



facts & figures

the belgian food safety agency in 2006

2006



federal agency for the safety of the food chain (fasfc)

.be

Editor in charge

Gil Houins
Chief executive officer
Federal agency for the safety of the food chain
WTC3 - 21th floor
Boulevard Simon Bolivar 30
1000 Brussels

Text

Yasmine Ghafir - Paul Coosemans

Graphic design & lay-out

FASFC communication service
(Gert Van Kerckhove - Jan Germonpré)

Print

Schaubroeck, Nazareth

Translation

FASFC translation service

Legal depot: BD 54.197
© FASFC — september 2007

This report also exists in French, Dutch and German.

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

Introduction



I am pleased to present, on behalf of the Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain, an executive summary of the activities carried out in 2006 by my 1 300 members of staff. The Belgian agency was set up in 2000 and became operational in 2002. It has succeeded in integrating all the former inspection services of the food chain.

In the past year, we developed an ambitious data system for the centralised treatment of inspection and test results (known as Foodnet), rationalised the activities of our laboratories, drew up or amended checklists that are indispensable for carrying out controls and audits and, finally, we set up a new financing system. This system, which is based on a “bonus/malus” principle, is an economic incentive in order to generalise the practice of certified self-checking and adequate tracking and tracing of products by all operators.

The results recorded in 2006 show significant progress in risk management by Belgian businesses.

I wish to support them in their efforts under the daily supervision of an agency whose professional qualifications increase day by day.

I hope you will enjoy reading this report !

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'G' followed by a horizontal line and a vertical stroke.

Gil Houins,
Chief executive officer



facts & figures

the belgian food safety agency (fasfc)

2006

1. the fasfc in a nutshell
2. 2006 in figures
3. noteworthy facts of 2006
4. accomplishing the tasks of the fasfc

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.

Table of contents

	Introduction	3
1.	The FASFC in a nutshell	9
1.1.	What do we do?	9
1.2.	The organisation	10
1.2.1.	Food safety in Belgium	10
1.2.2.	How the FASFC is organised	12
1.2.3.	17 addresses of the FASFC	16
2.	2006 in figures	19
3.	Noteworthy facts of 2006	23
3.1.	New financing system	23
3.2.	Enlargement of the advisory committee	24
3.3.	Self-checking systems and sector guides	25
3.4.	Approval of laboratories	26
3.5.	Development of the mediation service	26
3.6.	Working out the smiley	27
3.7.	Development of the internal audit service	27
3.8.	Administrative simplification	28
3.9.	Dioxin incident	29
3.10.	Avian influenza	30
3.11.	Bluetongue	31
3.12.	International affairs	32

4.	Accomplishing the tasks of the FASFC	35
4.1.	Programming and conducting controls	35
4.2.	Businesses	36
4.3.	Plants and plant products	38
4.3.1.	Plant health controls	38
4.3.2.	Pesticides	38
4.3.3.	GMOs	39
4.4.	Animals	40
4.4.1.	BSE	40
4.4.2.	TSE	40
4.4.3.	Salmonella in poultry	41
4.4.4.	Animal welfare and trade in endangered species	42
4.5.	Public health	43
4.5.1.	Microbiological controls on food	43
4.5.2.	Foodborne outbreaks	43
4.5.3.	Controls on tobacco regulations and smoking ban	44
4.5.4.	Fight against fraud and hormones	44
4.6.	Import controls	45
4.7.	Communication	47
4.7.1.	Contact point	47
4.7.2.	Website	48



facts & figures

the fasfc in a nutshell

2006

1

The FASFC in a nutshell

1.1. What do we do?

The task of the FASFC (Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain) is to guarantee the safety of the food chain and the quality of our food to protect the health of humans, animals and plants.

In accordance with the Federal law of 4 February 2000, the Agency 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.

The major tasks of the Agency are:

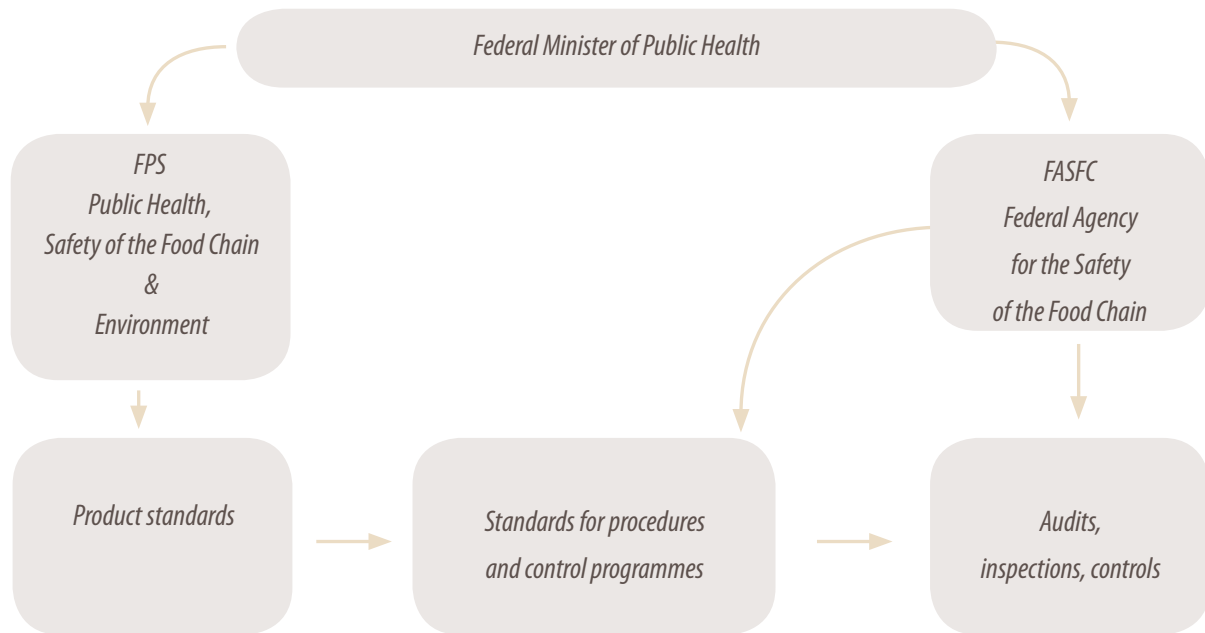
- 1° controlling, testing and inspecting foodstuffs and raw materials thereof at all stages of the food chain;
- 2° controlling and inspecting the production, the processing, the storing, the transporting, the marketing, the importing/exporting of products as well as the locations where these activities 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.

