# REVIEW OF THE FOOD WITHDRAWAL AND RECALL SYSTEM IN THE UK FOOD RETAIL SECTOR

## 1. Purpose of the paper

1.1. On 20th September 2017, FSA Board are to discuss an update paper (provided in Annex 1) on a joint FSA / FSS project to review the withdrawal and recall system in the UK food retail sector. The aim of this project is to provide FSS and FSA with better understanding of food withdrawal and recall mechanisms operating within the food retail sector in the UK and make recommendations for improvement.

1.2. Internal and external research was commissioned to establish a baseline of the operational effectiveness of the current recall system. The external research conducted by Kantar Public and internal research undertaken by FSA's Science, Evidence and Research Department (SERD) has now reported and the project team has identified a number of actions to improve the current system. These have been discussed and agreed with the External Stakeholder Reference Group (ESRG), comprising industry, consumer representative bodies and enforcement bodies, including FSS and the Scottish Food Enforcement Liaison Committee. The research findings, if agreed, will be encompassed within FSS Regulatory Strategy and FSA's Regulating Our Future Programmes.

## 2. Background

2.1. The system for withdrawing and recalling unsafe food in the UK is well established, with FSS and FSA providing a central co-ordinating role in the UK and is considered to work well. The FAO / WHO Guide[1] for developing and improving national food recall systems recommends that national food recall systems are reviewed in order to build on and improve processes. It was therefore considered timely to review systems operating in the UK in order to build on and make improvements.

2.2. The current system of recalling food is triggered when a regulator, enforcement body, industry body or consumer becomes aware that unsafe food has been produced. When FSS/FSA receives notification through one of these routes, it works with the food business operator (FBO) and local authority partners to trace how far the product has been distributed along the food chain, i.e. whether the product is still in storage and whether it is or has been on sale to consumers.

2.3 FSS/FSA will then evaluate the risk to consumers and decide on the most appropriate course of action to protect consumers. This may involve requiring that a product is recalled, in which instance the producers notifies all businesses it has

[1] http://www.fao.org/docrep/017/i3006e/i3006e.pdf

supplied the product to, takes steps remove it from sale and notify consumers who may have already purchased the product. The FBO issues point of sale recall notice to stores and the FSA publishes a food alert Notice, which it uses to publicise the recall. Local Authority officers check that product has been recalled correctly and work with the producer to make sure all the returned unsafe food is properly disposed.

2.4 Given the increase in the number of food alerts issued over the past 3 years, it is timely and important to identify any improvements that are required to ensure the UK withdrawal and recall system meets both the needs of consumers and legal requirements for businesses and serves to maintain public confidence in UK food. A key aim in doing this review is therefore to ensure that systems and processes deployed are as modern, responsive and effective as possible.

2.5 The scope of the review included withdrawal and recall processes in UK food retail businesses and, by association, suppliers to retailers, including manufacturers, distributors and wholesalers. Withdrawal and recall processes relating to feed and the service sector i.e. catering, hospitality, public sector catering such as schools and hospitals were out of scope.

3. The Board is asked to:

- **Note** the findings from the research phase of the project; and
- **Discuss** and **confirm** the proposed outcomes and the high level delivery plan for this work.

**Ian McWatt**
**Director of Operations**
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