

Working together on imported food



The Food Standards Agency (FSA) acknowledges the hard work of many authorities in carrying out imported food law enforcement work.

This booklet outlines some of the ways the FSA can support you in ensuring legal compliance with imported food controls in your area.

The responsibility for enforcing controls on imported food is shared between local and port health authorities and the Agency, and we work in partnership with the Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services (LACORS), the Association of Port Health Authorities (APHA), the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) and the Trading Standards Institute (TSI).

Remember that enforcement of regulations does not end at the point-of-entry into the UK where only a small percentage of foods are checked.

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Did you know?

- Imported food makes up an increasingly large part of the UK diet and about 50% of food consumed in the UK is from countries outside the UK.
- Imported foods can sometimes pose risks to public health and a high proportion of recorded food incidents are due to imports. Ensuring safety, legal compliance, consumer protection and choice is vital.
- Enforcement of controls on imported foods is the responsibility of all UK enforcement officers, both inland and at point-of-entry (seaports and airports). It should be integral to your authority's food law enforcement service.
- When goods are imported from other European Union (EU) countries, they have free movement. This is known as intra-community trade. Controls at ports only apply to imports from non-EU countries.
- Imported foods can be found in many food businesses in your area, and can take many forms (such as canned or vacuum packed fish and meat, herbs, spices, and fresh fruit and vegetables).
- A key outcome of the Agency's strategy for 2010–2015 is that imported food is safe to eat. To deliver this outcome we will work with port health and local authorities to ensure there are risk-based, targeted checks at ports and local authority monitoring of imports throughout the food chain.

About half the food eaten in the UK comes from outside the UK.

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Case study **Seizing illegal products inland and at the border**

Wakefield Metropolitan District Council had a strong suspicion that a food business operator (FBO) in its area was smuggling illegal products of animal origin from Nigeria into the UK. The local authority liaised with the FSA, which then notified the HM Revenue & Customs (the UK Border Agency has since taken responsibility for smuggled products of animal origin border control), and this led to the FBO being intercepted by customs officers at Heathrow airport. Luggage containing illegally imported products of animal origin were seized and destroyed.

Result: After further local authority investigations, a number of large suitcases, with various flight labels attached, were found in an upstairs room of the FBO's retail food premises. Hidden among the clothing in the cases were products of animal origin, calabash chalk, peanuts, plant material and chilli products. The local authority seized these illegal products, removing them from the food chain.

Your responsibilities

The hard work by a large number of enforcement authorities has already received high profile recognition from central Government. These achievements were also commended in the EU's Food and Veterinary Office report, which was published after its 2006 evaluation of imported food controls in the UK.

However, the Agency's imported food data, which is collected via the Local Authority Enforcement Monitoring System (LAEMS), suggests that a significant number of authorities continue to carry out very little, or no enforcement, in relation to imported foods and/or do not reflect their responsibilities in their procedures, service plans and authorisations.

As it is the responsibility of all local and port health authorities to enforce imported food law. Particular emphasis should be placed on the following areas:

Routine food law enforcement work

Think about imported foods in your routine food law enforcement work, such as when you are looking at purchasing and traceability. Imported foods can appear in almost any type of UK food premises and may be in the form of a raw ingredient or a finished product, which might, for example, be vacuum packed, tinned or frozen.

Policies and procedures

In accordance with the Framework Agreement, include references to imported foods in policies and procedures, service plan and sampling programmes, to ensure officers are aware of their responsibilities and have the guidance they need to carry them out effectively and consistently.

Accurate returns

Record imported food work and submit accurate returns to the Agency so that it can effectively co-ordinate and support enforcement.

Communication

Good communication between local and port health authorities, involving the Agency where appropriate, is vital in tackling unsatisfactory imported foods.

Appropriate authorisation

Ensure that food law enforcement officers are appropriately authorised. It is extremely important that authorities do this. Otherwise any formal action could be challenged in a court of law. Be prepared; don't get caught unaware if a food incident requires a rapid enforcement response.

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Case study Investigating together

Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council informed the FSA about two premises selling canned sheep heads from Iran and enforcement action that resulted in a voluntary surrender and a seizure. Further notifications of action against other retail premises also selling sheep heads were received from Sheffield City Council, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, and the London Borough of Barnet.

