



FEDERAL AGENCY FOR THE SAFETY OF THE FOOD CHAIN

FACTS AND FIGURES



THE BELGIAN FOOD SAFETY AGENCY IN 2008

OUR TASK IS TO PRESERVE THE SAFETY OF THE FOOD CHAIN AND THE QUALITY OF FOOD
IN ORDER TO PROTECT THE HEALTH OF HUMANS, ANIMALS AND PLANTS.



.be

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FASFC communication service
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Print

IPM, Brussels

Translation

ISLV Editing and Translation Services, Université de Liège

Legal depot : BD 54.197

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Sources should be cited when using quotes

This report also exists in French, Dutch and German

A full report containing all activities of the FASFC in 2008
is available on www.afsca.be (in French and in Dutch).

Printed on FSC compliant paper

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Introduction

Dear Readers,

This summary in 4 languages (English, French, Dutch and German) gives a good survey of the results of the control activities of the Belgian Food Agency in 2008. It reflects the result of the considerable efforts made by our 1.300 staff members and our partners.

The results show that the safety of the Belgian food chain is constantly improving. As an Honorary Minister recently said : “the Belgian Agency is a wonderful instrument exporters do not yet fully put to use to extol the guarantees and the quality of their goods”.



Nevertheless, still more efforts are needed in some of the sectors. I refer e.g. to the links catering (hotels, restaurants, pubs) and distribution. For that purpose has been set up an information service the mission of which is to help operators increase their knowledge and improve their everyday practices.

In the previous edition I expressed the hope that in the next three years significant progress would be made in the field of self-checking. I am therefore pleased to see that a very large number of operators of the primary sector applied for certification, incited to take this step by the economic incentives put in place. The same goes for the feed sector. Gradual progress is also noted in the other sectors as well.

In these hard economic times special attention should be given to fraud prevention. When circumstances are difficult, one might actually be tempted to neglect safety aspects. That would be very unwise ! In Europe, we do not yet need to be reminded of the huge cost and the loss of confidence brought on by a crisis.

A more detailed report on our activities is available on this website in French and in Dutch.

I hope you will enjoy reading this report!

Gil Houins

Chief Executive Officer



The FASFC
in a nutshell

From Farm to Fork

Our task is to preserve the safety of the food chain and the quality of food in order to protect the health of humans, animals and plants.

The Belgian Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain (FASFC) is a federal executive agency with authority over the whole Belgian territory. It lays down the operational standards applicable to businesses and integrates all official control and inspection services for the food chain. In accordance with the Federal law of 4 February 2000, the FASFC is responsible for laying down, implementing and enforcing measures related to the analysis and the management of risks that may affect the health of consumers, but also the health of animals and plants.

The major tasks of the FASFC are:

- 1° controlling, testing and inspecting foodstuffs and raw materials thereof at all stages of the food chain
- 2° controlling and inspecting the production, the processing, the storing, the transporting, the marketing, the importing/exporting of products as well as the locations where these activities take place
- 3° issuing, suspending or withdrawing approvals and authorisations required to exercise certain activities in the food chain
- 4° integrating and designing identification and tracing systems allowing foods and their raw materials to be followed through the food chain and controlling these systems
- 5° gathering, classifying, managing, filing and distributing all information related to its task
- 6° working out and implementing a policy of prevention, awareness-raising and information, in consultation with Communities and Regions
- 7° supervising the application of legal provisions by all components of the food chain, from agricultural input (fertilisers, feed, plant protection products) to consumer level.

Structure of the FASFC

The FASFC is built on four general directorates or administrations: the general directorates of control policy, control, laboratories and corporate services. Some services fall under the direct authority of the Chief Executive Officer.



Control Policy

The Control Policy administration evaluates the risks that may affect the safety of the food chain. It is in charge of laying down operational regulations and drawing up the control programmes (inspections and analyses). Furthermore, this administration is also in charge of setting up consultations with business sectors and with national and international authorities, in particular with the European Commission.

This administration is also responsible for international relations with third countries, the development of tracing and identification systems, the creation of databases and the secretariat of the Scientific Committee of the FASFC.

Control

The control programmes that were drawn up by the Control Policy administration are translated into control plans by the central services of the Control administration. On the spot controls and audits are conducted by the 11 Provincial Control Units (PCUs).

This administration is also in charge of issuing approvals and authorisations as well as certificates, import controls and conducting co-ordinated investigations to fight fraud.

Laboratories

The laboratories department co-ordinates and performs the analyses laid down in the control programmes. To this end, the FASFC has five ISO 17.025 accredited laboratories that are part of the FASFC and it also regularly calls upon the services of some fifty external laboratories. The main requirements to be met with a view to approval by the FASFC are accreditation and high quality analytical results.

This laboratory network is provided scientific and technical support by the national reference laboratories that are specialised in well-defined scopes and are designated by the FASFC.

Corporate services

No organisation can work effectively without adequate logistic and administrative support. That is why the FASFC has made provision for a well-developed corporate services administration including the following services: staff & organisation, financial service, budget, logistics and sale, ICT and a legal service.

Services of the Chief Executive Officer

Communication, the crisis prevention and management unit, the internal audit, quality and prevention service are some of the services that come under the direct authority of the Chief Executive Officer. The Chief Executive Officer presides over the Advisory Committee which consists of representatives of the different economic sectors, federal and regional public services and consumers.



FASFC management

Gil Houins, Chief Executive Officer

Herman Diricks, Director general Control Policy

Jean-Marie Dochy, Director general Control

Geert De Poorter, Director general Laboratories

Véronique Berthot, Director general Corporate Services

The new business plan for the FASFC

In 2008, the new business plan 2009 – 2011 for the FASFC has been prepared under the supervision of the Chief Executive Officer. This new plan defines the strategic objectives for the forthcoming years. It has been approved by the Minister in charge of the FASFC, Mrs Sabine Laruelle, and aims for a safer food chain, but also the establishment of an agency that is well accepted by the operators and recognised by society.

With a view to evolving from an inspection agency into a public authority serving citizens and society at large, a certain number of initiatives are going to be put in place, allowing for a more humane approach to controls and a real administrative simplification. In addition, there will be more of an emphasis on information and raising awareness among the target groups which are often difficult to approach and among whom numerous non-compliant practices have been observed.

The promotion of self-checking in companies remains an extremely important point. In addition to raising awareness and information in companies, several stimuli are planned as guarantees of visual recognition (the FASFC smiley), which is only issued in the HORECA sector for the moment but which could be extended to the retail sector, and all of this could be backed up by a set of significant financial stimuli (a bonus/malus system for the annual contribution).

The new business plan can be downloaded from the FASFC website (www.afsca.be) in French, Dutch and German.



12 strategic objectives for the years 2009 - 2011

1. An ever safer FASFC
2. An agency accepted by the operators and recognised by society
3. A transparent agency
4. The promotion of self-checking
5. Simplification of administrative procedures
6. An agency that is professional and exacting in terms of results
7. Optimal collaboration between public and private sectors
8. Constructive and efficient cooperation with other official authorities
9. Integrated management of information and data (ICT)
10. Guarantees on the quality of services rendered
11. Sustainable development at the FASFC
12. A significant role on an international scale.

Certification ISO 9001

Every day, the FASFC encourages operators to set up a reliable self-checking system and to have that system certified. But what about quality management inside the FASFC? On 13 October 2008, after an external audit, the FASFC obtained the ISO 9001:2000 certificate for some of its activities. This certificate proves that the departments concerned have actually set up a quality management system that is compliant with the ISO 9001:2000 standard requirements.

By adopting the ISO 9001 standard, the FASFC aims to offer at all times and in all circumstances, quality services to consumers, to operators, to authorities and all parties involved in the safety of the food chain. In practical terms this means that the FASFC wishes to:

- listen to its clients and partners to better identify their needs and expectations
- permanently respect the legislation
- make available to its collaborators high-performance tools and ensure their efficiency
- continuously improve the performances of its processes.