1.2. The organisation

1.2.1. Food safety in Belgium

The Belgian authorities have entrusted 2 services with the responsibility for food safety: the Federal Public Service (FPS) of Public Health, Safety of the Food Chain and Environment and the FASFC. The emphasis is put on the safety of the entire

food chain, while assigning a central place to consumers. With the aim to achieve complete integration of food safety matters, one Minister was made responsible for both services, i.e. the Minister of Public Health.



In general, the distinct responsibilities of both services may be described as follows:

1. the FPS Public Health, Safety of the Food Chain and Environment is responsible for preparing policymaking and for establishing product standards (for veterinary drugs, pesticides, food, feed...), for laying down detailed requirements with respect to animal disease control, plant protection and for defining parameters to be taken into account with regard to animal welfare and veterinary medicine.
2. the 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.

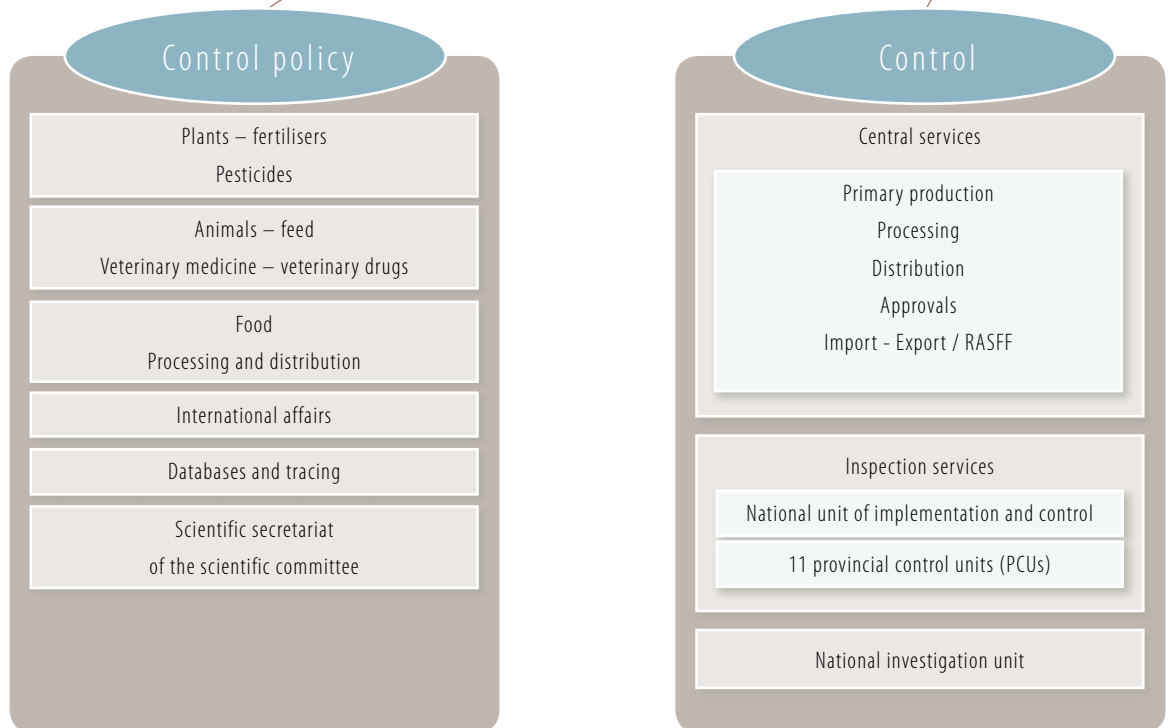
1.2.2. How the FASFC is organised

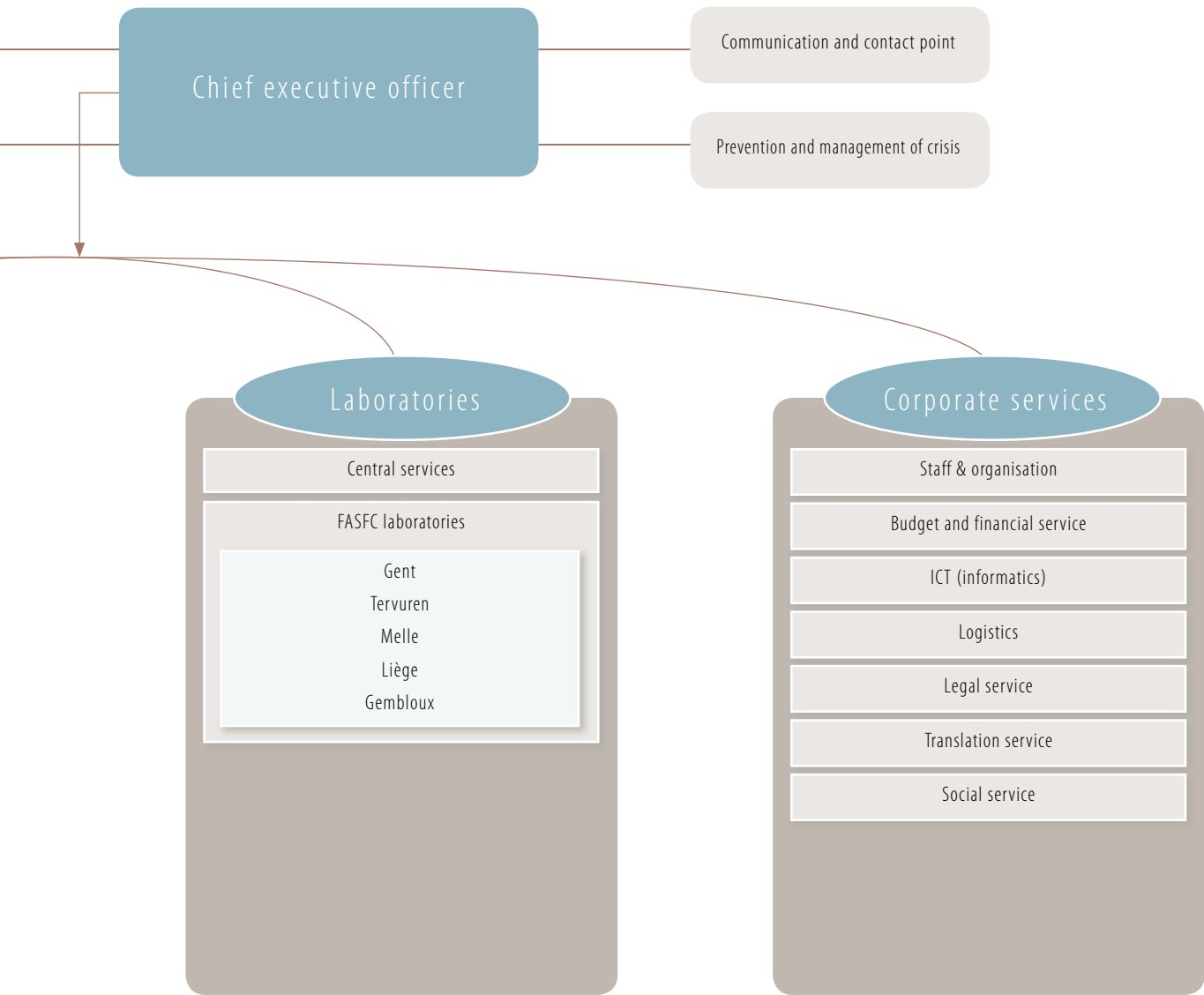
The FASFC is built on four important foundation stones, i.e. four directorates general (DG) each headed by a director general. These DG are control policy, control, laboratories and corporate services.

