



## Research questionnaire January 2017:

### Charges for inspection visits – Permission to Trade (registration)

#### **£300 for each time your Local Authority carries out routine food safety inspections - and you need Permission to Trade!**

Additional cost for your business could be on their way if the plans put forward by the Regulating Our Future panel and the Food Standards Agency (FSA) are implemented.

The FSA is reviewing food regulations through its programme '[Regulating our Future](#)'. Additional charges for permission to trade (registration) and routine food safety inspections were discussed at meetings in September and December.

Most of the members of the panel set up to agree these proposals are employees of multi-million pound companies and consultants who may have little or no idea about the problems of running a small food businesses. At the moment Food Solutions is the only member of this panel representing the interests of small and micro food businesses which account for around 90% of food businesses in the UK. If nothing is done, these charges will be introduced. **We have to fight to stop this.**

**As a start we need to have a mandate to represent your views. So please complete the attached questionnaire.**

**To access the questionnaire go to:**

**<http://www.opiniontaker.com/surveys/websurvey.asp?ci=115&si=31>**

**Deadline for response to questionnaire 27th February 2017**

#### **Background information**

Discussion about charging for food safety inspections (also known as full cost recovery) is not new. To help you fully understand what this is all about we have put together a briefing paper bringing together some of the documents that have been produced over the years. [Briefing paper here.](#)

A worrying aspect is that some Local Authorities are unaware about what is going on. One EHO when contacted by a small food business was very quick to deny any chance of charges in the future.

**A query by a small food business to the FSA produced this response:**

We want to reassure you that plans for our future regulatory model for food and feed are very much under discussion and decisions on its design haven't been reached. We are developing our plans out loud, in consultation with all those with an interest in food regulation, including our Expert Advisory Groups of which Food Solutions is a member. We therefore continue to invite views to help shape the design of the model, via gatekeeper organisations like Food Solutions.

We cannot afford to be complacent – we need your support:

**Inaction at this stage is not an option. If we do nothing we will get what we deserve.**

## **Questionnaire background Part 1. Charging for routine food safety inspections.**

**Proposal:** There has been a move for some time to introduce full cost recovery for official functions. What this means in practice is that the costs of routine food hygiene inspection are to be met by food businesses. When this was first suggested the cost per visit was estimated to be around £300. It would also apply to second visits.

**Arguments for the proposal:** Local Authorities (LA) are finding it difficult to carry out routine inspections efficiently due to cut backs. The increasing value of a high rating under the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme is becoming increasingly important. Food Business operators (FBOs) wanting to improve their rating are having to wait for inspections or re-inspections. The claim is that the risk of food scares is increased by less frequent inspection. **Introducing a charge would ensure a more efficient inspection regime.**

**Arguments against the proposal:** FBOs already pay for inspections through their business rates and taxes. Inspections are carried out to ensure that food being sold to the public is safe. This is the responsibility of Local Authorities.

Full cost recovery could disadvantage remote rural businesses. It would raise suspicion that follow up visits were for money raising rather than hygiene. This could also lead to corruption at local level. **Businesses should not be asked to pay twice to provide a service that is the responsibility of LAs.**

## **Questionnaire background part 2. Permission to Trade (Registration)**

### **Background:**

**Current requirement** - All food operators are required to register so that authorities know where they are and what sort of business they run. This is the responsibility of Local Authorities.

**Proposed change** - Develop a centralised, digitally enabled registration process.

- This would be mandatory, a fee would be charged, data would be verified, and annual updates expected.
- Some businesses will need a 'permit to trade' before they can commence trading - have to demonstrate they have robust arrangements in place for ensuring food is safe and what it says it is.
- Some low risk businesses will not require inspection following registration – dependent on risk segmentation.

**Arguments for:** Currently responsibility for registration lies with Local Authorities. There is no national register and enforcement of non-registration is poor. The result is many unregistered food businesses operating in the UK. The national register held by the FSA would be more efficient. The person running the business must be properly qualified and licensed. The centralised scheme would have on-line support for new business start-ups.

**Arguments against:** This would be mandatory, a fee would be charged, data would be verified, and annual updates expected. This would add an extra cost to businesses. It would also apply to charity events.

Local Authority knowledge of businesses in their area reduces the risk of non-registration. Centralising the process could result in businesses dropping out and remaining hidden, especially if charges were involved.