

WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

UPDATE ON HORSEMEAT FRAUD

04 MARCH 2013

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Owen Paterson)

I would like to update the House on developments since my Written Ministerial Statement on 25 February (Hansard 25 Feb 2013: Column 5WS), on the latest results from the food industry programme of tests of beef products for the presence of horsemeat.

The vast majority of results from food retailers, wholesalers, and caterers are now in. Including previous weeks' testing, a total of 5430 test results of the most vulnerable processed beef products had been reported to the Food Standards Agency by Friday 1 March. They continue to show that over 99% of processed beef products are what they say they are on the label.

Last Friday, 1 March, the Food Standards Agency published a third set of results from the programme of product testing being carried out by food businesses. These are included in the table alongside results reported to the House previously (Hansard 25 Feb 2013: Column 5WS). This included a further 1797 results since the 22 February report, in which a further four products were confirmed as containing horse DNA. These four products are covered by 10 test results that show horse DNA at or above the 1% threshold. All were named and withdrawn from sale.

	Number of tests	Number of positive tests for horse DNA at 1% or above	Positive test results as percentage of number of tests	Number of <u>products</u> testing positive for horse DNA at 1% of above
Set 1 results published on 15 February 2013	2501	29	1.2%	7
Set 2 results published on 22 February 2013	1133	6	0.5%	6
Set 3 results published on	1797	10	0.6%	4

	Number of tests	Number of positive tests for horse DNA at 1% or above	Positive test results as percentage of number of tests	Number of <u>products</u> testing positive for horse DNA at 1% of above
1 March 2013				
Total for all published results (as of 1 March 2013)	5430*	44*	0.8%	17

** Cross-checking of data has identified one positive test reported previously that is a duplicate test on the same batch of the same product, and this test has been removed from the total number of positives.*

As shown in the table, the industry programme of testing has now identified 17 products confirmed as containing over 1% horse DNA. A further two products had by Friday 1 March been identified as positive for horse DNA through other testing routes outside the formal testing programme, or through other testing and investigations by the Food Standards Agency or local authorities. All 19 products have been named and withdrawn.

The Food Standards Agency has reported to me over the weekend that a batch of product which has tested positive in another Member State is likely also to have been imported into the UK for sale. The product type had already been withdrawn from sale here as a precaution, and will be reported by the Food Standards Agency on confirmation.

There have been no positive tests to date for the presence of bute in any of the UK food samples found to contain horse.

Food businesses will continue to test for the presence of horse DNA in their beef products, reporting to the Food Standards Agency. These results will now be published every three months. However, food businesses that identify any confirmed cases of contamination above 1% horse DNA will report these to the Food Standards Agency immediately and this information will be published on the Agency's website as soon as the information is received.

This week, the Food Standards Agency will publish the first set of data from the UK-wide authenticity survey being carried out by local authorities on behalf of the Agency. This survey has three phases. The first phase involves sampling and testing minced beef products for the presence of horse and pig DNA. A second phase covers a wider range of beef products including ready meals. The third phase is the sampling under the EU Co-ordinated Control Plan, the Europe-wide programme of testing to which I referred in my statement of 25 February (Hansard 25 Feb 2013: Column 5WS). The Food Standards Agency will report the UK's contribution to the Europe-wide programme to the EU by mid April.

Both the food industry and Food Standards Agency deserve credit for having put this programme of tests in place very quickly, completing over 5000 tests in a very short space of time. The unprecedented level of testing reported here, combined with the Food Standards Agency led local authority and EU programmes over the coming weeks, will give us a clear picture of the extent of the problem. Investigations into cases where horsemeat has, quite unacceptably, been discovered will continue, and anyone found guilty of criminal activity should expect to face the consequences.