



UK Statistics  
Authority

# Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

## Statistics on Food

*(produced by the Department for  
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs)*

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### **About the UK Statistics Authority**

The UK Statistics Authority is an independent body operating at arm's length from government as a non-ministerial department, directly accountable to Parliament. It was established on 1 April 2008 by the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*.

The Authority's overall objective is to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good. It is also required to promote and safeguard the quality and comprehensiveness of official statistics, and good practice in relation to official statistics.

The Statistics Authority has two main functions:

1. oversight of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) – the executive office of the Authority;
2. independent scrutiny (monitoring and assessment) of all official statistics produced in the UK.

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# **Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics**

## **Statistics on Food**

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## ASSESSMENT AND DESIGNATION

The *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* gives the UK Statistics Authority a statutory power to assess sets of statistics against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*.

Assessment will determine whether it is appropriate for the statistics to be designated as National Statistics.

Designation as National Statistics means that the statistics comply with the *Code of Practice*. The *Code* is wide-ranging. Designation can be interpreted to mean that the statistics: meet identified user needs; are produced, managed and disseminated to high standards; and are explained well.

Designation as National Statistics should not be interpreted to mean that the statistics are always correct. For example, whilst the *Code* requires statistics to be produced to a level of accuracy that meets users' needs, it also recognises that errors can occur – in which case it requires them to be corrected and publicised.

Assessment Reports will not normally comment further on a set of statistics, for example on their validity as social or economic measures. However, Reports may point to such questions if the Authority believes that further research would be desirable.

Assessment Reports typically provide an overview of any noteworthy features of the methods used to produce the statistics, and will highlight substantial concerns about quality. Assessment Reports also describe aspects of the ways in which the producer addresses the 'sound methods and assured quality' principle of the *Code*, but do not themselves constitute a review of the methods used to produce the statistics. However the *Code* requires producers to "seek to achieve continuous improvement in statistical processes by, for example, undertaking regular reviews".

The Authority may grant designation on condition that the producer body takes steps, within a stated timeframe, to fully meet the *Code's* requirements. This is to avoid public confusion and does not reduce the obligation to comply with the *Code*.

The Authority grants designation on the basis of three main sources of information:

- i. factual evidence and assurances by senior statisticians in the producer body;
- ii. the views of users who we contact, or who contact us, and;
- iii. our own review activity.

Should further information come to light subsequently which changes the Authority's analysis, it may withdraw the Assessment Report and revise it as necessary.

It is a statutory requirement on the producer body to ensure that it continues to produce the set of statistics designated as National Statistics in compliance with the *Code of Practice*.

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# 1 Summary of findings

## 1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This is one of a series of reports<sup>1</sup> prepared under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*<sup>2</sup>. The Act requires all statistics currently designated as National Statistics to be assessed against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*<sup>3</sup>. The report covers the statistics included in the following National Statistics publications produced by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra):

- *Family Food*<sup>4</sup>
- *Food Transport Indicators*<sup>5</sup>.

This report also covers the compendium publication:

- *Food Statistics Pocketbook*<sup>6</sup>

1.1.2 The Act also allows Ministers to request an assessment of other official statistics in order for them to gain National Statistics status. The report covers the following publication in response to such a request:

- *Total Factor Productivity of the United Kingdom Food Chain*<sup>7</sup>

1.1.3 Assessments of compendium publications against the *Code of Practice* relate to the processes involved in preparing the publication, rather than in producing the statistics that are included. Those sets of statistics will normally be subject to separate assessment. Designation of a compendium publication as National Statistics therefore means that the producer body has, for example: identified and met user needs in terms of the content of the publication; considered the appropriateness of each series for inclusion; and written appropriate commentary.

1.1.4 This report was prepared by the Authority's Assessment team, and approved by the Board of the Statistics Authority on the advice of the Head of Assessment.

## 1.2 Decision concerning designation as National Statistics

1.2.1 The Statistics Authority judges that the statistics covered by this report are readily accessible, produced according to sound methods and managed impartially and objectively in the public interest, subject to any points for action in this report. The Statistics Authority confirms that the statistics published in *Family Food*, *Food Statistics Pocketbook*, *Food Transport Indicators* and *Total Factor Productivity of the United Kingdom Food Chain* are designated as

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga\\_20070018\\_en.pdf](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga_20070018_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.defra.gov.uk/statistics/foodfarm/food/familyfood/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.defra.gov.uk/statistics/foodfarm/food/transport/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.defra.gov.uk/statistics/foodfarm/food/pocketstats/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.defra.gov.uk/statistics/foodfarm/food/food-chain-productivity/>

National Statistics, subject to Defra implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by September 2011.