The mission statement of the FASFC is the basis of the quality policy: "To preserve the safety of the food chain and the quality of food in order to protect the health of humans, animals and plants". From this and based on legal and regulatory requirements, the main line to be taken in order to meet the needs and requirements of partners and « clients » of the FASFC has been translated into strategic objectives.

A certain number of the common processes and activities of the FASFC have already been certified by an accredited independent body:

- drafting and implementing legislation on food safety
- assessing sector guides on self-checking
- managing the activities of independent veterinarians performing certain tasks for the FASFC, by the provincial control unit of "Vlaams-Brabant"
- issuing approval certificates to external laboratories and managing TSE analyses
- dealing with complaints (reporting point for consumers and ombudsman for operators)
- internal audit.

Support processes related to (human) resources management (such as training or the protection of computer data) were also audited. The FASFC plans to extend the certification to all basic activities and to obtain the ISO 17020 certificate for his control activities.

The FASFC
and you





New offices for the FASFC in Brussels!

In 2008, the central administration and the PCU of Brussels moved to a new building, the 'Food Safety Center'.

Several new arrangements are to be noted in relation to the old WTCIII building. The system of badge management has been extended to visitors and rights of access are checked in every office or on each floor.



Central Administration

- CA Botanique - Food Safety Center
Bd du Jardin Botanique 55 - 1000 Brussels
1 T 02/211 82 11 – F 02/211 82 00 – www.afsca.be
Contact point for consumers: 0800 13 550
pointdecontact@afsca.be



Provincial Control Units (PCUs)

- PCU Antwerpen
2 Italiëlei 124 bus 92, 2000 Antwerpen
T 03/202 27 11 – F 03/202 28 11
Info.ANT@favv.be



- PCU Brussels
3 CA Botanique - Food Safety Center
Bd du Jardin Botanique 55 - 1000 Bruxelles
T 02/211 92 00 – F 02/211 91 80 – Info.BRU@afsca.be



- PCU Hainaut
4 Avenue Thomas Edison 3, 7000 Mons
T 065/40 62 11 – F 065/40 62 10
Info.HAI@afsca.be



- PCU Limburg
5 Kempische Steenweg 297 bus 4, 3500 Hasselt
T 011/26 39 84 – F 011/26 39 85
Info.LIM@favv.be



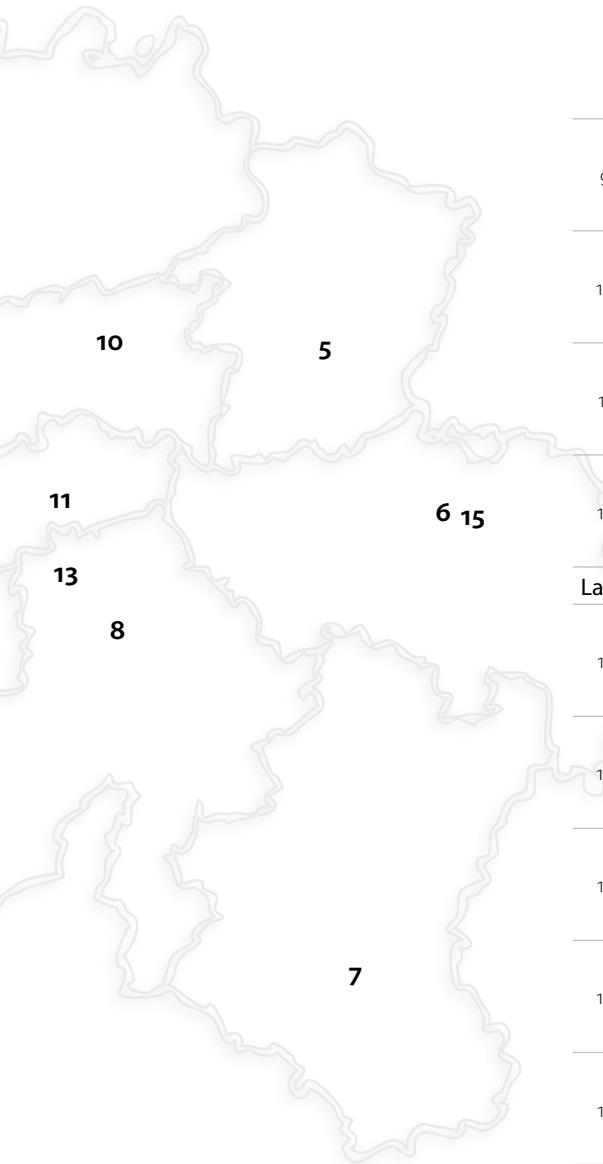
- PCU Liège
6 Bd Frère-Orban 25, 4000 Liège
T 04/224 59 00 – F 04/224 59 01
Info.LIE@afsca.be



- PCU Luxembourg
7 Rue du Vicinal 1 – 2^{ème} étage, 6800 Libramont
T 061/21 00 60 – F 061/21 00 79
Info.LUX@afsca.be



- PCU Namur
8 Chaussée de Hannut 40, 5004 Bouge
T 081/20 62 00 – F 081/20 62 02
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9	PCU Oost-Vlaanderen Zuiderpoort, blok B, 10 ^{ème} étage Gaston Crommenlaan 6/1000, 9000 Gent T 09/210 13 00 – F 09/210 13 20 – Info.OVL@favv.be
10	PCU Vlaams-Brabant Greenhill campus, Interleuvenlaan 15 – Blok E, 3001 Leuven T 016/39 01 11 – F 016/39 01 05 – Info.VBR@favv.be
11	PCU Brabant wallon Espace Coeur de Ville 1, 2 ^{ème} étage, 1340 Ottignies T 010/42 13 40 – F 010/42 13 80 Info.BRW@afsca.be
12	PCU West-Vlaanderen Koning Albert I laan 122, 8200 Brugge T 050/30 37 10 – F 050/30 37 12 Info.WVL@favv.be
Laboratories of the FASFC	
13	Gembloux Chaussée de Namur 22, 5030 Gembloux T 081/61 19 27 – F 081/61 45 77
14	Gentbrugge Braemkasteelstraat 59, 9050 Gentbrugge T 09/210 21 00 – F 09/210 21 01
15	Liège Rue Louis Boumal 5, 4000 Liège T 04/252 01 58 – F 04/252 22 96
16	Melle Brusselsesteenweg 370a, 9090 Melle T 09 272 31 00 – F 09/272 31 01
17	Tervuren Leuvensesteenweg 17, 3080 Tervuren T 02/769 23 12 – F 02/769 23 30





2008 in figures

Personnel of the FASFC

	2007	2008
Persons employed	1.285	1.309
Persons in inspection services	773	775
FTE*	1.148	1.172
% permanent staff	62 %	70 %
+ veterinarians with assignment**	762	758

* full-time equivalent

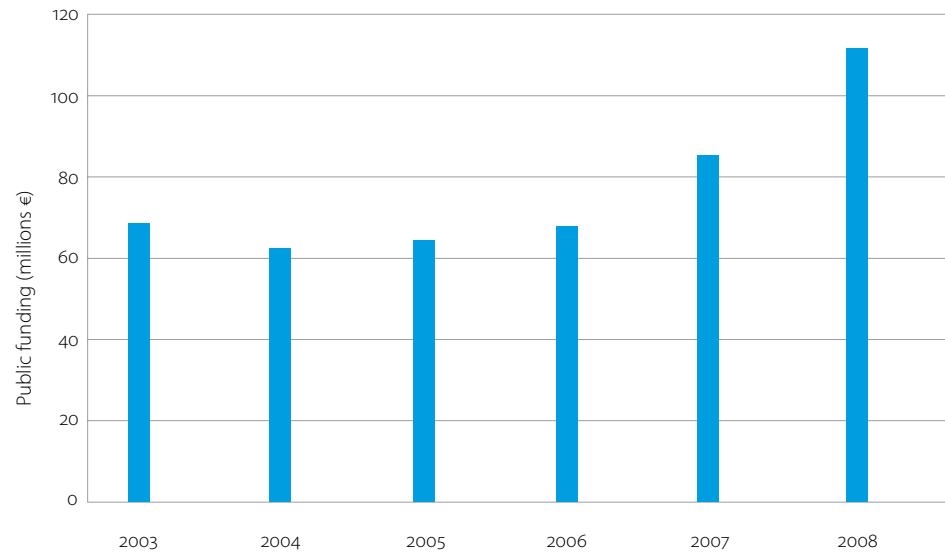
** independent veterinarians fulfilling special assignments

