

Trading Standards Service

Food Sampling



Norfolk County Council
at your service

Norfolk County Council Trading Standards Service is responsible for the enforcement of legislation relating to food standards. As part of this role, officers from the Service regularly take samples of food for analysis.

Food samples taken by the Trading Standards Service will be analysed to determine whether the food complies with Food Standards legislation.

For example:

- Does the food comply with legal standards of composition (such as a minimum meat content)?
- Is the food described and packaged properly, so as not to be misleading?
- Are the additive levels acceptable?
- Are there any contaminants (such as toxins)?
- Is the nutritional information accurate?
- Is the food labelled in accordance with labelling Regulations?

A formal sample will be taken by a qualified food officer, following certain methods which are prescribed by law. For example, a typical formal sampling procedure may involve the food being divided into three equal portions. One of the portions is submitted for analysis, another is left with the seller (or manufacturer), and a third portion is retained by the sampling officer in case of future dispute about the analysis results. Formal food samples may be used as evidence in legal proceedings. The analysis is normally carried out by an independent Public Analyst whose qualifications and facilities are determined by law.

As an alternative, an informal sample may be taken, particularly where the officer is taking samples as part of a survey or an information gathering exercise. In some instances an informal sample may be purchased anonymously and you may be notified of this (and the results) at a later date.

What to expect when a food sample is taken

Sampling officers are authorised by Norfolk County Council in writing, to carry out food sampling. The officers will normally identify themselves although this may be after the sample has been purchased. A payment will usually be offered for the food sampled.

The samples will be labelled and packed into bags, which are then sealed with tamper-proof seals. Some detailed information will be taken from you, particularly if the sample is a formal sample. If the sampling officer gives you a portion of a formal sample, as your reference sample, this should be kept in appropriate safe storage until you are informed of the results of analysis. You may wish to arrange for your own analysis to be carried out on this part of the sample.

What happens to the samples?

Most food samples obtained by the Trading Standards Service will be analysed by our appointed Public Analyst, who will then provide the sampling officer with a signed certificate of analysis describing the tests carried out and the results.

The Analyst will report on whether the sample has been found to be satisfactory or unsatisfactory.

What happens next?

If the sample was a formal sample, you will be notified of the results of analysis. The sampling officer will discuss any unsatisfactory result with you. If you did not manufacture the food, the sampling officer will also discuss the result with the manufacturer (or their local Trading Standards Service). Depending on the seriousness of the issue, a follow up sample may be taken and/or the sampling officer may have to pursue the matter on a formal basis. You will be notified of the intended course of action, and when you can dispose of any portion of the sample you may have. Advice will be provided to you and/or the manufacturer about how the issue can be put right.



If the results of analysis suggest that the food may be harmful to health then the sampling officer will discuss with you what action is required. If there is a possibility that you will have to withdraw the food from general sale, you have a responsibility to inform the Food Standards Agency of this.

The Agency can be contacted on 0207 276 8000 or www.food.gov.uk, but the sampling officer will provide you with specific information in this event.

Food sampling plans

All food authorities are required to prepare and publish a food sampling policy and to make that policy available to businesses and the public. For contact details, please see the end of this leaflet.

Food sampling helps us to ensure that food produced and sold in Norfolk is safe, described accurately and complies with certain standards. We can provide advice to businesses on how to achieve this.

For more information or advice please contact:

Norfolk County Council Trading Standards Service
County Hall
Martineau Lane
Norwich
NR1 2UD

Tel: 0844 800 8013

Email: trading.standards@norfolk.gov.uk

Website: <http://tradingstandards.norfolk.gov.uk>



If you need this advice sheet in large print, audio, Braille, alternative format or in a different language please contact Trading Standards on 01603 222619 and we will do our best to help.