### 1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

- 1.3.1 The producer team has demonstrated a commitment to continuous improvement by improving the format and content of releases and creating new releases in response to user demand. However, there is a lack of contact with, and knowledge of, users outside Defra and the Family Food Committee. In addition, Defra has published little documentation about user needs and information about users' experiences of the statistical service it provides.
- 1.3.2 The releases include some information about the quality of the statistics but this is not comprehensive and does not cover all main sources of error and bias.
- 1.3.3 Each release includes a section on key messages and commentary to accompany the statistics. This is useful, but there is a lack of explanation of trends and charts do not always present the statistics clearly.

### 1.4 Detailed recommendations

- 1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that Defra could strengthen its compliance with the *Code*. Those which the Assessment team considers essential to enable designation as National Statistics are listed in section 1.5. Other suggestions, which would improve the statistics and the service provided to users but which are not formally required for their designation, are listed at annex 1.

### 1.5 Requirements for designation as National Statistics

<b>Requirement 1</b>	Identify, and seek to engage with, users outside the Family Food Committee and Defra, and publish information about users' experiences of the statistical service it provides (para 3.2).
<b>Requirement 2</b>	Investigate and document the use made of <i>Total Factor Productivity of the United Kingdom Food Chain</i> and the <i>Pocketbook</i> and the types of decisions they inform (para 3.3).
<b>Requirement 3</b>	Confirm that any future changes to methods will be pre-announced (para 3.6).
<b>Requirement 4</b>	Publish explanations for why particular methods have been chosen for the <i>Family Food</i> , <i>Total Factor Productivity of the United Kingdom Food Chain</i> and <i>Food Transport Indicators</i> releases and provide links to details of the methods used to produce the statistics in the <i>Pocketbook</i> (para 3.8).

- Requirement 5** Improve the information provided on the quality of the Food Statistics, including strengths and limitations, and ensure that users are informed of all main sources of error and bias (para 3.9).
- Requirement 6** Review and improve the commentary and presentation of statistics in the Food Statistics releases to improve clarity and aid user interpretation (para 3.23).
- Requirement 7** Publish the name and contact details of the responsible statistician in the *Family Food* release (para 3.29).



## 2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 The statistics presented in *Family Food* are based on data collected in the Family Food module of the Living Costs and Food Survey<sup>8</sup>, conducted by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The module collects detailed quantity and expenditure information about household food and drink purchases, including itemised lists of food and drink purchases when eating out. This data collection commenced in 1940 when the survey was known as the National Food Survey<sup>9</sup>. Originally, data were collected for Great Britain only, but from 1996 Northern Ireland was also included so that the survey covered the whole of the UK. In 2001, the survey merged with the Family Expenditure Survey to form the Expenditure and Food Survey. It became the Living Costs and Food Survey in January 2008.
- 2.2 *Food Statistics Pocketbook (Pocketbook)* is an annual compendium of food statistics which have already been released and was first published in 2006. The chapters are aligned with policy subject areas: Food Chain; Prices and Expenditure; Global and UK Supply; Environment; Waste; Dietary Health; and Safety and Confidence. *Pocketbook* serves as a useful reference tool, particularly for those developing and monitoring policies in Defra. The latest release (2010) includes a new section which reports on comparisons of: the relative size of the food manufacturing industry; the productivity of the food chain; and obesity levels with European data in response to user demand.
- 2.3 *Food Transport Indicators (FTI)* was created as a result of research commissioned by Defra - *The Validity of Food Miles as an Indicator of Sustainable Development*<sup>10</sup>. The research assessed whether a practical and reliable indicator based on food miles could be developed, and whether this would be a valid indicator of progress towards Defra's food industry sustainability strategy<sup>11</sup>. The report recommended that a suite of indicators be developed to reflect the key adverse impacts of food transport, and this informed the content of the release. The indicators are: UK urban food kilometres; HGV food kilometres; air food kilometres; and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from food transport. The time series in the release begins in 1992, with the latest update including data up to 2009 (and provisional figures on air food kilometres for 2010). The release has been labelled as an experimental National Statistics release until the latest release, published in March 2011. For this release, Defra has removed the experimental label.
- 2.4 *Total Factor Productivity of the United Kingdom Food Chain (TFP)* was published for the first time in April 2011. Statistics on the productivity of the food chain were previously presented in *Pocketbook* and as a result of user demand for improved timeliness, Defra decided to create a separate release and in doing so took the opportunity to improve the underlying methods. Details