In addition to these DG there are a certain number of services that come under the direct responsibility of the chief executive officer. These are known as the staff services.

Internal audit, prevention and mediation service

Advisory committee





Control policy

The control policy administration is in charge of laying down operational regulations and drawing up the control, sampling and analysis programmes. Furthermore, this administration is also in charge of the international affairs section of the Agency.

Control

The control programmes that were drawn up by the control policy administration are translated into control plans and operational instructions by the central services of the control administration. Controls and audits on the spot are conducted by the provincial control units (PCUs).

Laboratories

The FASFC has 5 ISO 17025 accredited laboratories, that are part of the Agency, and regularly calls upon the services of some fifty external laboratories. The main requirements to be met with a view to approval by the Agency are accreditation and high quality analytical results. The laboratory network is given 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 properly without adequate logistic and administrative support. That is why the Agency has made provision for a well-developed corporate services administration including the following services: staff & organisation, budget and financial service, logistics, ICT (informatics) and a legal service.



The FASFC management team

Véronique Berthot, director general of the DG corporate services

Jean-Marie Dochy, director general of the DG control

Gil Houins, chief executive officer

Geert De Poorter, director general of the DG laboratories

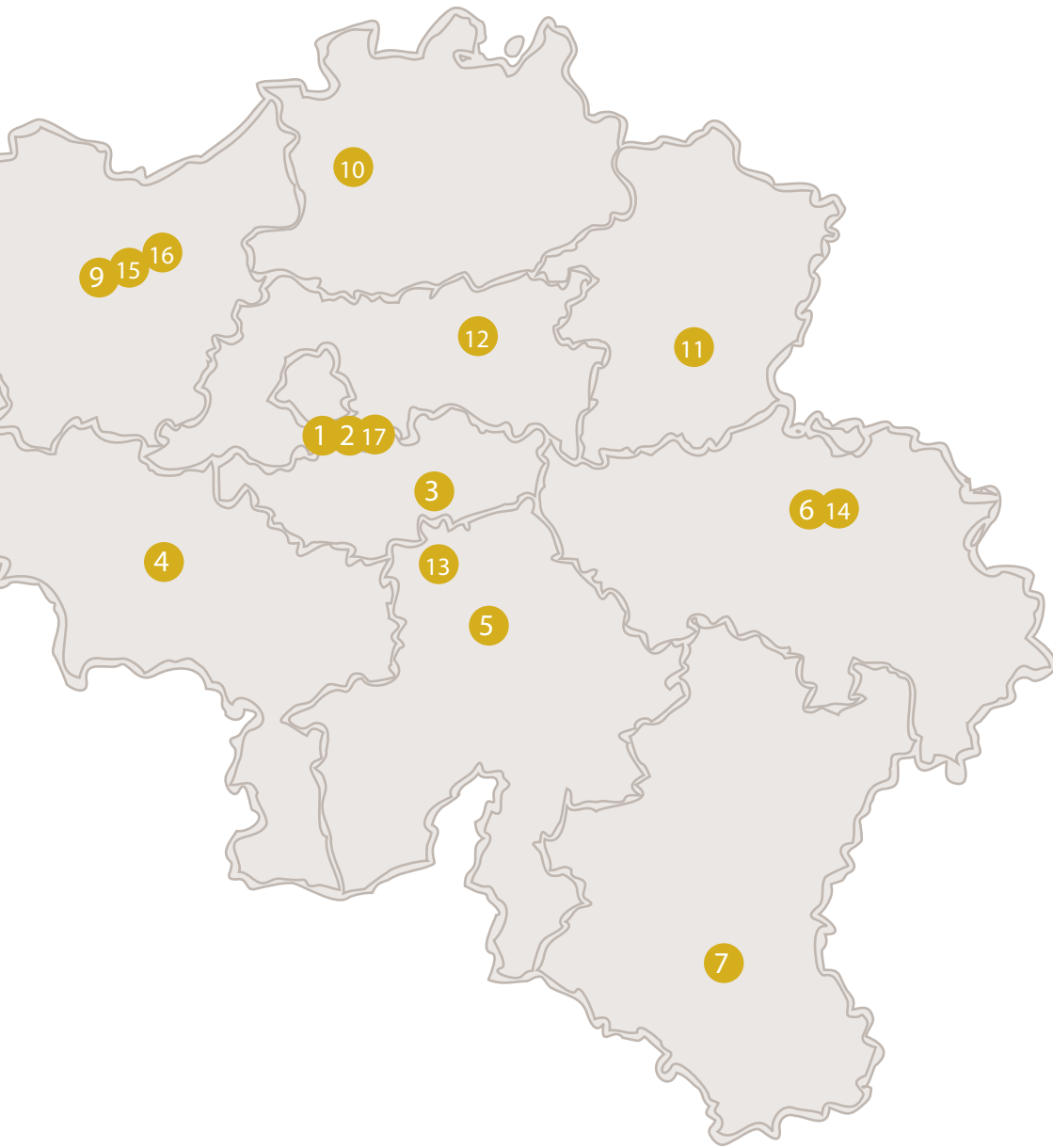
Herman Diricks, director general of the DG control policy

