

FoodMatters Protect our food

The new name for MeatMatters

Welcome to FoodMatters

FoodMatters is the new name for MeatMatters, UNISON's newsletter for all of our members in the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and contract staff.

FoodMatters will be the voice of all of our members and reps in the FSA, because nothing is more important than the safety of our members, the facts, and the work that members do to protect the public. THANK YOU. **You are heroes too.** Whether you work in a plant, visit plants, or work in a support role, in an office or from home, UNISON is here for you.

Risk Assessments

It has been a busy time for UNISON reps supporting and fighting for your safety wherever you work. Every day, we are talking to the FSA about risk assessments. This work has been the focus of our activity since the pandemic began. HR at the FSA has been very responsive, but we are deeply unhappy about the response from Field Operations. Risk assessments should be the bread and butter of the FSA to make sure staff working in slaughterhouses, and food businesses are safe. There is some light at the end of the tunnel, but it is still not as we want and demand it to be. No one should be in a plant or any office environment if a risk assessment is not signed-off and agreed with the union.

Before we talk about the detail of risk assessments, please know that we were fighting for indefinite special leave for members who had to shield or be shielded. This work paid dividends as we were successful in all cases. The response from Jo Bushell and Emily Miles has been commendable. We would like to thank them for working with UNISON on making sure our members are protected.

www.protectourfood.org

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Risk assessments for plant-based staff



UNISON recently made a complaint to the Health and Safety Executive about the FSA, as follows:

“I am writing to make a complaint regarding the protection of UNISON members working for the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and its contractor, Eville & Jones (E&J). Since the Covid-19 pandemic began, UNISON has held weekly conference calls with the FSA. We sought assurances about social

distancing and the provision of the right PPE for Meat Hygiene Inspectors (MHI) and Official Veterinarians (OV) working in one or more slaughterhouses and meat production/cutting plants in England and Wales.

“Despite raising these concerns, the FSA has failed to address the issue of legally required risk assessments in each workplace.”

We made the complaint to the Health & Safety Executive as the safety of our members is of the greatest importance.

UNISON has said to the FSA that:

The FSA should carry out individual plant visits and complete a thorough plant-specific risk assessment for each workplace, to ensure a safe working environment for staff.

UNISON does not agree with the reliance upon generic risk assessments having scored a low-risk rating for plant-based staff.

UNISON has highlighted its disapproval on how individual plants haven't been risked assessed regarding social distancing and health and safety.

UNISON feels that the hands-off approach taken by the FSA is putting members at risk of contracting Covid-19.

There are several confirmed cases of Covid-19 from FSA staff working in premises in the Field Operations division and for Eville & Jones staff, contracted by the FSA.



UNISON has asked the FSA to:

Allow the six health and safety leads across England And Wales to visit, observe and verify that social distancing is happening in all meat plants. The FSA says this is unnecessary travel even though it is classified as a low-risk activity.

Provide copies of all FSA risk assessments for each Meat plant. We would expect the FBO do a risk assessment that FSA/E&J staff can see.

To collate the number of plants across the country where MHIs and OV's are working regarding social distancing not only for our members but for Food Business Operator workers as well. Then to report these plants to the HSE if the food business is failing.

Employers must do a risk assessment

There are existing laws which already protect workers. It's a legal requirement, under the Health and Safety at Work Regulations Act 1974 (The Act), for employers to carry out a workplace risk assessment. Employers must also take the actions that come from their risk assessment.

These will include enabling working from home where possible, ensuring proper hygiene and cleanliness, and making sure workers can be at least two metres apart at all times. Where these actions don't mitigate the risk, workers may need personal protective equipment.

Our Field Operations members – who are considered key workers in the pandemic – have no choice but to go into work. UNISON expects the FSA to protect its workforce and contractors. We believe the duty of care has not been met nor satisfied under The Act. The generic risk assessment written by the FSA does not adequately cover the risk, and the FSA has so far refused to provide the risk assessments from local FSA managers.

UNISON has been raising the issue of risk assessments since the end of March 2020. We finally received the spreadsheets which are a desktop exercise and not a proper risk assessment. We also received the new risk assessments by species, which the FSA's Health & Safety Unit collated.

The FSA National Health & Safety Committee – where UNISON H&S reps sit along with the FSA – met on the 6 May 2020.

The minutes of that meeting demonstrate that UNISON has tried every avenue to seek the protection of our members. The generic risk assessment covers hundreds of workplaces.

However, the FSA is still not following The Act and government guidance by working with the recognised trade union, local management and the managers or owners of the premises. UNISON provided the old spreadsheets and the new risk assessments by species to the HSE.

Therefore, UNISON requests that the Health & Safety Executive urgently investigate the FSA for potential breaches to The Act so that our members are protected as the key workers necessary to maintain the food supplies for the country.”