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about/surveys/a-z-of-surveys/living-costs-and-food-survey/index.html>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.defra.gov.uk/statistics/foodfarm/food/familyfood/nationalfoodsurvey/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://archive.defra.gov.uk/evidence/economics/foodfarm/reports/documents/foodmile.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/2011/03/28/pb11649-food-industry/>

of these methods have been published in a separate document which accompanies *TFP*.

- 2.5 Defra is the main user of Food Statistics in its co-ordinating role on food policy across government. The statistics feature in high-level indicators on healthy diet and food security such as the *Indicators for a Sustainable Food System*<sup>12</sup> used to monitor progress of the delivery of Defra's food strategy. Defra also uses the statistics in various ways for contextual information, such as to attribute an upper limit to the level of fraud being committed in the food industry, in which foods are mislabelled as higher value products. The Food Standards Agency<sup>13</sup> uses the statistics to obtain contextual information about the amount of food being consumed and the market share which is held by different types of food. The statistics are placed in the UK Data Archive and are accessed by academics to carry out research. For example, the statistics are currently being used by researchers at the University of Reading to make official estimates of price and income elasticities of different types of food. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation also uses the statistics for research into a minimum income standard for Britain<sup>14</sup>. Finally, the statistics are used by the food and drink industry to monitor trends in purchases.
- 2.6 It cost around £381,000 to produce *Family Food* in 2009/10. This cost is made up of the sum of £320,000 paid to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) for the Family Food module of the Living Costs and Food Survey and the sum of £61,000 spent on Defra staff costs for survey monitoring and the production of the release. *Pocketbook* costs approximately £40,000 to produce in 2010. This cost has recently been reduced as a result of the restriction on printed copies and carrying out less additional research for the Family Food Committee. Defra estimates that it cost £25,000 to produce *FTI* in 2011 and £3,500 to produce *TFP*.

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.defra.gov.uk/statistics/files/defra-stats-foodsystemindicators.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.food.gov.uk/>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/minimum-income-standard-2009-full.pdf>

### 3 Assessment findings

#### Principle 1: Meeting user needs

**The production, management and dissemination of official statistics should meet the requirements of informed decision-making by government, public services, business, researchers and the public.**

- 3.1 Defra chairs a formal user group, the Family Food Committee, which meet annually and mainly focuses on the *Family Food* release. The Committee is composed of a selection of the main users of *Family Food* and includes users within Defra, the Devolved Administrations, the Department of Health, ONS, the Food Industry and academia. The Food Statistics team involves members of the Committee in the drafting of the releases and takes into account the Committee's views and needs when reviewing the format and content of the releases.
- 3.2 The Food Statistics team has contact with users outside the Committee mainly via ad hoc email and telephone queries. It records email contacts and queries but not telephone queries. It carried out a Food Statistics feedback exercise using 'Survey Monkey' in January 2010 but received a very low response and did not publish any feedback received. In July 2010, Defra carried out an organisational level feedback exercise in which it wrote to 37 key stakeholders asking about their priorities for statistics. The feedback received via this consultation has not been published. For *FTI*, the Food Statistics team only has contact with colleagues within Defra responsible for developing and reviewing policy and these colleagues promote the statistics to users within the food and drink industry. The Food Statistics team has not proactively sought out unknown or potential users or engaged with users other than Committee members in a systematic way. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Defra should identify, and seek to engage with, users outside the Family Food Committee and Defra, and publish information about users' experiences of the statistical service it provides<sup>15</sup> (Requirement 1). We suggest that Defra refers to the generic classes of use put forward in the Authority's Monitoring Brief: *The Use Made of Official Statistics*<sup>16</sup> in meeting this Requirement.
- 3.3 *FTI* and *Family Food* include a section on the uses of the statistics but Defra has not published such information for the other releases. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Defra should investigate and document the use made of *TFP* and *Pocketbook* and the types of decisions they inform<sup>17</sup> (Requirement 2).
- 3.4 The Food Statistics team in Defra occasionally completes additional pieces of work at the request of the Family Food Committee, for example it has: updated the conversion of food into nutritional content; conducted research into price elasticities, i.e. how demand changes as price changes and the impact of