1.2.3. 17 addresses of the FASFC

Central Administration	
1	WTC 3, Boulevard Simon Bolivar 30, 1000 Brussels T 02/208 34 11 – F 02/208 33 37 – www.afsca.be Contact point for consumers: 0800 13 550 pointdecontact@afsca.be
Provincial Control Units (PCUs)	
2	Brussels WTC 3 – 2 nd floor, Boulevard Simon Bolivar 30, 1000 Brussels T 02/208 34 61 – F 02/208 33 89
3	Brabant wallon Espace Coeur de Ville 1, 2 ^{ème} étage, 1340 Ottignies T 010/42 13 40 – F 010/42 13 80
4	Hainaut Avenue Thomas Edison 3, 7000 Mons T 065/40 62 11 – F 065/40 62 10
5	Namur Chaussée de Hannut 40, 5004 Bouge T 081/20 62 00 – F 081/20 62 02
6	Liège Bld. Frère-Orban 25, 4000 Liège T 04/224 59 00 – F 04/224 59 01
7	Luxembourg Rue du Vicinal 1 – 2 ^{ème} étage, 6800 Libramont T 061/21 00 60 – F 061/21 00 79
8	West-Vlaanderen Koning Albert I laan 122, 8200 Brugge T 050/30 37 10 – F 050/30 37 12
9	Oost-Vlaanderen Zuiderpoort, blok B, 10 ^{de} verdieping Gaston Crommenlaan 6/1000, 9000 Gent T 09/210 13 00 – F 09/210 13 20
10	Antwerpen Italiëlei 124 bus 92, 2000 Antwerpen T 03/202 27 11 – F 03/202 28 11

11	Limburg Kempische Steenweg 297 bus 4, 3500 Hasselt T 011/26 39 84 – F 011/26 39 85
12	Vlaams-Brabant Greenhill campus, Interleuvenlaan 15 – Blok E, 3001 Leuven T 016/39 01 11 – F 016/39 01 05
Laboratories of the FASFC	
13	Gembloux Chaussée de Namur 22, 5030 Gembloux T 081/61 19 27 – F 081/61 45 77
14	Liège Rue Louis Boumal 5, 4000 Liège T 04/252 01 58 – F 04/252 22 96
15	Gentbrugge Braemkasteelstraat 59, 9050 Gentbrugge T 09/210 21 00 – F 09/210 21 01
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







facts & figures

2006 in figures

2006

2

2006 in figures

Staff of the FASFC	
Total number of FTE*	1.171
Persons employed	1.329
% permanent staff	69%
FTE in decentralised services	645
Days of training	5.000
Veterinarians with assignment (VWA)**	749
Average number of hours worked/VWA	975
* full-time equivalent	
** independent veterinarian fulfilling special assignments	

Businesses***	
Approvals	7.918
Authorisations	158.771
Number of activities	440
*** one business may have several approvals or authorisations	

Laboratories	
Laboratories of the FASFC	5
Reference laboratories	8
Approved laboratories	52

Communication	
Visits to the website (7 months)	212.000
Press releases	91
Bulletin	5
Subscriptions to the bulletin	10.000

Budget of the FASFC		
Revenue	budget	realised
Public funding****	68.110.735€	68.111.000€
Contributions	35.450.000€	25.653.640€
Repayments	47.977.750€	41.521.851€
EU interventions	3.363.452€	2.394.479€
Administrative fines	1.265.000€	861.324€
Others	3.077.627€	3.598.716€
Total revenue	159.244.564€	142.141.010€
Total amount without BSE	138.394.564€	126.734.243€
Expenditure	budget	realised
Total expenditure	162.776.682€	147.293.870€
Total amount without BSE	145.872.063€	131.853.287€

**** allocation from the federal budget

Notifications, complaints	
Contact point (consumers)	
Questions	6.683
Complaints	482
Mediation service	
Questions	106
Complaints	229

Controls	
Samples tested*	66.796
Compliance %	97,4%
Inspections	85.500
Compliance %	84%
Businesses controlled	72.000
<i>* samples tested by the laboratories of the FASFC and the laboratories approved by the FASFC, with the exception of animal diseases</i>	

Action taken in consequence of non-compliance	
Suspensions	1
Withdrawals	4
Rapid alerts	79
Seizures	174
Official reports	1.442
Administrative fines	1.674
Warnings	7.269

Imports from third countries	Number of consignments	% of consignments that were rejected
Live animals	1.684	1,6%
Animal products for human consumption	25.454	0,4%
Food of non-animal origin	176	1,1%*
Animal products not for human consumption	4.425	0,6%
Feed	2.530	0,04%
Plants and plant products	19.632	1,3%**
<i>*: of the consignments that were controlled by the FASFC</i>		
<i>**.: of the 6222 consignments that were controlled by the FASFC (physical controls, document controls and identity controls on import)</i>		

Advisory committee	
Members	37
Plenary meetings	10
Monitoring Committee on Financing:	
Representatives	4

Scientific Committee	
Members	22
Requests for opinions	69
Formal opinions	54
Advices	14
Amendments	1





facts & figures

noteworthy facts of 2006

2006

3

Noteworthy facts of 2006

3.1. New financing system

The new financing system of the FASFC came into force on 1 January 2006. The aim of the system is to achieve a more equitable distribution of costs among the various sectors and individual business operators of the food chain.

In this system, which was approved by the government, the overall contribution of the sectors to the working cost of the FASFC did not increase and services provided are charged directly to the businesses concerned. The public funding (allocation from the federal budget) made to the Agency accounts for 47,9% of the revenue in 2006.

The new financing system is based upon two pillars: contributions and retributions.

Contributions must ensure an equitable and proportional distribution of the costs related to FASFC control activities among all sectors engaged in the food chain.

The amount of the contributions varies according to certain factors such as the sector of activity, the production capacity or the number of workers employed of the business. The contributions are calculated on the basis of an annual **declaration** of business characteristics from the previous year.

Retributions are amounts related to the delivery of services.

They are compensations for the services provided by collaborators of the FASFC at the request of business operators - such as the issuing of certificates, controls or audits - and which can be assigned to individual business operators.

The launching and the results of the first year of the new system will be evaluated in 2007; whenever necessary, adjustments will be made by the FASFC, in consultation with the representatives of the business sectors in the advisory committee.