Since the complaint, the FSA has agreed to send in ITLs to plant. We want to make it very clear that ITLs need to be adequately protected as they go into plants to protect FSA employees and contractors. We would also like to see the FSA take a closer look at the plant employed staff, who are often forced to work very close to each other, to make sure they are safe. We will be scrutinising the situation very carefully to ensure that proper and thorough risk assessments are completed.

PLEASE raise any issues with your UNISON rep and line manager.

We are also making sure members who visit plants are protected. For office-based staff, we are in negotiations with the FSA to make sure there is not a rush to go back to the office until proper and thorough risk assessments are completed. Members must be consulted and given time to go back to the office if and when their circumstances allow.

Food Safety—What do the public think?

The world before Covid-19 seems like a long time ago. In January we conducted a sizeable public polling exercise, to get a feel for the public’s views on food safety. The respected [Savanta ComRes](#) polling company asked over 2,000 people what they thought of your work and meat production in the UK. It makes interesting reading and reinforces our members’ views on what needs to be done.

Q.1 Which of the following do you think is best placed to check that the meat for sale in the UK is safe, and not diseased or contaminated?

	%
Independent inspectors employed by the government	65%
Independent inspectors employed by private companies	9%
Slaughterhouses and abattoirs themselves	8%
Other	1%
Don't know	17%

Q.2 Currently, the inspection of abattoirs and slaughterhouses is conducted by independent inspectors employed by the government. How would you feel about the quality standards of the meat for sale in the UK, if the inspection of abattoirs and slaughterhouses were conducted by each of the following?

%	Inspectors employed by private companies	The slaughterhouses and abattoirs themselves
NET: More confident	17%	11%
NET: Less confident	52%	64%
Much more confident	5%	3%
Slightly more confident	12%	8%
It would make no difference	20%	14%
Slightly less confident	30%	22%
Much less confident	22%	43%
Don't know	12%	10%

Q.3 Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

	%
It should be compulsory for meat safety and quality in slaughterhouses to be assessed by independent government inspectors	85%
It should not be compulsory for meat safety and quality in slaughterhouses to be assessed by independent government inspectors	6%
Don't know	9%

Q.4 Currently, the food safety monitoring of restaurants and takeaways is conducted by local councils. How confident would you be in the standards of meat if these outlets were instead inspected by private companies?

	%
NET: More confident	17%
NET: Less confident	53%
Much more confident	5%
Slightly more confident	12%
It would make no difference	21%
Slightly less confident	26%
Much less confident	26%
Don't know	9%

Q.5 Checks on the quality standards of meat are currently EU-regulated, but the UK could introduce its own laws after it leaves the EU on 31st January 2020. Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

	%
The UK shouldn't create new laws governing meat inspections after we leave the EU, and should maintain our current laws	34%
The UK should create new stricter laws governing meat inspections after we leave the EU	52%
The UK should create new more relaxed laws governing meat inspections after we leave the EU	3%
Don't know	11%

Q.6 As the UK leaves the EU, how would you feel about the standards of chicken, turkey, duck and goose meat for sale in the UK, if quality checks became the sole responsibility of the poultry industry, rather than of independent inspectors employed by the government, as at present?

	%
NET: More confident	11%
NET: Less confident	67%
Much more confident	3%
Slightly more confident	8%
It would make no difference	12%
Slightly less confident	25%
Much less confident	42%
Don't know	10%

Q.7 As the UK leaves the EU, to what extent, if at all, would you be concerned if the UK government relaxed laws on meat quality standards, in order to secure trade deals with the USA and the rest of the world?

	%
NET: Concerned	81%
NET: Not concerned	12%
Extremely concerned	47%
Quite concerned	34%
Not very concerned	10%
Not at all concerned	2%
Don't know	7%

Methodology: Savanta ComRes interviewed 2,015 British adults online from the 24th to 27th January 2020. Data were weighted to be demographically representative of all GB adults. Full tables at www.comresglobal.com.

STAY IN CONTACT

There are a number of ways you can stay in contact and get the latest news.

Email: please contact UNISONdirect online or your branch/region here <https://www.unison.org.uk/about/contact/>. Make sure we have your email address and your permission to use it.

Address: we're not sending out post at the moment. But if you do want to receive relevant materials in paper form, when we're able to send it out, please contact UNISONdirect and make sure your address is up to date and that you have selected 'yes' to receive printed mail.

Facebook: this is where regular updates are posted quickly. Please like and follow the UNISON FSA Members Facebook Page here <https://www.facebook.com/unisonFSA/>.

Twitter: follow us on Twitter for food and meat-related posts here <https://twitter.com/protectourfood>.

