a 'sick bag' campaign flyer followed by an information pack to every food establishment in the country. The Agency targeted information at catering workers by promoting information through a media campaign, including television advertising. Coverage of the campaign appeared in over 200 separate sources with a combined potential audience of 45 million, and the Agency received over 26,000 hits on its food hygiene website.	The Agency convened focus groups of catering workers to determine how best to engage catering staff in its campaign.
Dioxins in milk	Food safety - risk from chemicals in food	There was considerable uncertainty surrounding the initial assessment made by the Department of Health in April 2001 of possible risks to public health from pyres used to dispose of carcasses during the foot and mouth outbreak. The Agency therefore convened a meeting of external experts from government agencies and academia which concluded that, although the assessment was based on the best available science, the uncertainties were sufficiently great to give potential cause for concern.	As any changes in levels of dioxins could take some months to reach their peak, the Agency issued precautionary advice to consumers in May 2001 about the additional risk to exposure for populations around the foot and mouth pyres, based on a theoretical risk assessment. Evidence from the Agency's investigation was published periodically with the first report issued on 5 July 2001. By September 2001, sufficient evidence was available for the Agency to lift its precautionary advice issued four months previously as its testing had identified that there was no measurable effect on food from foot and mouth pyres.	The Agency issued precautionary advice to target populations by sending a direct mailshot to 30,000 farmers in the areas around foot and mouth pyres. It also provided information for consumers nationally through the media and on the Agency website. The Agency intervention generated publicity with a combined potential audience of 11 million people. The Agency won praise from consumer groups for its handling of the issue.	The Agency issued precautionary advice before it began its testing programme, and was open about the planned testing with consumers and local populations. The Agency sent a direct mailshot to 30,000 farmers in the affected areas to inform them of the risks and how the Agency was addressing them.

Case example	Type of issue	Identification of risks and concerns	How the Agency responded	Providing advice and information	Promoting transparency and openness
Illegal veterinary medicines: chloramphenicol in honey	Food safety - risk from chemicals in food	A European Commission inspection visit to China identified a lack of controls on the use of veterinary medicines.	It took the Agency 17 days from commissioning the survey work to publishing a response removing honey containing the illegal veterinary drugs from sale in February 2002.	Local businesses were asked to remove honey from China from sale. The Agency's intervention generated publicity with a combined potential audience of 7.7 million.	The Agency sought advice from in-house and external scientists to identify the risks to consumers and issued precautionary advice explaining the risks before it began testing products. After the results of testing emerged, action was agreed with major retailers and further advice was issued to consumers.
3-MCPD in soy sauce	Food safety - risk from chemicals in food	3-MCPD, a chemical known to cause cancer in animals, was found at significant levels in some soy sauce products in an earlier survey carried out in 1999. Alerts from other European Union Member States from late 1999 suggested that this remained a problem.	The Agency took ten months from starting the sample collection to publishing advice in June 2001. It issued targeted mailshots to importers and mounted a targeted information campaign to reach higher risk groups in the South East Asian and Chinese communities.	The Agency mounted an information campaign targeted at higher risk groups in the South East Asian and Chinese communities by issuing bilingual advice in English and Chinese. It also issued targeted mailshots to importers. The Agency won praise from the British Chinese community for its approach and generated publicity with a combined potential audience of 42 million.	The Agency engaged the Chinese community before publication of the results to determine how best to reach groups of the population at greater risk. The Agency also informed producers immediately prior to publication of the survey results.
Water in chicken	Food authenticity - misdescription of products	Consumer concerns were identified by the Agency's Working Party on Food Authenticity and Local Authority Trading Standards Departments also raised concerns.	It took nine months from collecting samples to publishing results in October 2000 (the work was originally commissioned by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food). A follow-up survey about water in chicken used in catering took five months from collecting samples to publication in December 2001.	The issue generated publicity with a combined potential audience of 24 million, and the Agency published information about products and brands covered by its survey to inform consumers. Some local authorities carried out prosecution of companies mislabelling produce following the survey results.	The issue was first raised as a consumer concern by an Agency Working Party. The Agency carried out its survey jointly with local authorities and Public Analysts. The Agency informed retailers and companies of the survey results, and published details of the brands and companies covered to inform consumer choice.

6 The Agency measures the potential audience reached using a method ("Weighted Opportunities To See") which assesses how many people are likely to have seen a news item.

Annex 2

The Food Standards Agency: Good practice in improving service delivery

Public bodies often need to build the trust and confidence of the public if they are to perform effectively. Some may need to act proactively to pre-empt issues which may be of concern to the public and which may escalate. To help secure public confidence, public bodies need to engage with a wide range of stakeholders to help ensure that their actions are soundly based, practical, and will reach the target audience - and that, overall, the public considers the organisation's services to be of real benefit. The approach the Food Standards Agency is following to build public confidence demonstrates a range of good practice which agencies and other public bodies delivering services where public trust and confidence are key should find useful. This includes:

<p>The need to demonstrate transparency in decision-making</p>	<p>The Food Standards Agency holds decision-making Board meetings in public and all its scientific advisory committees include lay or consumer members. Transparency of decision-making is crucial in strengthening the credibility of the Food Standards Agency and helping to engender confidence in the Agency's evidence-based approach. Lay and consumer members on the Agency's scientific advisory committees can ask the sort of questions that a member of the public would want to ask, and help to ensure that expert members address issues which are of concern to the public.</p>
<p>The need to build trust by open and active engagement with all stakeholders</p>	<p>The Food Standards Agency develops policy through actively engaging with a wide range of stakeholders. Stakeholder input is secured through a range of activities including formal groups, workshops, informal discussions and written consultations. In the development of policy, the Agency recognises the importance of engaging such stakeholders from an early stage - including consumer representatives, those involved in enforcement of food law and industry representatives. This helps to build trust and confidence. It also makes for more informed decision-making as it enables the Food Standards Agency to seek the views of stakeholders on the practical implications of different options to manage risks.</p>



The need to provide clear, unambiguous information and advice to the public

The Food Standards Agency always seeks to explain why it is issuing advice so as to promote greater understanding of what the advice means. It evaluates the effectiveness of its communications to help it learn from experience. The Agency's website has been developed with a different 'look' and interactive features for consumers. Food Standards Agency staff, who are often expert scientists in their own right, give interviews to the media and explain the basis of the Agency's decisions or advice to consumers. The Agency sets out scientific uncertainties and what is being done to resolve them, basing its advice on the current state of knowledge, updating it as necessary.

The need to tailor information and advice to reach target groups for whom it is most relevant

Where a food issue puts specific groups in the population at potentially greater risk, the Food Standards Agency targets its information and advice at these groups. While the Agency seeks to reach a wide audience, it also targets groups which may be at higher risk because of their consumption of certain types of food or their behaviour, and tailors the information accordingly. For example, advice about the food risks in using some brands of soy sauce was targeted at Chinese and South East Asian communities likely to be using more of these products, including bilingual promotion of the Agency's advice involving the Chinese media. The Agency also seeks to engage actively to reach specific stakeholders during the design stage of campaigns to help target campaigns more effectively (such as the focus groups held with catering staff to determine the best way to communicate food hygiene messages to the catering industry). Targeting information also builds credibility and confidence that the Food Standards Agency is acting in the interests of all consumers.