Result: Intelligence from these incidents identified possible suppliers in the London boroughs of Ealing and Brent, where enforcement officers had liaised with colleagues from the relevant authorities and carried out appropriate follow-up investigations. Officers at the London Borough of Brent and FSA officials then liaised with Dover Port Health Authority – which had also instigated an investigation into sheep heads – and local customs officers, in relation to further consignments being allegedly imported illegally.

How we can support you

The Agency supports local and port health authorities in imported food law enforcement through:

Training

A programme of regional-based training is provided across the UK to ensure that port health and local authority enforcement officers are kept up to date with current legislation and practical guidance on the implementation of imported food official controls.

Resource pack

A comprehensive resource pack to provide food law enforcement officers with information, practical guidance and advice to enable them to secure the effective control of imported food throughout the food chain in the UK. The pack is downloadable from the Agency's website [food.gov.uk/foodindustry/imports/enforce_authorities/resourcepack](https://www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/imports/enforce_authorities/resourcepack)

Helpline

A dedicated imported food helpline for enforcement bodies, consumers and industry: tel **020 7276 8018**, email imported.food@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

Online

Key information on imported food controls and specific resources for enforcement authorities is available online at [food.gov.uk/imports](https://www.food.gov.uk/imports)

Funding

Local and port health authorities can apply for Agency funding to support additional imported food sampling.

Forum

The Imported Food Working Group, attended by Agency officials and key stakeholder representatives, discusses imported food issues.

For more information, visit [food.gov.uk/imports](https://www.food.gov.uk/imports)

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Case study Using combined intelligence

The London Borough of Hounslow took a sample of peanut butter that had been imported from Ghana and sold by a local retailer. The officer took the sample because of an FSA food alert about peanut butter from Ghana. Chemical analysis showed that the product contained a high level of aflatoxins (these are a naturally occurring contaminant produced by mould and have been linked to an increased risk of cancer). The peanut butter had been imported by a business in the London Borough of Southwark and supplied to another retailer in the Bracknell Forest District Council area.

Result: The three local authorities' investigations resulted in the peanut butter being withdrawn from sale and destroyed.

Online resources

A number of online resources are available that provide legislation, guidance and facilitate the exchange of information and intelligence:

Guidance and Regulatory Advice on Import Legislation (GRAIL)

A web-based searchable database of imported food legislation and guidance to ensure that up to date information on imported food controls is readily accessible to all UK food law enforcement officers to assist them in applying consistent and effective controls, both at point of entry and inland. You can access GRAIL at: food.gov.uk/grail

UK Food Surveillance System (UKFSS)

This searchable database holds UK sampling data in a central place. The system will enable a faster and more accurate exchange of information between laboratories, enforcement authorities and Government departments and agencies, helping identify trends and risks on a local and national level.

Food fraud database

The Agency has established a national database of intelligence on illegal imported food and food fraud activity. The database enables us to link together intelligence from across the UK, share this information with enforcement authorities, identify trends and build up a national picture of illegal activity. To do this, all authorities need to notify the Agency of any potentially illegal or known fraudulent activity in relation to food. For more information on how to do this go to food.gov.uk/foodfraud

Remember – imported foods:

- are foods imported from countries outside the EU
- can appear as a variety of products anywhere in the country
- are our collective responsibility

Further information

For further information about imported food controls, visit food.gov.uk/imports

For general enquiries about imported food and imported food controls contact the Agency's Imported Food Team:

**Imported Food Team, Food Standards Agency,
Aviation House, 125 Kingsway, London WC2B 6NH**
tel **020 7276 8018**
email imported.food@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

To report a food incident, please contact the Incidents Team:
online report form food.gov.uk/foodindustry/regulation/foodfeedform
tel **020 7276 8448**
fax **020 7276 8788/8446**
email foodincidents@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

Out of office hours contact for food incidents should be made through:
Defra Duty Room
tel **020 7270 8960**
fax **020 7270 8125**

The Defra Duty Officer will contact the appropriate on-call officer at the FSA.

Further information

For more information and advice about food, visit the Food Standards Agency's websites:

food.gov.uk

eatwell.gov.uk

Food Standards Agency Publications

To order further copies of this, or other publications produced by the Agency, contact Food Standards Agency Publications:

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