Budget of the FASFC: revenue

	2007	2008
Public funding*	85.397.000 €	111.974.000 €
Contributions	23.904.000 €	26.260.000 €
Retributions	35.474.000 €	38.582.000 €
Interventions of the European Union	2.571.000 €	2.121.000 €
Miscellaneous	7.103.000 €	7.670.000 €
Relocation fund		2.501.000 €
Total revenue	154.449.000 €	186.607.000 €

* allocation from the federal budget

The public funding of the FASFC has been significantly increased in order to ensure its financial balance while decreasing the annual contribution of small and medium companies of the food chain, including farm producers.



Budget of the FASFC: expenditure

	2007	2008
Crisis reserve		5.000.000 €
Total expenditure	154.232.000 €	170.124.000€

Advisory Committee

	2007	2008
Members	37	37
Plenary meetings	9	10

Scientific Committee

	2007	2008
Members	20	22
Opinions	38	33

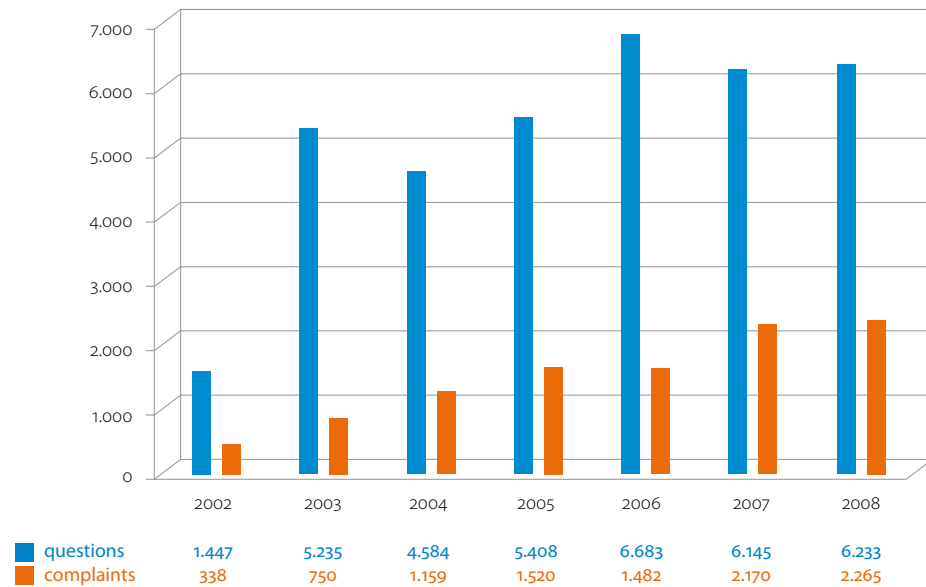
Laboratories

	2007	2008
Laboratories of the FASFC	5	5
Reference laboratories	11	11
Approved laboratories	52	56

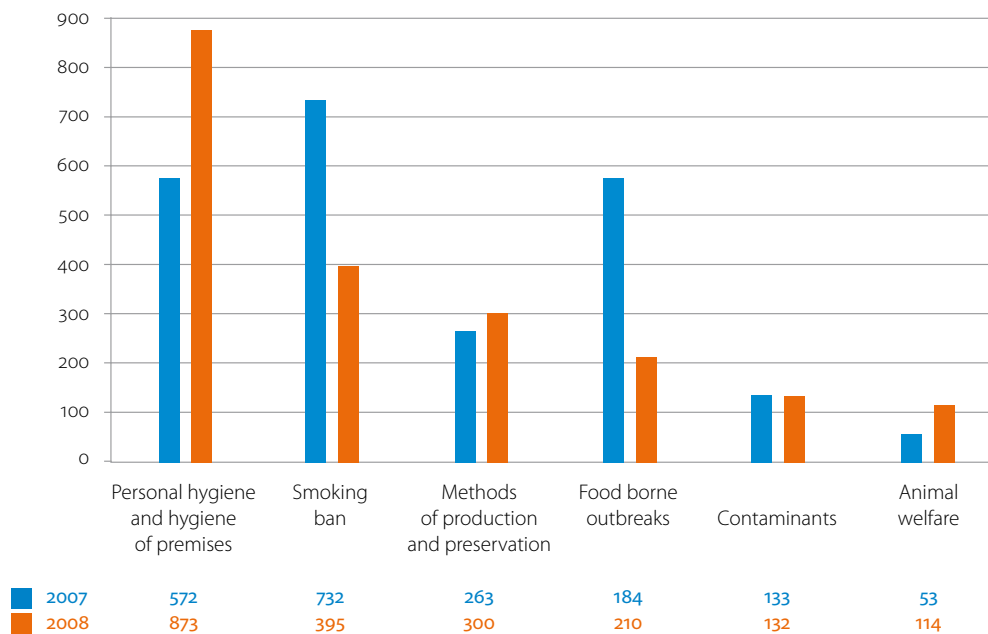
Communication

	2008
Press releases	131
Press releases on the withdrawal of products	45 %
Visits to the website www.afsca.be	673.494

Contact point for consumers



Questions asked and complaints made to the contact points since its creation



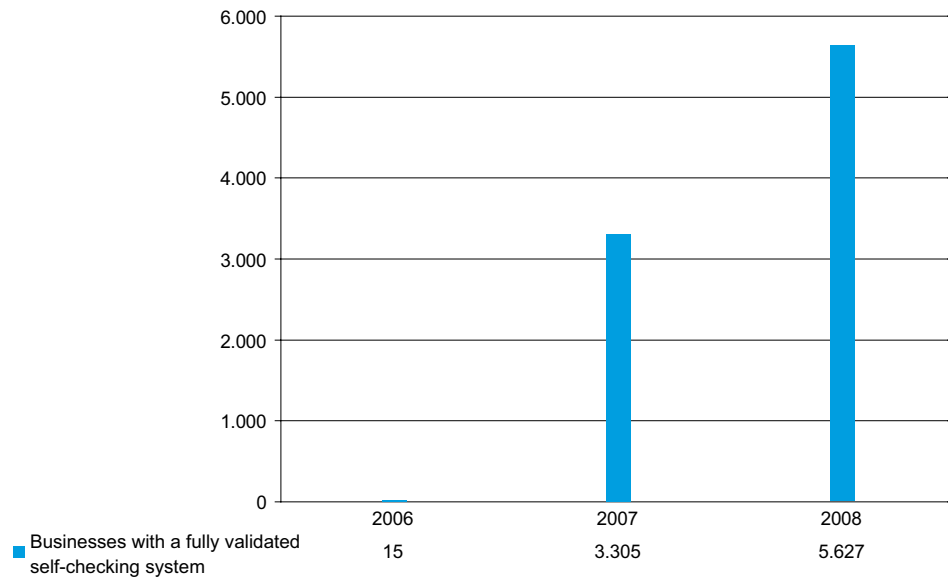
Top 6 complaints in 2007 and 2008

Mediation service for business operators

	2007	2008
Complaints	164	149
Complaints on financing system	57 %	39 %
Complaints on legislation	24 %	28 %
Complaints on the behaviour of control officers	4 %	5 %