3.2. Enlargement of the advisory committee

The advisory committee of the FASFC gives its opinion on all matters related to the policy adopted or to be adopted by the Agency, either on its own initiative or at the request of the Minister or the chief executive officer. The committee is composed of 37 members representing the major business sectors, consumers associations and other public authorities involved in the scope of activity of the FASFC. The committee is the interface between the Agency and its “clients” and has an important role to play in the field of information transfer and counselling between these partners.

Following the evaluation of the activities of the advisory committee, the mandates were renewed, new principles were adopted (appointment of deputy members, adoption of new standing procedures) and the representation of sectors was enlarged by providing mandates for sectors that make a significant contribution to the financing of the FASFC. The number of representatives of the food industry was increased from 1 to 4. Two new mandates were given to the trade sector that is subject to control by the FASFC. The composition was further enlarged with representatives from the sectors of transport, butcheries and horeca.

Some remarkable achievements of the Advisory Committee in 2006

- the results of the consumers survey on food safety and the smiley,
- the development of control measures for bluetongue,
- the inquiry into the dioxin incident,
- the development of the financing of the FASFC,
- the carrying out of the control plan,
- the validation of sector guides on self-checking.

3.3. Self-checking systems and sector guides

Self-checking refers to the whole range of measures taken by business operators to make sure that the products for which they are responsible meet the requirements laid down in the regulations on the safety and the quality of products under the authority of the FASFC, and on tracing.

Self-checking implies that the requirements have to be met at all stages of production, processing and distribution of products. All business operators (except those of the primary sector) with activities in the food chain must introduce, implement and sustain a self-checking system.

To help business operators to implement self-checking within their business, the various sectors of the agri-food-stuffs industry are free to draw up self-checking guides that may be submitted for approval to the FASFC.

Businesses may, however, choose not to use these guides when setting up their self-checking system provided that they are able to guarantee similar results by using another system. The guides submitted for approval must be based upon a hazard analysis, deal with subjects such as hygiene practices, tracing, obligatory notification and HACCP and, finally, be easy to use by the business operators concerned.

In the primary sector, the setting up of a self-checking system is not mandatory. Business operators must, however, comply with good hygiene practices and keep records of certain operations. In some circumstances, measures governing the implementation of self-checking and tracing for SMEs engaged in processing and distribution may be less stringent.

In 2006, the total number of guides that have been approved amounted to 9; these guides related to the following sectors:

- feed,
- dairy industry,
- butchery,
- abattoirs and cutting plants for poultry,
- primary production of raw milk,
- collection and transport of raw milk,
- production and distribution of pesticides for use in agriculture,
- primary production in the plant sector,
- horeca.

At the end of 2006, 25 draft guides were under examination.

3.4. Approval of laboratories

The FASFC has at its disposal a wide network of laboratories for performing analyses. In addition to its 5 “internal” laboratories, the FASFC co-operates with approved external laboratories which perform routine analyses. A certain number of these are specifically engaged in the animal health sector and are specialised in detecting animal diseases. In 2006, the FASFC approved 52 laboratories. Further information on these laboratories and their scopes of activity is available on the FASFC website.

The laboratories network is given scientific and technical support by reference laboratories which are specialised in some particular fields. In 2006, co-operation agreements describing the specific tasks of a reference laboratory were concluded with 8 institutions subsidized by the FASFC.

3.5. Development of the mediation service

The FASFC wants to be a credible and reliable public service and therefore has decided to set up a mediation service with a view to optimising its performances.

All complaints about the working of the FASFC submitted by businesses are handled by the mediation service that was set up in 2005. This way, businesses are assured that their complaints will be handled in a correct and objective way. The mediation service intervenes after all the existent procedures for solving problems have been exhausted. It also enables the FASFC to improve the follow-up of complaints and to optimise its working in a permanent way.

The mediation service was set up only for the benefit of businesses that may undergo controls by the FASFC. It reports directly to the chief executive officer.

Between December 2005 and the end of 2006, 106 requests for information and 229 complaints were recorded. Two-thirds of the complaints related to the introduction of the new financing system; only 12 complaints concerned the relationship between controlling services and businesses controlled. The requests for information mostly related to the interpretation of the rules for the implementation of Belgian and European regulations.

3.6. Working out the smiley

Since 2002, the FASFC has tried to adopt a modern policy for monitoring the food chain. While considerable effort has already been put in by the various sectors, it is unclear how consumers may appraise the results thereof.

A choice has been made from several possibilities to achieve this goal: the affixing of a distinctive mark for food businesses supplying directly to the consumer as a guarantee for the proper application of food safety legislation. The idea of a sticker with logo intended for consumers, which found its origin in the Council of Ministers of March 2004 in Oostende, was further developed by the FASFC in 2006. The smiley concept will be realized in 2007, after consultation with the sectors, the consumers associations and a panel of citizens.

What is the exact meaning of the smiley? When a business operator voluntarily decides to adhere to the smiley concept, he must have the implementation of his self-checking system favourably audited by a certifying body that has been accredited by Belac (the Belgian organisation for accreditation) and approved by the FASFC. In addition, the sector must have a sector guide on self-checking that has been approved by the FASFC. The horeca sector has met these requirements and, besides, this sector, which counts several thousands of business operators, has been asking for an incentive to accelerate the implementation of self-checking.

3.7. Development of the internal audit service

Being a modern public service, the FASFC pays special attention to compliance with the requirements laid down in European legislation. In accordance with the regulation 882/2004 on official controls, the internal audit was started in September 2006. As a result, the FASFC will have an operational internal audit system as from 2007, as part of the development of an internal system for quality management and the certification of core business processes.

The FASFC internal audit service examines and appraises the compliance of activities with (Belgian and European) legal provisions and with relevant quality requirements. The independence of the service is guaranteed by means of a charter (available on the website). The service provides analyses, appraisals, recommendations and other information on the activities that are audited. Internal audit is an integral part of a modern and efficient FASFC.

3.8. Administrative simplification

In 2006, the FASFC made a considerable effort with a view to administrative simplification, e.g. by re-examining the procedures for issuing approvals, authorisations and registrations.

The impact of this simplification has been calculated with the aid of the « Agence de simplification administrative » for approximately 10 000 retail food business operators: calculated according to the Kafka measuring model¹, administrative costs show a fall by € 790.000 a year.

This new regulation also makes it possible to register business operators by means of the unique identification codes of the “Banque Carrefour des Entreprises (BCE)” or the “Registre national des personnes physiques”. Data may be exchanged between various federal public services so that citizens will be asked only once to supply particular information.

