

Recommendations

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The need for broad integrated impact assessments is compelling, notably in the context of health and environmental impacts and the growing attention to such assessments in government policies, the expectations of consumers and civil society and in the private sector.

The Science Council concluded that the evaluation of wider impacts aligned with FSA regulatory food safety risk assessment is scientifically feasible but is currently limited by the absence of protocols, guidelines, experience and the legislative remit for such evaluations. Based on the scale of impacts, the most important priorities in the context of the food system are those of environmental and potential wider health impacts. Ideally, outcome-based approaches are preferable when possible; these will require means of monitoring significant wider impacts. The following recommendations address the above impact areas and the need to build a science base around the assessment process.

Recommendation 1. Update FSA internal processes to identify how, where (relative to food and feed safety regulatory assessment) and by whom wider impacts are identified and assessed. Transparency is especially important when considering wider impacts beyond traditional risk assessment to ensure trust in risk management and policy.

Recommendation 2. Develop an up-to-date map of government policies impacting the food system and dietary patterns and quality, to identify ownership, guide evaluation of wider impacts beyond food safety risk assessment across government and ensure policy coherence.

Recommendation 3. It is not currently possible to rank or easily compare evidence for wider impacts. The FSA should collaborate with other government departments and agencies to develop guidelines for structured evidence evaluation across impact areas, including evidence sources and quality, use of comparator products and benchmarks, and comparison of options/alternatives.

Recommendation 4. Develop in collaboration with other government departments a set of criteria for selection of impacts for inclusion in FSA risk management considerations.

Recommendation 5. Environmental sustainability of production systems for any food product should be viewed as context dependent. Any assessment of sustainability should take appropriate account of waste products, water (use and contamination of fresh and sea water), greenhouse and malodorous gas emissions, soil health, biodiversity and changes in land and marine use and how these might be influenced by the widespread consumption of the food product. Although methodologies for environmental impact assessment, and international and UK environmental standards exist, new metrics and means of applying existing assessments and standards to food standards will be required.

Recommendation 6. Explore the thorough exploitation of all available data including National Diet and Nutrition Survey (NDNS), and other appropriate data sources to gain better insights into potential nutritional consequences of changing dietary patterns associated with new categories of product, food preparation and cooking practices, retail and media trends.

Recommendation 7. Use existing data sources to develop a predictive tool (with input from other government departments) with which to better assess the impact of product reformulation on food properties (e.g., to elaborate more nuanced data on food matrix changes and stability; breakdown calorie data from fat, sugar, etc) and unintended impacts on nutrition and health.

Recommendation 8. Improve application of existing data on how consumer perception of benefit and risk drives eating behaviour, to assist consumer choices in an increasingly complex food environment. It is desirable as a prerequisite to agree working definitions of terms such as “ethical”, “natural”, “processed”, etc.