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<sup>15</sup> In relation to Principle 1, Practices 1 and 5 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring-briefs/monitoring-brief-6-2010---the-use-made-of-official-statistics.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> In relation to Principle 1, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

income on this<sup>18</sup>; and conducted research into the impact of attitudes on purchasing behaviour<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> <http://archive.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/foodfarm/food/familyfood/index.htm>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.defra.gov.uk/statistics/foodfarm/food/>

## Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity

**Official statistics, and information about statistical processes, should be managed impartially and objectively.**

- 3.5 The National Food Survey was merged with the Family Expenditure Survey in 2001 to form the Expenditure and Food Survey (now known as the Living Costs and Food Survey). Defra has published a document<sup>20</sup> which details the adjustments made to historical National Food Survey estimates to make them comparable with Family Food estimates from 2001 onwards.
- 3.6 For the latest *FTI* and *TFP* (published in March and April 2011 respectively), changes were made to the methods used to produce these statistics. In particular, the latest *FTI* used EU data on HGV transport for food miles outside the UK, whereas for previous releases this had been estimated based on distances between the UK and the country from which food has been imported. The main change within *TFP* was that non-food sales were removed from retail. Details of these changes are included in the latest releases but the changes were not pre-announced. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Defra should confirm that any future changes to methods will be pre-announced<sup>21</sup> (Requirement 3).

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<sup>20</sup> <http://archive.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/foodfarm/food/familyfood/method/method-nfsadjust.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> In relation to Principle 2, Practice 4 of the *Code of Practice*

### **Principle 3: Integrity**

**At all stages in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics, the public interest should prevail over organisational, political or personal interests.**

- 3.7 No incidents of political pressures, abuses of trust or complaints relating to professional integrity, quality or standards were reported to or identified by the Assessment team.

## Principle 4: Sound methods and assured quality

**Statistical methods should be consistent with scientific principles and internationally recognised best practices, and be fully documented. Quality should be monitored and assured taking account of internationally agreed practices.**

- 3.8 Defra publishes documents explaining the methods used to produce the statistics in *Family Food*<sup>22</sup>, *TFP*<sup>23</sup> and *FTI*<sup>24</sup>. However, these documents do not contain sufficient information on the rationale for the methods chosen and no links to methods and quality information are provided relating to the statistics in *Pocketbook*. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Defra should publish explanations for why particular methods have been chosen to produce the statistics included in *Family Food*, *TFP* and *FTI* and provide links to details of the methods used to produce the statistics in *Pocketbook*<sup>25</sup> (Requirement 4). This could be achieved by augmenting the existing methods documents where relevant.
- 3.9 Little information is published detailing the quality of the statistics presented in *TFP*; there is only a small section within the accompanying methods document which comments on the reliability of the statistics. This section provides some comment on sampling error but is not specific about the impact of this and does not mention sources of non-sampling error. *FTI* contains a section on the reliability of the indicators which mentions both sampling and non-sampling error but the comment on sampling error is not specific to the statistics in *FTI*. *Family Food* uses a tick code as an indicator of relative standard error. This is an example of good practice, although no simple definition of a relative standard error is provided in the release and no information is given on the presence or likely magnitude of any non-sampling error. *Pocketbook* gives no information on the quality or reliability of the statistics published, other than indicating which statistics are National Statistics, official statistics or non-official statistics, but this labelling is not clear. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Defra should improve the information provided on the quality of the Food Statistics, including strengths and limitations, and ensure that users are informed of all main sources of error and bias<sup>26</sup> (Requirement 5).
- 3.10 Defra consults with users about quality matters relating to *Family Food*, mainly via the Family Food Committee, and documents development issues. For the 2010 publication, Defra has written a quality plan for *Family Food* which prioritises areas of most concern. We suggest Defra publish this document.
- 3.11 The Food Statistics team also holds meetings and workshops with internal policy colleagues in which quality matters relating to *Pocketbook* and *FTI* in particular are discussed. Feedback from policy colleagues is taken on board and actioned where possible; for example, *Pocketbook* used to contain only

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.defra.gov.uk/statistics/foodfarm/food/familyfood/method/>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.defra.gov.uk/statistics/files/defra-stats-foodfarm-food-productivity-110412-method.pdf>

<sup>24</sup>

<http://archive.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/foodfarm/food/transport/documents/MethodologyNote.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> In relation to Principle 4, Practice 1 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>26</sup> In relation to Principle 4, Practice 2 and Principle 8, Practice 1 of the *Code of Practice*

National Statistics but now includes other sources in response to the needs of policy colleagues.