On the other hand, the FASFC makes data of the Sanitel base available to other federal and regional public services with a view to drawing up statistics, conducting controls related to the granting of premiums or the enforcement of environmental regulations. As a consequence, livestock farmers keeping animals for production will not have to supply this information several times over different public services.

¹ The Kafka measuring concept was designed by the “Agence pour la simplification administrative” (<http://www.simplification.fgov.be>)

3.9. Dioxin incident

Early in 2006, the Dutch authorities established a dioxin contamination in pig fat intended for **animal feeding** and coming from a Belgian producer. The investigation conducted by the FASFC made it possible to establish quickly the origin of the contamination, i.e. a producer of **hydrogen chloride** (HCl). HCl is used in the processing of animal by-products for the production of gelatine. The fat (a secondary product) was intended for feeding animals. Following this contamination, 445 pig holdings, poultry farms and rabbit breeding farms were blocked. The products of the contaminated farms could be traced quickly, thus preventing the introduction of batches of contaminated food into the food chain.

This incident clearly showed what risks are related to chemical products that are used as processing aids by agri-food-stuffs businesses or feed manufacturers. Although the use of chemical products in the food supply chain is very low when compared to all non-food applications, incidents may sometimes take on very large proportions.

Following this hydrogen chloride incident, the associations FEVIA (federation of food industries), APFACA/BEMEFA (professional association of compound feed manufacturers) and FEDICHEM (federation of the Belgian chemical industries) held a meeting and signed a **code of conduct** under the protection of the FASFC. This code describes the responsibilities of each of the actors:

- suppliers of chemical products should be more aware of the hazards related to the product and the manufacturing process; they should give attention to the destination of the product and inform their customers in the food chain;
- business operators who are active in the food chain must make a risk assessment, taking into account the use that they will make of the product.

3.10. Avian influenza

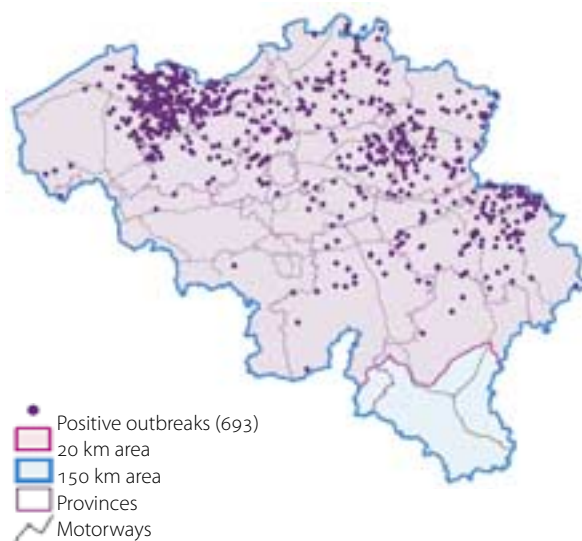
The H5N1 avian influenza virus emerged in Southeast Asia at the end of 2003 and remained in the spotlight throughout the year 2006. This virus differs from the other avian influenza pathogenic viruses by the fact that it has a very wide range of hosts (birds, but also humans and other mammals appeared to be sensitive) and by its extremely aggressive character, even in other bird species than poultry. In spite of all the preventive measures that were taken to preclude the introduction of the virus from contaminated countries, this avian influenza virus was found in places all over Europe between February and July 2006: 750 contaminated wild birds were found. The origin of this sudden and unexpected contamination boom is to be found in migratory birds.

In the autumn of 2006, these cases led to the adoption of **general protection measures** for poultry in most of the European countries. Likewise, in Belgium, both private and professional keepers of poultry had to confine their animals indoors or protect them from any contact with wild animals during this period of time. Moreover, gatherings of birds and fowls were strictly regulated. Each year a survey is also carried out of wild birds and fowls so as to be able to detect any possible introduction into our country as soon as possible.

Being aware of the fact that avian influenza risks becoming a problem that will last for several years, the FASFC developed a long term **decision-making matrix**, early in 2006, in co-operation with the professional poultry sector and with private persons keeping birds. This matrix shows which measures must be taken with respect to protection, protected feeding and watering, gathering birds on markets, shows and exhibitions depending on the migratory season of wild birds and the place where the avian influenza virus has been detected. The measures are interpreted more strictly in sensitive nature areas, **risk areas** with a high prevalence rate of water birds and, more in particular, of migratory water birds. In these areas, contacts between domestic birds and birds that may be contaminated with the H5N1 virus are more likely to occur. This decision-making matrix makes it possible to react promptly to changes in the epidemiological situation.

3.11. Bluetongue

On 16 August 2006, Belgium was confronted with bluetongue for the first time. Bluetongue is a virus disease that is transmitted by vectors (midges of the culicoides species) and to which ruminants, and especially sheep, are extremely sensitive. This disease spread all over the country between September and December 2006. Many cases were also recorded in the Netherlands, in Germany, in Luxemburg and in France.



In accordance with European Directives, the 5 countries affected by the disease adopted the same approach. A restricted area with a 150 km diameter was demarcated around each outbreak. It was forbidden to transfer animals from these restricted areas to bluetongue-free areas. Moreover, there was a ban on the transport of ruminants and mandatory insecticide treatments had to be performed within an area of 20 km around each of the outbreaks. After some time, the similar areas in the different countries merged, giving rise to larger cross-border areas within which the rules on the transport of ruminants were gradually eased, first for slaughter animals and then for breeding and production animals.

Because of the spread of the disease the overall economic impact of bluetongue on Belgian stock breeding remained rather limited. Nevertheless, due to the restrictions on transport, the disease caused essentially economic problems. In consequence of the continuous expansion of the "areas" in the neighbouring countries, the animal export market was somewhat stabilised, thus limiting financial losses.

3.12. International affairs

Major obstacles to international trade due to the dioxin incident in January 2006 and the bluetongue crisis in August 2006 could be avoided to a large extent owing to the rapid dissemination of proper information by the international affairs service of the FASFC through our Belgian diplomatic posts.

In 2006, new **bilateral agreements** or **certificates** were concluded with 11 countries:

- Colombia, Thailand and Kazakhstan on the export of pigs,
- Colombia on the export of horses,
- South Africa on the export of birds,
- The People's Republic of China on the export of pigeons,
- Canada on the export of pig semen,
- Peru on the export of milk and milk products,
- Cuba on the export of pork and other products from pigs,
- French Polynesia on the export of pork and other products from pigs,
- Romania on the export of milk and milk products,
- Algeria on the export of beef meat.