Business operators

Number of operators under the competences of the FASFC		162.487
Number of operators having a full validated self-checking system	Farm supplier	225
	Primary production	5.113
	Processing	198
	Wholesale business	4
	Distribution	31
	Horeca	55
	Transport	1



Controls

	2007	2008
Sampling	65.411	64.565
Inspection missions	88.076	84.025

Action taken as a consequence of non-compliance

Official reports of non-compliance / fines	3.539
Amount of administrative fines	1.564.740 €
Withdrawals of approvals or authorisations	27
Refusals of approvals or authorisations	40

RASFF (European rapid alert system): overview of the notifications of Belgian origin

		In Belgium	Kept at the border	In Belgium	Kept at the border
		2007	2007	2008	2008
Chemical hazards	Residues of veterinary medicinal products	4	7	15	16
	Pesticide residues	7	2	10	0
	Heavy metals	6	7	7	0
	Industrial contaminants (PCB and dioxins)	5	0	7	0
	Migration	6	0	7	0
	Mycotoxins	4	6	3	1
	Food colouring and food additives	1	0	3	1
	Chemical contaminants	1	1	3	0
Biological hazards	Pathogens and altering agents	16	12	22	2
	Marine biotoxins	1	0	0	0
Other hazards	Foreign bodies	2	0	4	0
	Non-notified allergen	1	0	2	0
	Non-authorised food supplement	1	0	1	0
	GMO	0	0	1	0
	Illegal import	0	5	1	0
Total		56	40	86	20

Import controls

	Consignments	Rejected
Live animals	2.791	11 (0,4 %)
Food	33.398	240 (0,7 %)
Plants and plant products	4.115	103 (2,5 %)
Products not for human consumption	4.987	18 (0,4 %)
Animal by-products	247	9 (3,6 %)
Total	45.538	381

Role of the FASFC in the context of exports

Certificates issued for export	220.844
Whose export to the Russian Federation (secured certificates)	4.521
Foreign delegations received	17
Agreements reached with third countries	20 (13 third countries)

Fighting fraud

Investigations on fraud	322
Participation to controls during transport	18
Samples at farms and slaughterhouses	3.210
Specific campaigns (dietary supplement, sheep...)	20
Transfer of information to other services	109
Coordinated actions with other authorities	781
Non-compliances	245



The core
process of
the FASFC



The FASFC continuously oversees that the processes and their products comply with the requirements laid down in regulations. Inspection of equipment and hygiene measures implemented on the premises, controls of the actual implementation of self-checking and tracing systems, controls of labels and the sampling of products for analysis are some of the ways in which the safety and the quality of products of the food chain may be guaranteed.

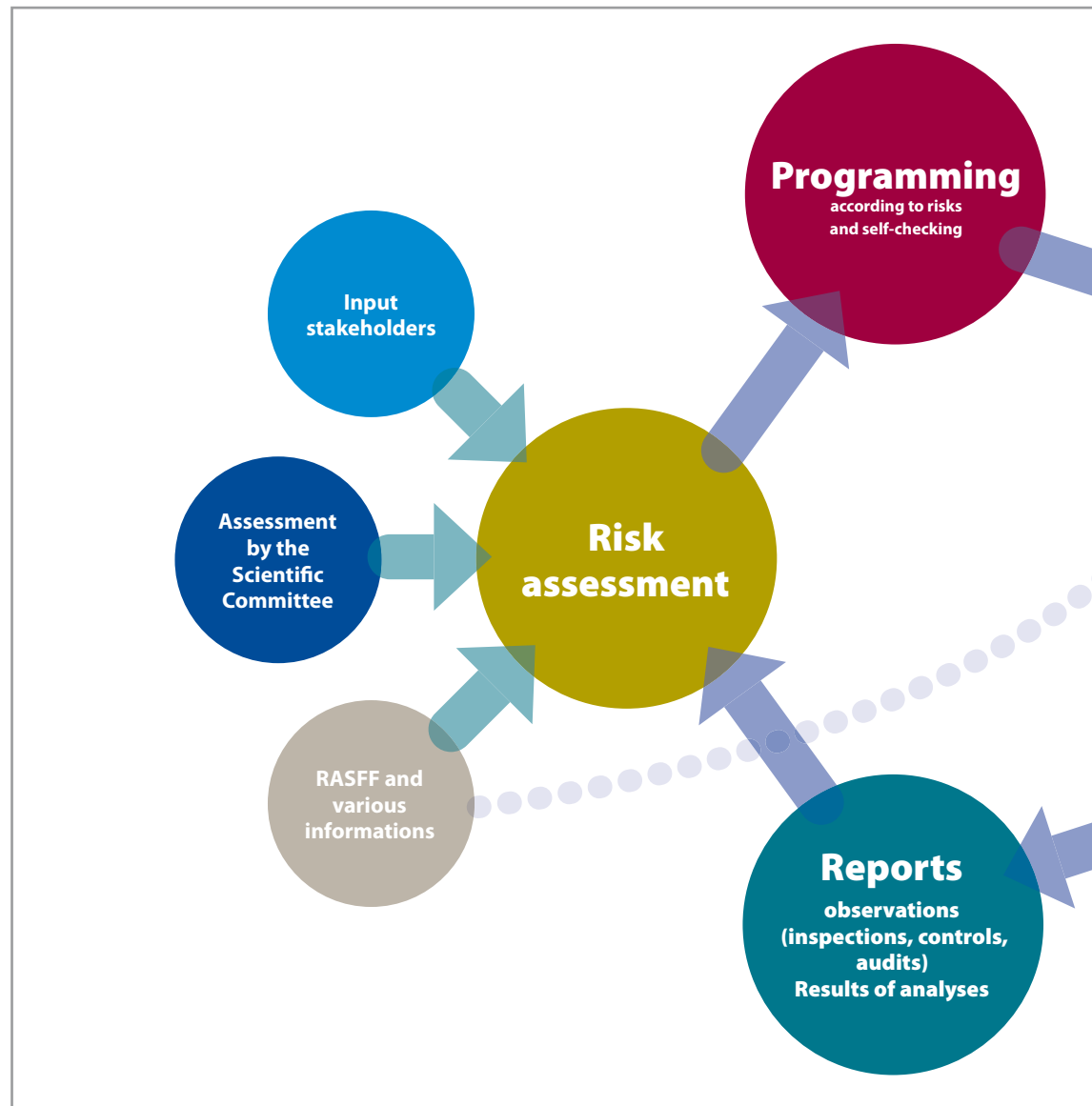
The main process of the FASFC is cyclical and consists of 3 stages:

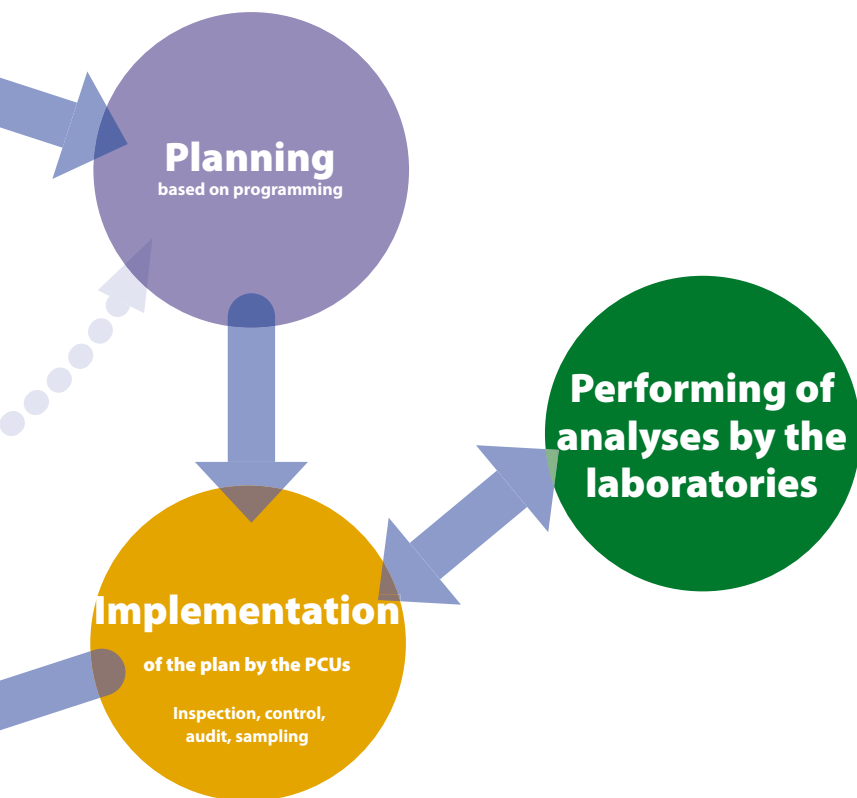
1. Each year, the FASFC drafts a control programme based upon a risk assessment. This programme is composed of 2 parts: sampling and inspection.
2. The integrated control programme is then translated into a planning of all control activities that sets the targets per province, sized to sector level.
3. The provincial control units (PCU) carry out the controls (inspection and sampling) and report their findings. The laboratories report the results of the analyses.