- 3.12 Both Defra and ONS carry out quality assurance of the data from the Family Food module of the Living Costs and Food survey that is used in *Family Food*. ONS carries out coding checks and validation checks on expenditure data and Defra carries out further detailed validation following this, in particular validation checks relating to quantity data. Desk instructions are not available for all of the quality assurance processes carried out by Defra. We suggest that Defra ensure all of its quality assurance processes are fully documented.
- 3.13 Defra removed the 'experimental statistics' label from the March 2011 *FTI* because of improvements that it had made to the methods, although no user consultation has been carried out nor any user feedback received to suggest that the statistics fully meet user needs. We suggest Defra consult with users to ensure that *FTI* meets their needs and is suitable for publication without the experimental statistics label.
- 3.14 All releases present data for the UK. *Pocketbook* also includes European comparisons in response to requests from policy colleagues within Defra. For the statistics presented within *Family Food*, Defra has told us that making comparisons with statistics in other EU countries would be difficult due to the lack of data on the quantity of food consumed in other countries. However, there is a link to the Eurostat website in *Family Food* where users can access statistics for other EU countries. Defra does not know of any comparable food transport indicators or food chain productivity statistics being produced in the rest of the EU. The deviations that exist from EU data collection on food are not made publicly available. We suggest Defra publish this information.
- 3.15 Changes have been made to the methods used to produce the statistics within *FTI* and *TFP*. Figures within the time series have been updated and presented in the latest releases so that consistent historical statistics are available for users.



## **Principle 5: Confidentiality**

**Private information about individual persons (including bodies corporate) compiled in the production of official statistics is confidential, and should be used for statistical purposes only.**

3.16 Defra has assured us that it takes all necessary steps to protect the confidentiality of the data it collects. The only confidential data that are used are those collected in the Living Costs and Food Survey. Defra releases household level records to the data archive. These are anonymised and contain no geographical information below Government Office Region level. A service level agreement between ONS and Defra includes details about how the confidentiality of the data transferred between them will be protected. Defra has recently produced a confidentiality declaration and all members of the food statistics team have signed the declaration.

## Principle 6: Proportionate burden

**The cost burden on data suppliers should not be excessive and should be assessed relative to the benefits arising from the use of the statistics.**

- 3.17 ONS collects the data needed to produce the statistics in *Family Food*, since it runs the Living Costs and Food Survey. A budget transfer has taken place between Defra and ONS so that Defra now only pays for the additional questions which it requires. Therefore it has limited control over the running of the survey. However, Defra is sometimes required to weigh up the costs and benefits of new data requirements for its set of questions. For example, it was recently asked to include statistics on organic purchases in *Family Food* and decided that the benefit to users would not outweigh the increased burden and resource which would be required for the additional questions.
- 3.18 Meetings between Defra and ONS provide an opportunity for Defra to express views on survey matters such as coding procedures and influence survey processes.
- 3.19 Other data used for the Food Statistics releases are collected for other purposes – for example, data from the National Diet and Nutrition Survey<sup>27</sup> obtained from the Department of Health and the trade data<sup>28</sup> obtained from HM Revenue and Customs. *Pocketbook* uses many different data sources, most of which Defra obtain themselves without the data supplier needing to send the data separately. The exceptions to this are the data obtained from Kantar World Panel<sup>29</sup> and the World Health Organisation<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> <http://www.natcen.ac.uk/study/national-diet-and-nutrition-survey>

<sup>28</sup> [http://customs.hmrc.gov.uk/channelsPortalWebApp/channelsPortalWebApp.portal?\\_nfpb=true&\\_pageLabel=pageImport\\_TradeStats](http://customs.hmrc.gov.uk/channelsPortalWebApp/channelsPortalWebApp.portal?_nfpb=true&_pageLabel=pageImport_TradeStats)