The standard certificates for feeding stuffs and foodstuffs and veterinary certificates were amended to facilitate international trade.

The international affairs service also received visits from 18 foreign delegations.





facts & figures

accomplishing the tasks of the fasfc

2006

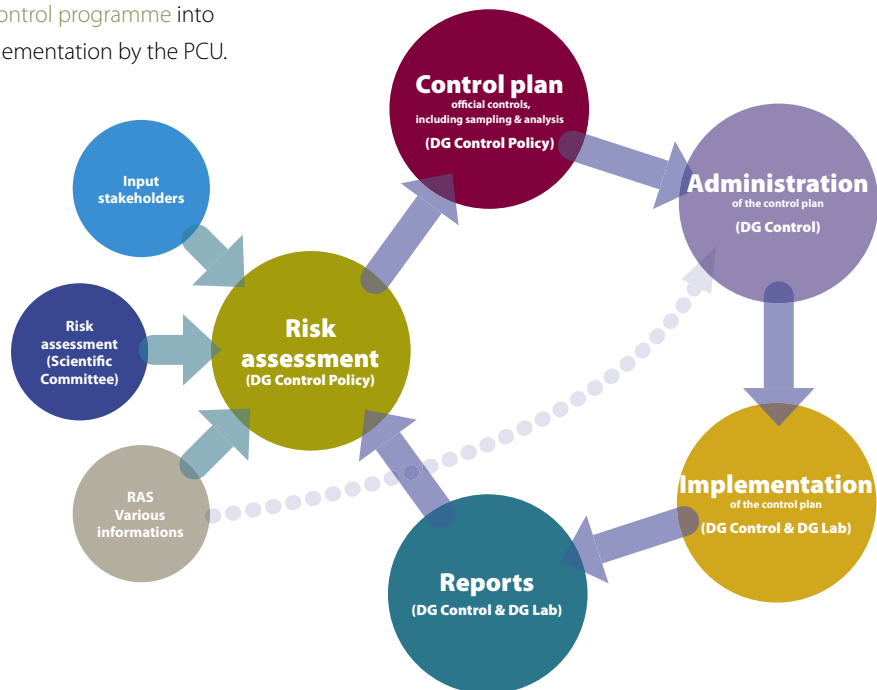
4

Accomplishing the tasks of the FASFC

4.1. Programming and conducting controls

Two directorates general (DG) are involved with controls. Starting from a risk assessment, DG control policy designs the policy and the control programmes for the plant sector and the related sectors (fertilisers, pesticides), the animal sector and related sectors (veterinary medicinal products, feed) and the manufacturing and distribution level of the food-stuffs sector. The scientific committee evaluates the control programme from a scientific point of view. On the other hand, DG control translates the **annual control programme** into **control plans** per province for implementation by the PCU.

It is obvious that when drafting the control plans, the FASFC takes into account the existence of reliable and validated self-checking systems since businesses with a validated self-checking system have a lower risk profile than other businesses. The FASFC still gives priority to concentrating its efforts on businesses presenting a higher risk profile.



The information received in relation to the obligatory notification, the European rapid alert system (RASFF), complaints, findings, inspection reports and test results is used to carry out risk assessments and requires a regular, sometimes immediate, adjustment of the programme in order to maximise risk management. In this respect, the expertise of the scientific committee of the FASFC may prove to be of vital importance. The implementation of the control plan drawn up on the basis of the updated programming is left in the care of the PCUs which report the information on controls (inspections, samplings...) by means of a centralised data system; afterwards, this information will supply a basis for risk assessment.

This process, which is far from being static, is changing constantly and all persons involved must be able to react in the proper manner, both competently and efficiently, so that the appropriate action may be undertaken whenever necessary.

In 2006, the FASFC conducted 85,700 inspections in 72,000 businesses. 84% of these inspections showed results that were in compliance with regulations. Similarly, 66,796 samples were taken in 2006 and 97% of them were found to be in compliance with the standards or maximum limits in force.

4.2. Businesses

According to the European regulations that came into force on 1 January 2006, all businesses and all business operators active in the food chain in Belgium must be known to the FASFC.

The royal decree of 16 January 2006 lays down the procedures for prior registrations. Some activities require an authorisation or an approval, in addition to registration.

In 2006, 7,918 approvals and 158,771 authorisations were issued to businesses.

With a view to reducing administrative duties for businesses to a strict minimum, the FASFC closely co-operates with the "Banque Carrefour des Entreprises" (BCE) and – whenever possible – with other databases. In consequence of this course of action, business operators do not have to undergo additional formalities. When new business operators register with the BCE (one stop shop for businesses) they are informed of their duties towards the FASFC, depending on the activities declared. As it is, this one stop shop has the most recent information at its disposal to be of help to new business operators.

The aims of the new regulations are:

- to increase the efficiency of controls,
- to harmonise the procedures for issuing, suspending or withdrawing approvals and authorisations:
 - by treating all business operators involved in a fair way,
 - by reducing administrative duties as much as possible,
 - by seeking maximum compliance with European regulations,
 - by preserving possibilities for appeal for matters in dispute.

The activity of a business operator is the action accomplished by this operator to produce marketable goods and, hence, to keep his business in operation.

The combination between activities to be controlled, locations where activities take place and products handled yields some 440 different activities that come under the control of the FASFC, each of which according to the nature of the product, the type of handling or the type of business (e.g. bread and flour confectionery, industrial / non-industrial bakery, itinerant / non itinerant bakery).

Checklists are forms whose aim is to standardise inspections. They are used by the FASFC staff members when carrying out controls.

Early in March 2006, the new methodology for planning controls was introduced. At present, a data system (Foodnet) is used by all control officers to supply detailed and har-

monised reports on the results of the various controls that have been performed. Inspections are more often combined with taking samples and their target is no longer expressed by a figure but is linked to a frequency of visits that varies according to the activity of business operators. Thorough inspections are performed with the help of the standardised checklists. These forms consist of a chart that must be completed and that mentions the various aspects of legal provisions related to the powers of the FASFC that must be observed by the business operator.

In 2006, more than 65% of the controls in businesses related to hygiene, self-checking, tracing, obligatory notification, equipment, waste management, etc. were in compliance (which means that no remarks or only minor remarks were made).