The information received in relation to the obligatory notification, the European Rapid Alert System (RASFF), complaints, findings, inspection reports and results of analyses is used to make risk assessments and requires a regular, sometimes immediate, adjustment of the programme to maximise hazard management. In this respect, the expertise of the Scientific Committee of the FASFC is of vital importance.

Three directorate generals (DG) are involved in this process:

- DG Control Policy defines the policy and the control programmes
- DG Control translates the annual programme into control plans that are to be carried out by the PCU (provinces)
- DG Laboratories co-ordinates and performs the analyses provided for in the control programmes.





Our core task:
the controls



In addition to the controls within the framework of the control plan, controls are carried out for different reasons: re-control following a previously unfavourable control, complaints, request for official approval, RASFF, suspicion of illness, obligatory notification, irregularities in case of importation, exportation or inter-community trade, also for the BIRB (Belgian Bureau for Intervention and Restitution).

The FASFC carries out these controls in the establishments that are the «links» in the food-chain. When a control officer or inspector carries out a visit to an establishment this is known as a «mission». During a mission, several «controls» may be carried out depending on the activity of the operator. The most common controls are «inspections» and «sampling».

There are three different types of inspections which are grouped into domains or «scopes». Some examples are:

- infrastructure, equipment and hygiene
- self-checking system
- obligatory notification
- smoking ban.

To ensure that inspections are carried out in a uniform manner, «checklists» are used; these can be found on the FASFC website. During his mission, the inspector completes these checklists. The number of checklists completed corresponds to the number of inspections carried out.

During a sampling of feed, plants or foodstuffs, one or several samples are taken and then analysed to detect the presence of substances or diseases.

Inspections

In 2008, 106.610 inspections spread over 84.025 missions were carried out.

Types of inspections carried out in 2007 and 2008

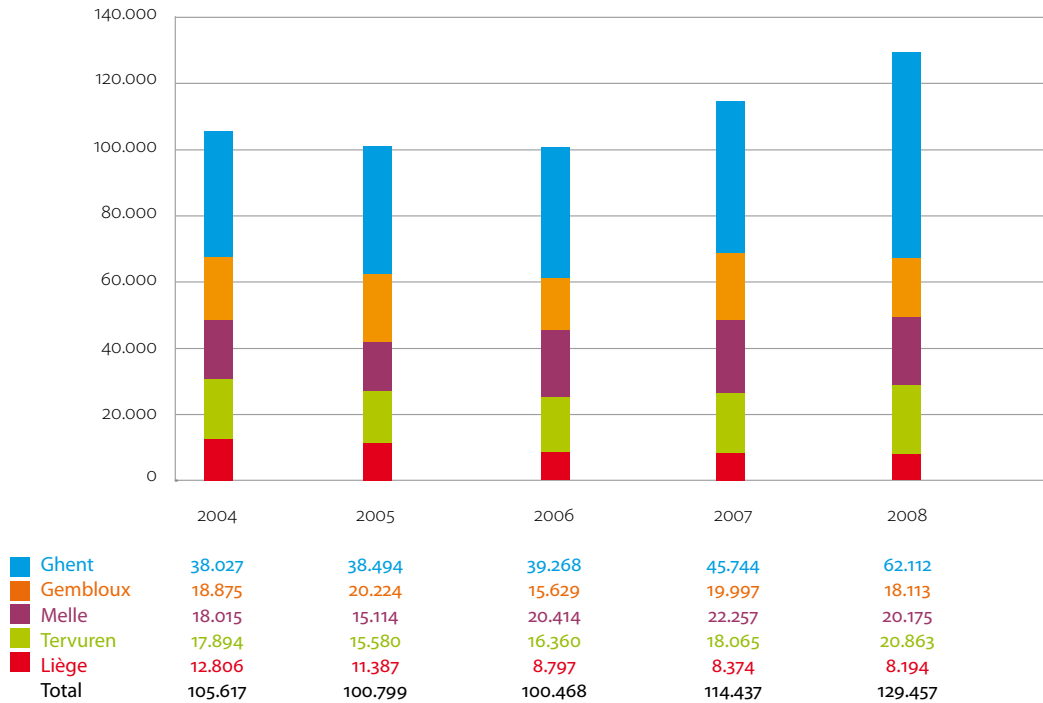
Items controlled	2007	2008	2008 vs. 2007
Infrastructure, equipment and hygiene	28.014	26.041	-7%
Infrastructure and equipment (prior to approval)	551	529	-4%
Tracing (identification and registration included)	15.823	18.196	+15%
Smoking ban	11.979	5.290	-56%
Animal welfare	7.480	8.788	+17%
Packaging and labelling (marketing standards included)	6.029	7.662	+27%
Obligatory notification	6.047	9.989	+65%
Self-checking system	5.960	7.722	+30%
Medicinal products and guidance	3.174	4.186	+32%
Waste management	2.992	3.426	+15%
Plant health and physical control	2.966	3.036	+2%
Epidemiological surveillance	2.733	3.603	+32%
Transport	3.966	1.712	-57%
Animal health	1.942	2.735	+41%
Pesticides	921	2.311	+151%
Packaging material	828	1.213	+46%
Other aspects	810	171	-79%
Total	102.215	106.610	+4%

Analyses

The FASFC includes five internal laboratories, distributed throughout the Belgian territory and which have been granted the ISO 17025 accreditation by BELAC (the Belgian accreditation body). Their first mission is to carry out analyses requested by the FASFC. The number and variety of analyses carried out in these laboratories is constantly increasing. In addition to routine analyses, the laboratories of the FASFC are always ready to carry out a greater number of analyses in case of crisis.

To ensure fulfilment of analyses on samples taken in the context of its missions, the FASFC also collaborates with approved external laboratories (56 in 2008), and which specialise in different areas of analysis, such as, for example, microbiology, residues and contaminants, pesticides, additives and phytopathology. The list of these laboratories, as well as the analyses covered by the approvals is available on the FASFC website.





Number of analyses carried out in the FASFC laboratories.

In the context of this report the total number of controls carried out by the FASFC can not be detailed. They are included in the full annual report available on the website www.afsca.be. Some striking results are discussed in the following chapters.

Animal diseases

Bluetongue

The first cases of bluetongue disease (serotype 8) appeared in Belgium in August 2006. In 2007, 6.870 cases were detected in cattle, sheep and goats. In 2008, the turning point in the fight against the disease was without doubt the vaccination campaign which was initiated in the month of May. Only 50 new cases have been diagnosed in Belgium, of which more than half (27 cases) involved imported animals.