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.kantarworldpanel.com/en/#/News/news-list/Kantar-Worldpanel-defra-consumer-report.html>

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.who.int/en/>

## Principle 7: Resources

**The resources made available for statistical activities should be sufficient to meet the requirements of this Code and should be used efficiently and effectively.**

- 3.20 Defra has produced an Economics and Statistics Programme Business Plan but this has not been published. The plan includes the attribution of statistical resources and Defra has also produced a document which proposes how staff resources for economics and statistics activity will reduce to meet the Spending Review requirements. This document outlines priorities and costs for each work area, including Food Statistics, and how staffing resource will be split across the different work areas. Defra also keeps a record of staff time spent on Food Statistics releases.
- 3.21 We were told that although funding for *Family Food* will remain the same, Defra will need to make a reduction in staffing costs attributed to the production of Food Statistics. In part, Defra plans to achieve this by reducing the amount of ad hoc analysis and research which it conducts in response to requests from the Family Food Committee. It will also continue to adopt a flexible staffing resource strategy, in which staffing resource is pooled and assigned according to demand. The Food Statistics team has already made use of this for the production of *FTI*.
- 3.22 Defra holds an annual meeting with ONS to ensure that survey processes are efficient and meet user needs.

## Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility

**Official statistics, accompanied by full and frank commentary, should be readily accessible to all users.**

- 3.23 Each of the releases covered by this Assessment includes a section on the key messages of the statistics presented and commentary on trends. The commentary on trends in the summary of *Family Food* is usefully accompanied by arrows to indicate the direction of the trend. However, the coherence of the key messages within *Family Food* and within *Pocketbook* could be improved. Additionally, commentary within the releases only explains the reasons for changes in the time series in a few cases. *TFP* contains definitions of productivity and related terms but explanation of these could be improved. Charts contained in *Pocketbook*, *FTI* and *TFP* do not always present the statistics clearly. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Defra should review and improve the commentary and presentation of statistics in the Food Statistics releases to improve clarity and aid user interpretation<sup>31</sup> (Requirement 6).
- 3.24 Defra makes full *Family Food* datasets<sup>32</sup> available on its website in Excel format. Some historic data collected through the National Food Survey are also made available. The tables in these datasets are clearly presented and well-labelled and contain some explanatory footnotes, but could be improved by the addition of links to information about the methods used and reference to the tables published in *Family Food* to which the data relate. We suggest Defra provide links to information on methods from the *Family Food* datasets and reference the datasets to the appropriate tables in *Family Food*.

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<sup>31</sup> In relation to Principle 8, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.defra.gov.uk/statistics/foodfarm/food/familyfood/datasets/>

## **Protocol 1: User engagement**

**Effective user engagement is fundamental both to trust in statistics and securing maximum public value. This Protocol draws together the relevant practices set out elsewhere in the Code and expands on the requirements in relation to consultation.**

3.25 The requirements for this Protocol are covered elsewhere in this report.

## Protocol 2: Release practices

**Statistical reports should be released into the public domain in an orderly manner that promotes public confidence and gives equal access to all, subject to relevant legislation.**

- 3.26 Defra makes all of its releases available via the National Statistics Publication Hub. Release dates are announced on the Publication Hub and on a list of latest releases<sup>33</sup> published on Defra's website. The latest releases of *FTI* and *TFP* were not announced 12 months in advance. However, the Publication Hub now has release dates pre-announced for the next 12 months.
- 3.27 *FTI 2011* was originally planned for release in February 2011 but was delayed until March 2011 due to unanticipated issues with EU data on HGVs that was discovered as part of the data quality assurance procedure. Defra told us that this delay was announced on the Publication Hub.
- 3.28 Defra told us that due to IT or other technical issues, statistical releases are not always available at 9.30am. If this occurs, releases are emailed to users in response to user requests. Such problems have not affected any of the Food statistics releases covered by this assessment.
- 3.29 Full contact details for the responsible statistician are published in *Pocketbook*, *FTI* and *TFP*, but these details are not available in *Family Food*. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Defra should publish the name and contact details of the responsible statistician in *Family Food*<sup>34</sup> (Requirement 7).
- 3.30 Pre-release access is given to *Family Food*, *TFP* and *FTI* and a pre-release access list is published on Defra's website<sup>35</sup>. Defra told the Assessment team that the pre-release access list is reviewed each quarter and individuals on the list are asked if they still require the pre-release access to ensure that the number of individuals on the list is controlled. The pre-release access lists for *Family Food*, *TFP* and *FTI* currently contain 10, 5 and 7 individuals, respectively.

