

# 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.

## Webinar for UNISON members in the FSA

UNISON has started using webinars to connect with members. Members working for the FSA are invited to the first **UNISON FSA Webinar on 3<sup>rd</sup> December between 6:30 pm and 7:30 pm**. The meeting will enable members to meet Convenors who sit on the FSA Sector Committee. UNISON National Officer, Paul Bell, will also be present.

To register for the event, please use a computer or your phone by following this link <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/5141207931000366093> or by visiting [www.protectourfood.org/webinar1](http://www.protectourfood.org/webinar1).

## NEWSFLASH: pay freeze

UNISON has reacted in total disbelief to the UK Government's announcement of a civil service pay freeze. Rishi Sunak's spending review was a bit like old-style Thatcherism by numbers. On the one hand, the big numbers to dazzle and try and convince us all that the Tories are about levelling up and giving us a chance to flourish. On the other, the grim reality of a real-terms pay cut for millions who work across public services, with the added risk of job cuts further down the line. Read more at <https://www.unison.org.uk/news/general-secretary-blog/2020/11/blog-cynical-divisive-kick-teeth/>.

**NOVEMBER 2020**

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[www.protectourfood.org](http://www.protectourfood.org)

## **UNISON rep victimised for his trade union duties, wins compensation**

A UNISON steward has recently settled his case with the FSA. His grievance was upheld and it concluded that he was being victimised for his trade union duties and that two managers behaved unlawfully. From then he has been on quite a legal journey which culminated in an Employment Tribunal claim lodged by UNISON. Earlier this year an 'out of court settlement' was secured. There are no confidentiality clauses within the legally binding agreement. He had some time off work due to the emotional impact of the case, but he now feels like he has been vindicated. He is now back at work doing his job, fighting for UNISON members. He is still a steward and a national rep and he says UNISON has protected him and all the stewards within the FSA, as it has had an impact on industrial relations and the culture within the organisation.

It is often a worry for representatives that they might be victimised for becoming a UNISON activist. We think this case demonstrates the support that the union gives to our reps and the lengths the union

will go to protect them. Often in victimisation cases the member leaves their employment, but in this case the member is still in work and his working life is better. This shows the value of UNISON membership. We will not tolerate our reps and members being victimised for their trade union duties. We continue to work to stop bullying and harassment in workplaces, including staff who work from an office or at home. Our convenor for the NFCU is working hard in this regard.

We hope lessons have been learned at the FSA. Trade union membership, scrutiny and negotiation enrich an organisation and culture. Recent events during the pandemic have brought the FSA and UNISON into operational negotiations like never before. UNISON will continue to organise and fight to save lives. Thank you to all our reps and members.

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**The FSA Sector Committee would like to pay tribute and thank Gerwyn Probert and Gary Jones for all their hard work in supporting members in plant and with UNISON to save lives.**

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## **Data intelligence on plants**

A form is now available from UNISON's Protect Our Food website to record incidents at plants relating to Covid-19, health and safety or other matters you would like to raise with UNISON. The form is available by following this link: [www.protectourfood.org/tellme](http://www.protectourfood.org/tellme). Due to GDPR, please do not record any one's unique personal data but just the plant name, number and incident, so that it can be shared with your reps. By adding your email and telephone number, you will be consenting to provide those details to UNISON. The online form is not to replace talking to your rep, but can be used to share information quickly if your rep is not around. Please do not send individual UNISON casework through the online form.

## Latest from UNISON on COVID-19

UNISON is calling for mandatory Covid-19 testing at all plants. If this means closing temporarily, then so be it. A lot of work is happening behind the scenes. Your convenors and reps are working tirelessly to protect you, but we also need your support. UNISON meets with the FSA every two weeks and more frequently if necessary, to make sure your safety is a priority. It is not overdramatic to say that UNISON is working with the FSA to save lives.

UNISON health and safety reps across the country strongly encourage members to formally report all accidents, near misses, and incidents of bullying and harassment on the FSA K2 system. The more incidents that are recorded, the better chance UNISON reps have of putting pressure on the FSA and FBOs to improve the health and safety in your workplace.

UNISON also regard mental health and well-being as essential. If you are unfortunately off work with stress, please remember to complete the FSA stress questionnaire and make sure your line manager records it. UNISON is concerned that stress and mental health issues may be under-reported. If any member has an accident in the workplace through no fault of their own, please contact the UNISON helpline on 0800 0857 857 who may be able to help with legal assistance.