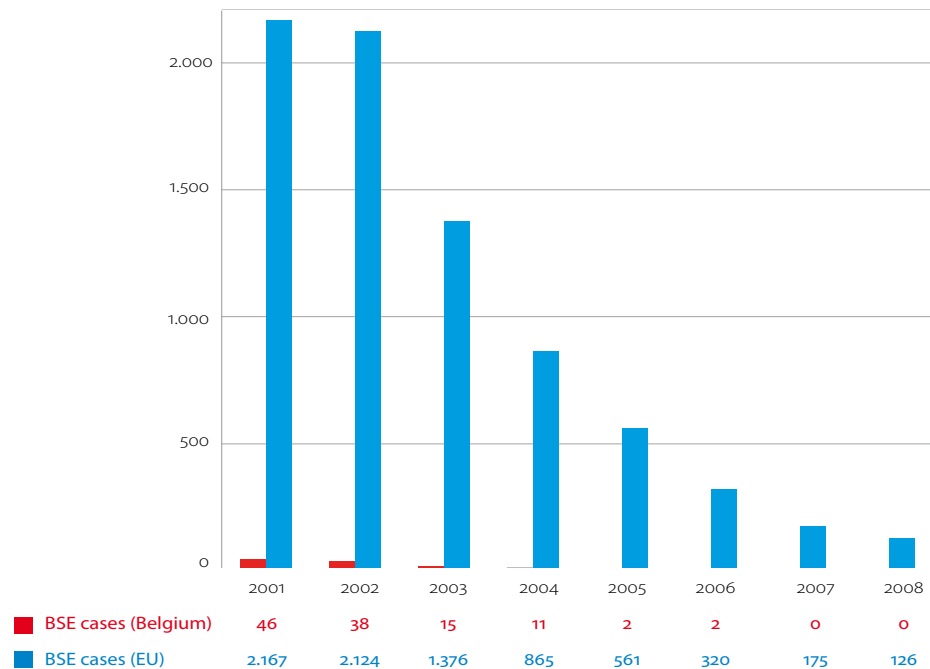
In the same way, the numerous clinical problems and the high mortality rate observed in 2007 in cattle and sheep were in the form of abortions, and the birth of calves which were often deformed and unhealthy, due to the transmission of the virus from cows to their calves during the gestation period. The relatively low number of new cases diagnosed and the low appearance of clinical problems can be explained by the progressive introduction of immunisation and the natural immunity of the animals.

With more than 5 million doses of the vaccine administered, virtually the entire adult herd of sheep and cattle were vaccinated. The vaccination campaign required a financial backing of almost 14 million Euros. It was financially supported by the FASFC, the budgetary fund for animal health and animal products, as well as the European Commission. Around 10 million Euros were paid to livestock breeders. Particular vigilance was paid to the introduction of serotypes other than serotype 8. In 2008 France was confronted with serotype 1 and Holland and Germany with serotype 6, two serotypes not yet discovered in Belgium.

The surveillance made it possible to identify three cattle farms and a calf-fattening farm into which one or two infected animals were introduced at the end of 2008. The infected animals were slaughtered or sent back to their place of origin. Analyses of the herds concerned, and in one case, herds situated within a radius of one kilometre led to the conclusion that no spreading of the virus had occurred. These foreign introductions were thus inconsequential. These cases show however that the risk of introduction of new viruses that exist in neighbouring countries is very real.

Mad cow disease

The last case of mad cow disease (BSE) was confirmed in Belgium in October 2006. The number of cases has greatly fallen since 2001 in the European Union. From this moment on, the tests carried out in the context of epidemiological monitoring could be reduced in the fifteen «old» member states from the 1/1/2009. The age limit for the tests has been increased to 48 months for carcasses and emergency slaughtering (initially fixed at 24 months), as well as the cattle slaughtered for human consumption (initially fixed at 30 months).



This represents an important sum in the long term. In 2008, almost 367.000 cattle and around 3.500 sheep and goats were tested, which represents a cost of around 13,8 million Euros.

However, everything possible must be done to continue to optimally apply effective management measures (destruction of the contents of the neurocranium, the vertebral column and the intestines as specified risk material or SRM), which are vital for the protection of public health.



Avian influenza

In 2008, as in the preceding years, the FASFC organised various monitoring programmes and took preventive measures to rapidly detect a possible introduction of bird flu into the poultry flock, and evaluated the threat that wild birds could represent for the poultry flock.

The monitoring of wild birds is carried out on:

- live birds captured during ringing activities conducted by the Belgian Royal Institute of Natural Sciences (IRSNB)
- water game shot during the hunting season sampled by the « Sanitary Surveillance Network for Wild Fauna » of the University of Liège
- samples of dead bird taken throughout the year at 154 different sites spread over the entire country and followed by the nature department of the three Regions.

In 2008, 3,604 wild birds were analysed. The results of the analyses were comparable with the previous years: flu viruses that were low pathogenic were found in six groups of ducks and geese, 2 groups of wading birds and water rails and seven groups of gulls. These figures show that different strains of low pathogenic viruses are to be found among the water fowl of Belgium.

The active monitoring of the poultry flock covered 520 professional farms and led to the analysis of 6,000 animal samples. The low pathogenic virus H5N2 was discovered in two free-range farms (geese and fancy fowl). No clinical signs were found. In conformity with the national and European regulations, the FASFC took preventive sanitising action on the two farms. The owners were compensated by the budgetary fund for the health and quality of animals and animal products.

Outlook

Belgium has been declared officially free of several diseases affecting cattle (bovine leucosis, brucellosis, tuberculosis). The pork herd has been declared free of Aujeszky's disease and no cases of trichinella in pigs and solipeds (equidae) were found. Belgium was granted rabies-free status in July 2001. However, the incidence of one case, concerning an illegally-imported dog, caused a revocation of the status, which was later re-established on the 21st of April 2008.

Vigilance is therefore still necessary to avoid the introduction and spread of these diseases, but also emerging diseases, such as for example new serotypes of bluetongue or Q fever.

Plants and plant products

Plant diseases

In 2008, the FASFC took more than 11.500 samples of vegetable products from growers, warehouses, distribution centres, green spaces and forests with the aim of detecting harmful organisms.

These were random samples which, according to the organism concerned, either do or do not show symptoms of disease, or targeted controls. In case of contamination, appropriate measures for tackling the disease are imposed, and, if necessary, potentially contaminated zones are clearly demarcated. This monitoring makes it possible to guarantee that our vegetables and vegetable products satisfy the international legal requirements.

Plant protection products

Plant protection products (insecticides, fungicides, herbicides) are intended to protect vegetables from harmful organisms and to destroy undesirable weeds. Their sale and use are strictly regulated: only approved pesticides, of fair marketable quality, and used in conformity with good agricultural practices are allowed. There is also technical control of sprayers.

	Inspection missions	Compliant
Marketing	182	82,3 %
Possession and use by farmers	2.135	88,5 %
Possession and use by local authorities	34	61,7 %

Most of the offences concerned the stocking of pesticides which are no longer authorised; 87 warnings and 163 fines were issued for non-conformity with the regulations.

In 2008, 1.432 samples of fruits, vegetables and cereals were taken from the Belgian market as part of the search for residues of 350 different pesticides; 94% of samples were in conformity (absence of residues or within maximum residue limits set by legislation). Fruit and vegetables imported from third countries were proportionately more in excess of MRL (maximum residue levels) than those produced in member countries (90% versus 96-97%). The MRLs are standardised across the European Union.

The main fruits which exceeded the MRLs were found to be exotic fruits (passion fruits), citrus fruits (oranges), and berries and small fruits (redcurrants and strawberries). The main vegetables exceeding the MRLs were hot peppers, aubergines, melons and lauki - a cucurbit also known as bottle gourd, garlic and beans.

The situation is rather reassuring, as stated by the scientific committee of the FASFC in 2007: "the results have shown that chronic exposure of the Belgian consumer to pesticide residues by consumption of fruit and vegetables is quite low. In most cases, the exposure is 100 times less than the acceptable daily dose".

