

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL SAFETY OF FOOD
INFORMATION PAPER
SURVEILLANCE DATABASE FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES

1. In the UK, thousands of food and feed samples are taken annually, with local authorities (LAs) spending approximately £10 million on sampling analytical costs alone. To date, the value of this work has not been maximised since detailed information is not routinely shared between LAs, scientific analysts or the FSA. Increased data exchange will allow for greater statistical analysis of sampling information that will enable officers to identify trends and emerging issues relating to food safety.
2. The United Kingdom Food Surveillance System (UKFSS) project was initially developed by FSA Scotland in conjunction with Health Protection Scotland (HPS) to provide a standardised data capture, storage, querying and reporting functionality for the microbiological and chemical analysis of food and animal feed samples taken by LA food officers.
3. Since May 2002, the 4 Public Analyst (PA) laboratories and 4 microbiology analysis laboratories in Scotland along with their partner councils have been contributing to the food surveillance system. In December 2005 a three year contract was signed with HPS to deliver the system to each local authority in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. To date, laboratory results from approximately 53000 chemical and microbiological analyses have been entered onto the system.
4. A Project Board oversees the development of the system. This Board includes representatives from various policy divisions within the Agency, FSA Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as from LACORS, the Association of Public Analysts, the Health Protection Agency (HPA) and Trading Standards Institute.
5. In Scotland, microbiological examination of food and feedstuffs is carried out by public analysts, whereas in England and Wales, these analyses are conducted, in most cases, by the HPA in England and the National Public Health Service in Wales. The contractors are working closely with the HPA to ensure that food and feed samples taken for microbiological examination are included on the database.
6. Regarding analysis for food standards issues; training of 5 PA labs (Leicestershire, Hampshire, Lancashire, Kent and Norwich) and their respective Local Authorities have taken place. Plans are in place to train the remaining LAs and PAs in England during 2007. User group training for the new animal feed module of the database has been completed in Scotland, Bristol and Somerset, Worcester and Stafford, and Durham. Wales are to come on to the system in 2008.

7. All twenty six councils and the Public Health Laboratory at Belfast City Hospital in Northern Ireland have fully implemented the system and are actively using it for data exchange and storage.
8. The contractors are currently working to develop an interface through which historic and future Agency survey data can be entered on to the system, making information collected by the Agency available to Local Authorities.
9. Each year, a report will be produced, analysing the data entered by LAs as well as FSA survey data. Further detailed analysis focussing on specific geographical areas or particular food related issues can be carried out on an *ad hoc* basis.
10. The benefits of implementing this system are far reaching and include adding increased value to sampling by helping to identify trends and emerging issues. It will also enable better targeting of resources and can prevent duplication of sampling activity. The system will allow faster, more standardised and accurate exchange of information between laboratories, LAs and Government agencies.
11. There are no plans at this stage to open the system up to a wider audience, although there is potential for others (colleagues in Europe, food manufacturing businesses etc) to enter and search data. However, the primary intention of this database is to provide a tool for LAs to manage their food sampling more generally, and any additional resource that the system may provide is somewhere in the future.

Secretariat
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