During the course of the pandemic, UNISON reps and UNISON have:

- **Written to the FSA asking that each Food Business Operator (FBO) carry out risk assessments to protect members by using social distancing and changes to the layout of premises**
- **Formally complained and submitted evidence to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to encourage the FSA to produce risk assessments for each FBO**
- **Submitted evidence to the FSA in the form of member comments and concerns along with the UNISON position on health and safety in individual workplaces**
- **Made a submission to the FSA seeking that the families of FSA staff who were shielding to be stood down on full pay. This was successful.**
- **Issued a special Covid-19 edition of FoodMatters (magazine for UNISON members in the FSA)**
- **Contributed UNISON research to inform the publication of FSA risk assessments by region and species**
- **Written to the FSA formally requesting that the spread of Covid-19 is contained by:**
  - ⇒ **Adequate separation at entry and exit points to workplaces**

- ⇒ Adequate separation on the meat inspection line including slowing down the line
  - ⇒ Enforcement of the two-metre rule
  - ⇒ The provision of washing/sterilising facilities in food processing areas
  - ⇒ Separation of staff at lunchtime and wash down, i.e. at the end of the shift
  - ⇒ Monitoring of FBO compliance and closure orders through the withdrawal of inspection where necessary
- Requested an extension of facilities time for UNISON's national convenor
  - Given regular updates to Convenors on the negotiations with the FSA
  - Written to the FSA on individual outbreaks in FBOs in England and Cymru/Wales.

The work of the Convenors, members, UNISON Centre and Regions, all contributed to saving lives through weekly negotiation meetings and our submission to the HSE and the FSA.

**Just recently, UNISON asked for the FSA to pay for members on the front line to receive the flu vaccination. You should have seen the information on how to claim back the cost of the flu vaccination and those staff who are eligible. UNISON thanks the FSA for agreeing to reimburse staff. As many symptoms of flu and Covid-19 are similar, this is a benefit for our members but also the country by preventing periods of self-isolation for just the ordinary flu.**

## **MHI and inspection spending slashed**

UNISON works in partnership with other civic organisations. One of them is Unchecked UK - an organisation supported by more than 40 organisations across civil society. In October they launched **a new report showing the staggering scale of the UK's perilous 'Enforcement Gap'**.

The research – which includes shocking whistleblower testimonies – shows that over the last decade, regulatory budgets in critical areas have fallen by 41 per cent in real terms, with staff numbers cut by over a third.

Few regulators have been spared, with many so hollowed out by successive cuts that they are no longer fit for purpose. The food inspection figures uncovered include:

**A 53 per cent cut** in the number of **FSA Meat Hygiene Inspectors** in England and Wales (2009-19)

A **24 per cent cut** in **FSA staff numbers** in England and Wales (2009-19)

A **51 per cent cut** in funding for the **Food Standards Agency** between 2009 and 2019, with an accompanying **24 per cent reduction** in staff numbers

A **37 per cent cut** in **FSA** spending in England and Wales on meat hygiene controls (2011-19)

A **39 per cent** reduction in the number of unannounced **FSA** inspections in cutting plans in England and Wales (2013-19)

A **49 per cent cut** in spending on **Health and Safety by Local Authorities in England** between 2009 and 2019, with a **reduction of 54 per cent** in the number of **Local Authority Health and Safety Inspectors**

A **60 per cent cut** in **Local Authority Trading Standards** funding between 2009 and 2018

A **38 per cent cut** in **food safety** in local authorities in England (2009-19)

A **59 per cent drop** in food sampling and testing by local authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland with an **18 per cent** drop in food interventions

A **fall in the number of UK laboratories from 17 to 9** which carry out food testing.

A **6 per cent** cut in funding for **Food Standards Scotland** (2009-19).

The implications of these cuts are significant, with declines in almost every metric of regulatory activity – including food safety checks, water pollution sampling, workplace inspections, health and safety visits, checks on consumer goods and prosecution of offenders.

Now is the time for the FSA to accept that they need more directly employed MHIs, PMHIs, OVIs and support staff working across England and Wales. With Brexit and its consequences about to be laid bare for everyone to see, we urge the FSA and the Association of Meat Inspectors to join UNISON in calling for more inspection staff. Lives depend upon how the FSA responds in the future of official controls.

For more information and to read the report, visit the Unchecked UK website: [www.unchecked.uk](http://www.unchecked.uk).

## Stay in contact and your Convenors

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:** 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>.

## Convenors for FSA Members

**Terry Shinton, the West Midlands Convenor has now retired. Terry is not only a sweet man but a powerhouse in supporting MHIs in his region. The FSA/FSS Sector Committee thanks Terry for his commitment to UNISON and his members over the years. Darren Hough is taking over from Terry.**

| Name            | Region                            | Telephone    |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| Graham Cross    | Cymru/Wales                       | 07427 173716 |
| Chris Tozer     | Eastern                           | 07951 049345 |
| Alan Howarth    | Yorkshire & Humberside            | 07790 564517 |
| Martin Hope     | North West                        | 07446 068344 |
| Alan Colson     | South East                        | 07710 469388 |
| John Rowland    | South West                        | 07847 552260 |
| Darren Hough    | West Midlands                     | 07540 797691 |
| Richard Collier | Northern                          | 07837 986486 |
| John Price      | Service Group Executive           | 07762 128138 |
| Mark Haylett    | East Midlands & National Convenor | 07736 195559 |
| Christin Price  | OVs                               | TBC          |
| Wayne Parker    | National Food Crime Unit          | 07947 069208 |