

WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Elliott Review

4 September 2014

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss)

Today Professor Chris Elliott has published his independent review into the integrity and assurance of food supply networks to ensure that consumers have confidence in the food they buy. The final report and the Government's response are available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications> and copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The Review

Professor Elliott's final report sets out a systems approach to improve the food supply chain. As last February's horsemeat fraud incident demonstrated, it is vital that we move towards a more open culture that allows consumers to understand where their food comes from and encourages industry to take more responsibility. We are determined to take action against food fraudsters.

Recommendations

I welcome Professor Elliott's report and would like to thank him for his important work in this area. I accept all of his recommendations, many of which we are already implementing:

- Giving **top priority to the needs of consumers** in relation to food safety and food crime prevention, including through targeted testing, intelligence gathering and surveys
- A **zero tolerance approach to food fraud** including by the development of whistleblowing and reporting of food crime
- A shared focus by Government and industry on **intelligence gathering and sharing**
- Improving **laboratory testing capacity and capability** to ensure a standardised approach for testing for food authenticity
- Introducing new unannounced **audit checks by the food industry** to protect businesses and their customers
- **Government support** for the integrity and assurance of food supply networks through the creation of a National Food Safety and Food Crime Committee
- Leadership and coordination of effective investigations through the **creation of a new Food Crime Unit**
- Ensuring mechanisms are in place for serious food safety and/or food crime **incident management** by implementing the recommendations of the Troop report

Action to date

Food and farming is the UK's largest manufacturing sector, contributing £96 billion to the economy and employing almost 4 million people. That is why we are taking action to ensure that British food remains world-leading and to give consumers absolute confidence in what they are buying.

As well as maintaining confidence at home, it is also vital for the reputation of our exports. This reputation is helping us to expand trade internationally through the Export Action Plan, opening up new markets in China and the US and increasing exports of UK food and drink by 7 per cent since 2010.

This Government is committed to helping consumers know what they are buying. We are giving them more power by improving labelling to make it easier for them to understand where their food comes from. Consumers are increasingly choosing British food, with an increase of about 10 per cent in the amount of British beef on sale in UK retailers.

Through our Plan for Public Procurement we are making it easier for food procurers to make decisions about the locality, authenticity and traceability of their food, enabling schools and hospitals to provide their pupils and patients with high quality British food. This will also boost UK farming by opening up £400 million of potential new business.

From this month, practical cookery and food education is compulsory in the new national curriculum up until the age of 14. This will empower the consumers of the future, giving children a better understanding of where their food comes from and why it is important that we know what is in our food.

Forthcoming action

Professor Elliott's report states there is a lack of direct evidence of food crime in the UK but that we should not be complacent if we want consumers to be confident in the food that they buy. That is why we intend to act immediately with the Food Standards Agency to establish a Food Crime Unit by the end of the year. In the first instance the Unit will focus on developing the evidence and intelligence picture so that we better understand the risks. The Unit will be trialled for two years after which we will review progress and likely future needs.

The report recognises that we have some of the most robust food safety controls in the world and that we are working closely with public analyst laboratories to achieve more effective and efficient working in scientific services to support food standards. We have also provided an additional £2 million this year to support local authority sampling and testing to help protect consumers.

Professor Elliott has also highlighted the role that the food industry needs to play in the gathering and sharing of intelligence. We will build on what Professor Elliott has already achieved by helping to facilitate discussions across the industry and we will work with businesses to remove the duplication in the current industry-driven audit system whilst ensuring consumers remain protected.

Finally, to oversee the delivery of these recommendations I am establishing a cross-government group on Food Integrity and Food Crime. This group will build the better collaboration identified as being necessary between the departments with an interest in food integrity, surveillance and crime.

Industry action

I have had assurances from industry and Professor Elliott that food businesses are already implementing many of the report's recommendations. The current industry focus on developing shorter supply chains is an important contribution to having a more resilient food supply chain. Since February 2013 industry and Government has reported over 55,000 tests on processed beef products, with no horsemeat found since April 2013. This demonstrates the effectiveness of the action being taken to assure supply chains and protect consumers.

Protecting the integrity of our food and empowering consumers is central to this Government's vision of a competitive, resilient and growing UK food supply chain.