Plant primary production

In the area of vegetable production for human consumption, inspections are carried out essentially on the farms and on the wholesaler's premises. In 2008, 2.268 missions were carried out at the operator's premises. More than 97% of the controls were favourable with the exception of the self-checking system which was incomplete or poorly implemented in the case of 1/3 of the wholesalers.

Feed

A constant improvement in the results of inspections can be seen in the area of feed: 94,2% of controls on infrastructure, self-checking, hygiene, traceability, packaging and labelling were favourable. Problems still occur with regard to respect for guarantees and standards in relation to additives and medicated feeding stuffs.

Live animals

Sanitel, the Belgian system for registration and identification of cattle, was completely revised in 2008 in collaboration with the regional associations of animal health DZG and ARSIA.

In 2008, 5.652 controls of identification and registering of animals were carried out. More than 94% of the controls were favourable, with problems being observed principally in sheep, goats and deer.

In the context of animal welfare and protection, 8.295 missions were carried out on farms, slaughterhouses and during the transportation of slaughtered animals; 98% of these were favourable.

Slaughter

All cattle, sheep, goats, pigs and horses must be subjected to an ante mortem and post mortem inspection. The primary objective of this inspection is to guarantee protection of the public by isolating and excluding from human consumption those meats which show pathological and anatomical abnormalities, which are contaminated by pathogenic agents, or which contain residues of veterinary medicines, pesticides or contaminants. The inspection is carried out by an official vet, generally a vet with assignment.

	Carcasses inspected	Carcasses seized
Beef	522.557	1.719 (0,3 %)
Veal	301.102	487 (0,2 %)
Pork	11.588.072	37.924 (0,3 %)
Horse	9.253	30 (0,3 %)
Sheep	133.192	122 (0,1 %)
Goat	3.363	12 (0,4 %)

In addition to the inspection itself, the official vet also carries out inspections relative to the food-chain, animal welfare, specified risk materials and other by-products, laboratory, hygiene, infrastructure and self-checking tests. The main elements shown not to be in conformity related to infrastructure, equipment and hygiene of slaughterhouses (around 30%), and the self-checking system (around 10%)

Food processing

In 2008 2.638 missions were carried out for 2.022 operators in establishments transforming industrial foodstuffs of vegetable, meat, fish, dairy and egg products. The inspections showed that 84% were in conformity with regard to the system of self-checking, and infrastructure. Equipment, hygiene, obligatory notification, traceability, packaging and labelling, transport and waste management were 96% in conformity.

PCBs and dioxins

PCBs (Polychlorinated Biphenyls) and dioxins are substances that can be carcinogenic. Their particularity is their resistance to chemical and biological breakdown and their tendency to accumulate in fats throughout the food chain. Certain dioxins are considered as toxic. Twelve PCBs show toxic properties similar to dioxins and are often classed as dioxins-like PCBs.

Dioxins are the by-products of a chemical reaction or the process of incineration. They also occur naturally. Unlike PCBs, dioxins do not have a technological application. They are therefore an undesirable by-product.

Humans absorb dioxins principally through food. Foodstuffs of animal origin such as meats, milk and eggs are their principal source. Dioxins are undesirable in the food chain and, as a precaution, it is necessary to ensure that their levels are as low as possible.

Control of dioxins in feed is crucial. A single portion of raw material used in the manufacture of these products could cause contamination of a great number of animals. We might cite as an example the dioxin crisis of 1999 (due to the contamination of animal fats by technically-produced fats), the incident in 2006 (caused by use of unpurified hydrochloric acid in the production of gelatine) and, in 2008, the dioxin crisis in Ireland (caused by dried and recycled bakery products).

Analyses of dioxins, dioxins-like PCBs and PCBs are carried out across the food-chain. In 2008, 4.481 samples were taken by the FASFC, six of which were not in conformity (0,1%).

	Number of samples	Non-compliant
Feed	2.542	1 premixture
Milk and milk products	315	1 drinking milk
Eggs	67	1 free range farming
Meat and animal fat	1.231	1 beef carcass
Aquaculture products	29	0
Fishery products	179	0
Baby food	30	0
Vegetal oil	73	2
Sauces	15	0

Mycotoxins

Mycotoxins are produced by moulds present in vegetable raw materials during growing or storage. Several mycotoxins have a non-negligible effect on the health of humans and animals: the fusarium toxin called DON (deoxynivalenol), patuline, certain aflatoxins, etc. Mycotoxins can also be found in animal products such as milk, following the ingestion of contaminated feed and because of their chemical stability.

This is why tests for the presence of mycotoxins in feed and foodstuffs are carried out. The most dangerous mycotoxins – aflatoxins, ochratoxin A and the fusarium toxins- are sought in the products most at risk: cereals and foodstuffs based on cereals.

In 2008, the FASFC took 2.092 samples in the search for mycotoxins (aflatoxin, ochratoxin, fumonisin, zearalenone, DON, T2 & HT2), only three of which were in non-conformity.

	Number of samples	Non-compliant
Feed	1.013	1 aflatoxin (rice flour)
Carcasses at slaughterhouse	159	0
Aquaculture fish	9	0
Milk and milk products	46	0
Food in processing and transformation businesses	865	1 aflatoxin (nutmeg) and 1 DON

HORECA, collective kitchens, retail and wholesale businesses

In 2008, more than 13.000 missions were carried out in the HORECA establishments, collective kitchens, retailers, wholesalers and transporters of foodstuffs.

	Inspections infrastructure, equipment & hygiene	Compliant
Classical HORECA	5.583	49 %
Itinerant trade	536	71 %
Collective kitchens	918	63 %
Milk formula rooms	79	80 %
Wholesale businesses	218	76 %
Retail businesses	5.158	59 %

Only 27% of the self-checking systems in the HORECA sector were favourable; 90% of controls on the smoking ban were favourable, and 80% with regard to traceability. Non conformity led to 2.632 warnings and 633 fines were given out.

Only 59% of controls on the self-checking system at retailers and wholesalers were favourable. In terms of meat tracing system, beef was 65% in conformity.

Since August 22 2008, the establishments (retailers and HORECA) selling foodstuffs to the final customer must display their authorisation in a place that is clearly visible to the consumer. In addition to the logo of the FASFC, this display mentions the type of activity for which an authorisation has been granted and the free telephone number of the point of contact for the consumer. Thanks to this obligatory display, the consumer can immediately see that the establishment holds an official authorisation from the FASFC.

Since September 2007, the FASFC has introduced a new system of weighting of results of controls, based on the use of check-lists. This new stricter method of inspection partly explains the increase in cases of non-conformity, but a clear improvement is achievable. The targeting of controls in establishments for which non-conformities have been observed (systematic re-controls) can also partly explain the increase in non-conformities. Considerable efforts are being made as much by sector as by local authority, to raise awareness, inform and support distribution establishments.

On the first of January 2008, the concept of the FASFC-smiley was launched; the HORECA establishments and collective kitchens were able to qualify for an FASFC-smiley certifying their self-checking system. In addition, an information service was put in place, composed of people with field experience. This has been active since September 2008 and its main objective is to give practical information to the operators in the form of conferences, information sessions and practical folders. The first target group is the HORECA and, after that the distribution sector with an emphasis on very small companies that experience difficulty in adhering to the regulations.

Sulphite in minced meat

The use of sulphite in minced meat is legally forbidden. The meat exposed to the air oxidises and takes on a brownish colour. The addition of sulphite helps the meat to keep its red colour. This additive can therefore give a fresh aspect to rotten meat and constitutes a risk for food safety. Ingredients added to prepare minced meats can contain sulphites. In this case, the level of sulphite in the finished product may not exceed the legal standard, and the sulphite must be labelled as an ingredient.