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.defra.gov.uk/statistics/foodfarm/latest-statistical-releases/>

<sup>34</sup> In relation to Protocol 2, Practice 6 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.defra.gov.uk/statistics/files/defra-stats-natstats-prerelease-access-110428.pdf>

### **Protocol 3: The use of administrative sources for statistical purposes**

**Administrative sources should be fully exploited for statistical purposes, subject to adherence to appropriate safeguards.**

- 3.31 Defra has been investigating opportunities for maximising the use of administrative data which it owns. This is relevant for agricultural data sources owned by Defra, since it carries out extensive monitoring work which requires similar data. Most of the data used to produce Food Statistics are either obtained from data sources collected for other purposes, cannot be obtained from another existing source, or are not required for other purposes and therefore there are no opportunities to maximise its use.
- 3.32 Defra has published a Statement of Administrative Sources<sup>36</sup>. Defra told the Assessment team that it covers all the administrative sources used to produce the Food Statistics.

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<sup>36</sup> <http://www.defra.gov.uk/statistics/national-statistics/adminsources/>

## Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to Defra's Food Statistics, in the interest of the public good. These are not formally required for designation, but the Assessment team considers that their implementation will improve public confidence in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics.

- |                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| <b>Suggestion 1</b> | Refer to the generic classes of use put forward in the Authority's Monitoring Brief: The Use Made of Official Statistics <sup>37</sup> in meeting Requirement 1 (para 3.2). |
| <b>Suggestion 2</b> | Publish the <i>Family Food</i> quality plan for the most recent publication (para 3.10).  |
| <b>Suggestion 3</b> | Ensure that all quality assurance processes are fully documented (para 3.12).   |
| <b>Suggestion 4</b> | Consult with users to ensure that <i>FTI</i> meets their needs and is suitable for publication without the experimental statistics label (para 3.13).                       |
| <b>Suggestion 5</b> | Publish information about the comparability of the statistics with those produced by other EU countries (para 3.14).  |
| <b>Suggestion 6</b> | Provide links to information on methods from the <i>Family Food</i> datasets and reference the datasets to the appropriate tables in <i>Family Food</i> (para 3.24).        |

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<sup>37</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-briefs/monitoring-brief-6-2010---the-use-made-of-official-statistics.pdf>



## Annex 2: Summary of assessment process and users' views

A2.1 This assessment was conducted from February to June 2011.

A2.2 The Assessment team – Emma Bowditch and Kat Pegler – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of Defra in February. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 1 March. The Assessment team subsequently met Defra in April to review compliance with the *Code of Practice*, taking account of the written evidence provided and other relevant sources of evidence.

### Summary of users contacted, and issues raised

A2.3 Part of the assessment process involves our consideration of the views of users. We approach some known and potential users of the set of statistics, and we invite comments via an open note on the Authority's website. This process is not a statistical survey, but it enables us to gain some insights about the extent to which the statistics meet users' needs and the extent to which users feel that the producers of those statistics engage with them. We are aware that responses from users may not be representative of wider views, and we take account of this in the way that we prepare assessment reports.

A2.4 The Assessment team received 10 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Defra	2
Other government departments	4
Academic	3
Devolved administrations	1

A2.5 Comments on *Pocketbook* were positive – it is seen as a valuable reference tool, well presented and including helpful commentary. Users from within Defra said that it had supported analysis presented in briefings to ministers and the Environmental Audit Committee. Statistics within *Family Food* are also used as evidence to support analysis and advice on food policy issues. Some users commented that the new sections on Food Waste and the urban-rural analysis were welcome additions and that the estimates of food elasticities would also prove to be useful. Users liked the fact that there is little variation in the way that the outputs are presented annually, and considered the team to be very helpful and communicative.

A2.6 User requests included to add Body Mass Index (BMI) and health status and/or body size to the survey data used for *Family Food*.

A2.7 Academics mostly use the datasets rather than the releases. None of the users who responded made reference to *FTI* or *TFP*.

### Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

