

About this bulletin

A communications and engagement plan has been devised for the Review of Food Withdrawal and Recall Processes in Retail Sectors project. As part of this plan, we are aiming to provide the External Stakeholder Reference Group (ESRG) with regular updates on the project's progress in between ESRG meetings. This bulletin outlines progress since the second ESRG meeting on 11 January.

Evidence and Research Gathering

As part of evidence gathering stage for the project, the external research organisation, Kantar Public (KP), has been conducting some in-depth telephone interviews with industry, enforcement and consumer stakeholders for the first, qualitative, phase of the research. The majority of work in this qualitative phase has been completed but, as reported at the meeting on 11 January, KP are still finding it difficult to secure sufficient participants in some sectors. The following summarises progress to date on reaching the respective quotas:

Sector	Target	Secured to date
Major Supermarkets/Retailers	4 to 5	6
Convenience Stores	4 to 5	1
Food & Drink discounters	2 to 3	0
Specialist Retailers	2 to 3	2
Independent Retailer	2 to 3	0
Manufacturers	8 to 10	7
Wholesalers	3	3
Industry representative group	5	5
Consumer Group	4	3
	35	27

We would very much appreciate any further assistance you could provide in encouraging

your members to participate in the research to help ensure it is as informed and robust as possible. Please contact Gurprit.Dhillon@kantarpublish.com (020 7656 5228).

KP has provided an interim update on the top line findings from the first half of the telephone interviews with stakeholders. On the positive side:

- There is a feeling of strong working relationships between the FSA/ FSS, LAs and FBOs;
- Among stakeholders, there is a strong interest in receiving feedback following a recall, to understand more about the trigger for the recall and the outcome;
- Consumer groups in particular are interested in knowing the effectiveness of their communications to consumers;
- Many feel there is a robust system of traceability and there is a strong sense of effective communication between relevant organisations;
- FBOs feel that it is in their best interest to implement recalls diligently to protect their brands, commercial relationships and consumers and are motivated by this more than government sanctions or LA enforcement; and
- Overall, the process is seen as being fast and effective, with clear logical steps and obligations.

Potential areas for improvement:

- Certain groups (Consumer Groups and Trade Associations) felt they could be involved in the recall process at an earlier stage and that the consistency of communication between them and FSA/FSS could be improved;
- The return rate for recalled food is recognised as being low and there is a lack of data and awareness of the effectiveness of the current system;
- Many feel the recall process is most effective when dealing with larger companies but there is an overall fear that smaller companies / retailers are harder to reach and influence;
- Due to stretched resources, Local Authorities rely heavily on food businesses taking the lead to implement the recalls process;
- The current process is 'front heavy' with respect to action and communication; the process should incorporate systems that allow lessons to be learnt once the recall has been actioned;
- It requires consumers to be educated to be diligent in examining labels, observe communications and dispose of products accordingly;
- Tracing products deep into the supply chain is difficult, particularly ingredients from abroad; and
- Differences between LA systems can slow down the recall process.

We would be grateful for any feedback that you or your members may have in relation to these findings – whether there is anything that is particularly surprising, or whether they are generally as would be expected. Please send any comments to

Tracy.Bishop@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk or David.Lowe@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

Project oversight and forthcoming meetings

The most recent meeting of the internal **Project Working Group**, which meets on a monthly basis to drive the practical aspects of project delivery, including the coordination of the various strands of research being undertaken, took place on Monday 13 February. At this meeting, Kantar Public presented the interim findings from Phase 1 of the research, which will inform discussions on relevant content for the industry questionnaires being developed for the next, quantitative phase.

The **Project Board**, which provides governance and oversight to the project and is comprised of both FSA and FSS staff representing key departments within the respective Agencies, met on Wednesday 15 February to discuss some of the research findings to date and potential future work streams for the project. The Board agreed that the project's discovery period will now be extended until June to ensure the highest quality of data is collected. The extended time line means that commissioning work to improve the withdrawal and recall system will now start in July.

As discussed at the last ESRG meeting, it is envisaged that the **next ESRG meeting** will take place to coincide with an initial presentation of findings from all the Kantar research. Following some amendments to the project timetable to maximise the opportunity to enhance an iterative approach and ensure optimal value and learning from the research, it is proposed that this will be sometime in late May/early June.

For further information please contact:

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