In 2008, 936 butchers, wholesalers, collective kitchens and supermarkets were controlled for the presence of sulphite in minced meat; 83 samples were not in conformity (8,9%) and led to 73 fines, 3 warnings, 1 seizure and measures concerning other operators upstream.

Allergens

The number of food allergies seems to be rising, and particularly in the case of children. The most dangerous allergic reaction is what is known as the anaphylactic shock, which can be fatal. Even tiny quantities of an allergy-causing substance can cause such a serious reaction. The minimum quantity to which an allergic reaction is caused can vary greatly from one person to another and from one food allergy to another. The only solution for a person suffering from a food allergy is to avoid the allergenic substance, and for this to be possible, a clear and legible label on each pre-packaged item is an absolute necessity.

The legislation in matters of labelling, demands that all pre-packaged foodstuffs must clearly mention any allergenic substances from a list of ten present in the ingredients: cereals containing gluten, shellfish, eggs, fish, peanuts, soya, milk (including lactose), certain nuts, celery, mustard, sesame seeds and derived products, and sulphite above 10 mg per litre or 10mg per kilo. From the 23rd of December 2008, lupins and molluscs were added to the list.

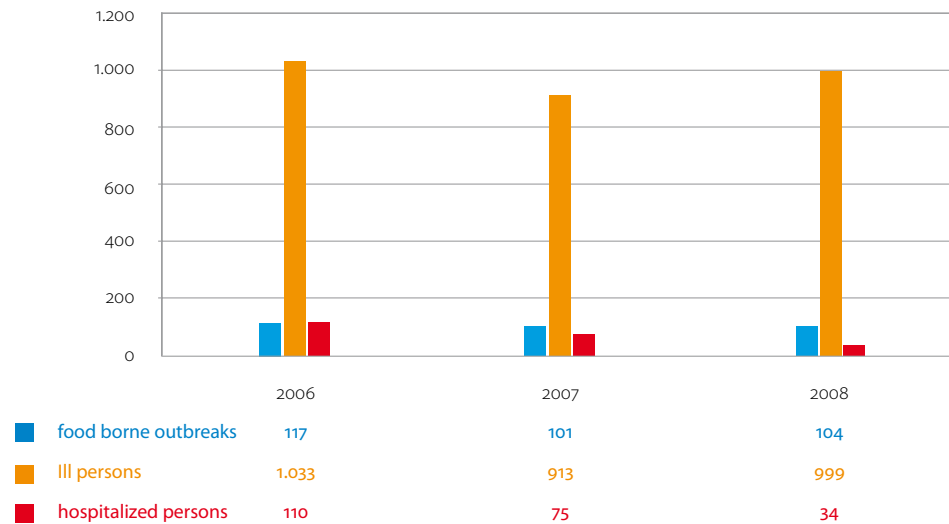
The FASFC carries out two types of controls:

- controls on the labelling of allergenic substances, notably by a verification of the amount indicated in the transformation and distribution: 12% of the 2.446 controls were not in conformity
- analysis of allergens in various distribution products: 4,3% of products analysed were not in conformity.

Given the possible consequences for consumers' health, this problem must be taken up with the food industry.

Food borne outbreaks

Food borne outbreaks are intoxications or infections caused by the consumption of contaminated food or water. The term food borne outbreak is used when similar symptoms are observed in at least two people in the same circumstances, and there is a probable link with a common food source.



Among the food borne outbreaks in 2008 we could mention specifically:

- a source of Norwalk-virus, probably due to contaminated sandwich ingredients, which affected around 200 people during an office party
- the intoxication of around one hundred teachers who had eaten a tajine, by clostridium perfringens
- the intoxication of 30 children by coagulase-positive staphylococcus, during a meal in the school canteen (pasta with ham and cheese).

Prevention and
crisis management



Prevention and crisis management are crucial tasks for the FASFC. The preparation takes into account the assessment of previous crises and incidents and plans the management of crisis scenarios. The service coordinates the management of incidents and crises, in collaboration with the various services of the FASFC and the competent external authorities (government crisis centre etc.).

In mid January 2008, the crisis prevention and management service set up, in collaboration with sectoral organisations, a real-time exercise, simulating the contamination of slaughtered pigs whose meat was put on the market. The exercise, a first of its kind in Belgium and in Europe, consisted of retracing pigs that were potentially contaminated coming from 44 farms. All the parties involved in the pig industry actively participated in the exercise. At the start, 14 slaughterhouses were involved. The number of partners involved (producers, processors of meat and meat products, wholesalers) increased from hour to hour, and extending to the distribution sector. At the end of the exercise, eight days after the slaughter of the pigs, around 3.000 Belgian operators were concerned by fictitiously contaminated products, including 1.350 supermarkets.

The retracing of the slaughtered meat at the sales points showed that the systems put in place are efficient, but the reaction time for the different links in the chain should be shortened. This type of exercise would need to be repeated, taking account of weak points that are shown up.

The year 2008 was marked by incidents in the food chain which demanded that contaminated or potentially contaminated products in the different sectors be retraced.

These various incidents were not caused by Belgian producers, and on each occasion both the FASFC and the producers showed they could react very efficiently.

Period	Incident	Consequences
April	Contamination of 40.000 tonnes of sunflower oil from the Ukraine by mineral oils	Recall of foodstuffs containing more than 10% of oil and withdrawal or destruction of contaminated oils
June	Contamination of Swedish beef fat by specified risk materials (SRM)	Destruction of 235 tonnes of frying fats
September	Contamination of Chinese milk by melamine	Targeted controls and seizure of chocolate confectionery
December	Contamination of Irish pork meat by dioxins	Recall of 22 products and seizure of 106 tonnes

These incidents, whose impacts on human health were, fortunately, negligible, have shown the ability of the FASFC to organise and take charge of tracing procedures in the sectors concerned, as well as efficiently managing these incidents. They also show the necessity for the operators to have access to an efficient tracing system.



Fighting fraud



Action on dietary supplements

The FASFC carried out an action relative to food supplements from September 2007 to June 2008. This quickly expanding sector is situated in a somewhat hazy zone between medicines and food-stuffs. These products are available at different distribution points (fitness centres, sports shops...) and via internet websites.

Around 5,000 products were controlled concerning 167 operators (principally retailers, but also manufacturers, wholesalers and three active establishments exclusively on sale over the internet) : 34% of operators were not registered at the FASFC and 34% of the products were not in conformity (absence of notification, non-conformity of labels, doses higher than the authorised standards, banned plants or nutriments, therapeutic indications, hormonal substances, medicines).

In collaboration with Customs and the Belgian Federal Agency for Medicines and Health Products, 21 controls were also carried out on imports by posted parcels. This led to the opening of 85 files. The multidisciplinary hormone cell was also informed of certain non-conformities (import of anabolic agents).



Conclusion

CONCLUSION

The Belgian food-chain is becoming safer and safer. The FASFC is investing in the establishment of a safety barometer for the food chain allowing assessment of developments.

In 2008, 23 sectoral guides for self-checking were validated. An information service having as its objective to help restaurants and traders to introduce the practice of self-checking has been set up. A financial incentive for approval also exists within the bonus/malus system that applies to the annual contribution at the FASFC.

The frequency of controls in a sector is adjusted upwards or downwards in relation to its profile and the controls are more and more targeted at certain operators. The risk profile is determined on the basis of the presence of a certified self-checking system, of the results of the last inspections and the eventual withdrawal of approval or authorisation.

In 2008, yet again, we can underline the role of the FASFC for the export of Belgian products.

The reaction ability and the rapidity of managing incidents involving foodstuffs have allowed to avoid important repercussions for the Belgian market, as well as for our exports. Vigilance remains vital to fight fraud.

The new business plan for the years 2009-2011 constitutes the common thread for the development of the food agency.



FACTS AND FIGURES

THE FASFC IN 2008

THE BELGIAN FEDERAL AGENCY FOR THE SAFETY OF THE FOOD CHAIN

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