Type of business	Compliance rate of inspections
Feed	86%
Farm-made dairy products	85%
Industrial dairy products	90%
Egg packing centre	83%
Wholesalers in eggs	84%
Egg products	100%
Processing of non-animal products	66%
Horeca, institutional kitchens, retailers	79%

4.3. Plants and plant products

4.3.1. Plant health controls

With respect to plant health, the **monitoring** and the **control measures** that have been laid down and enforced in Belgium these last years in co-operation with the agricultural sector are paying off. Our country is now free from or has eradicated several quarantine diseases:

- corn root worm (a nice success in the field of eradication)
- pinewood nematode,
- monilinia fructicola (Prunus orchards),
- potato ring rot and potato brown rot,
- pepino mosaic virus (tomatoes),
- chestnut gall wasp.

Some other plant diseases are still found on the Belgian territory but are subject to active monitoring:

- fireblight,
- potato spindle tuber viroid (PSTVd) in tomatoes and ornamental crops,
- Phytophthora ramorum (a fungus causing damage to oak trees).

4.3.2. Pesticides

4.3.2.1. Control of plant protection products

The **active substance content** and the **physical-chemical properties** of pesticides found on the Belgian market have been examined: 80 % were found to be in compliance.

Inspections on **marketing** requirements (approval, labelling) performed among business operators engaged in the marketing of pesticides for use in agriculture showed that only 69% of the business operators were in compliance.

On farms, 82% of the **users** were in compliance. Offences mostly related to the possession of pesticides for which the approval had been withdrawn in recent years, as a result of review processes by the European Commission.

In this context, the asbl Phytofar-Recover which is financed by industry provides a legal solution by collecting and destroying obsolete products.

4.3.2.2. Control of residues on fruit and vegetables

The controls on pesticide residues in/on fruit and vegetables showed 5,2 % of those controlled to be in excess of the maximum residue limit for Belgian products and 13,6% for foreign products. The proportion of fruit and vegetable samples showing pesticide residues has increased when compared to 2005 (+5%).

For some years now, testing methods have been improving, both with respect to the number of substances that can be detected and to the limits of quantification. A large number of the offences found may be explained by the incomplete harmonisation of maximum residue limits within the European Union.

4.3.3. GMOs

The FASFC performs 3 kinds of controls on genetically modified organisms (GMOs):

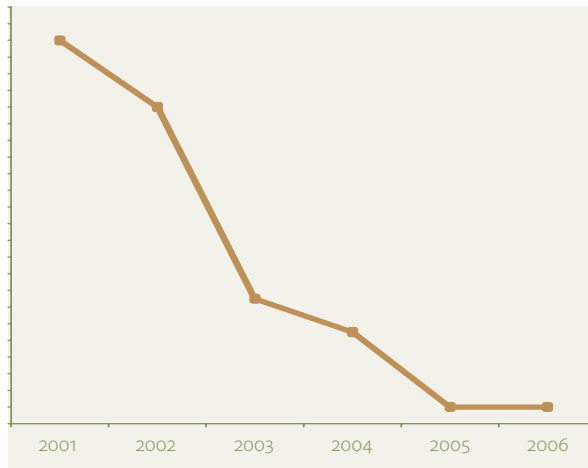
- controls on the non-authorized presence of GMOs,
- controls on labelling (compulsory indication when the product contains > 0,9% GMOs),
- controls on the amount of authorized GMOs present.

All food samples taken at manufacturers and distributors level were in compliance. However, two non-authorized GMOs have been found in rice coming from the USA (LL Rice 601) and from China (BT Rice 63). To deal with this problem, the European Commission and the Member States recalled the products that were not in compliance.

4.4. Animals

4.4.1. BSE

Rapid tests for diagnosing BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy or mad cow disease) are performed on all bovine animals older than 30 months and slaughtered for human consumption as well as on all risk bovine animals older than 24 months that die or undergo an emergency slaughter.



Evolution of the number of BSE cases in Belgium from 2001 to 2006

In addition, permanent monitoring is carried out on live bovine animals in farms, during transport and during health inspections in abattoirs. An inventory of all suspect animals found in farms and abattoirs could be made as a result of the application of the obligatory notification by veterinarians and stock farmers.

In recent years, the number of BSE cases has **significantly dropped**: in 2001, 46 cases were recorded in Belgium, against only 2 in 2005 and 2006, whereas 364.794 animals were tested.

4.4.2. TSE

Sheep and goats older than 18 months are also submitted to a monitoring of transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE):

- at rendering plants,
- at the abattoir.

In 2006, 10.121 sheep and 1.019 goats were tested; no more than 3 sheep were found positive for TSE (scrapie) (as against 2 in 2005).

4.4.3. Salmonella in poultry

Each farm keeping at least 200 fowls must meet the general requirements on **health qualification** (use of a hygiene lock, keeping a farm register, proper cleaning and disinfecting during fallowing). More than 97% of the inspection results were in compliance, which stands for a significant improvement when compared to 2005 (88% compliance rate) and is probably the result of an awareness-raising campaign among business operators.

4.4.3.1. Breeding poultry

The monitoring of breeding poultry during production consists of performing official bacteriological tests every 6 weeks as well as routine tests every 2 weeks. In 2006, the 558 poultry batches were all negative for the 5 Salmonella serotypes that are relevant for public health whose presence requires that the eggs be destroyed and the animals be slaughtered.

4.4.3.2. Meat poultry

Each farm keeping at least 5.000 fowls is tested during the last three weeks of production time. In 2006, 15,525 tests were performed by the meat poultry sector as exit control: 2,7% of the samples were positive. This is an improvement when compared to 2005 (4,1% of positive samples).

4.4.3.3. Laying hens

In 2006, the laying sector performed 844 exit tests. 34 of those were positive for Salmonella (4%). This is a slight improvement when compared to 2005 (5,4%). This improvement may be ascribed to the vaccination policy pursued by the sector.

Canalisation to the processing industry of eggs coming from positive farms is an important economic incentive with a view to complete recovery of the situation. It is obvious that this is also an efficient means to protect consumers' health, a fact borne out by the fall in salmonellosis cases.

4.4.4. Animal welfare and trade in endangered species

The FPS Public Health, Safety of the Food Chain and Environment outlines the policy in the field of animal welfare. However, the FASFC, when performing controls in businesses, also pays attention to this item. In 2006, the FASFC controlled 20.261 bovine animals, 318.943 porcine animals, 2.744 small ruminants and 25 horses; respectively 96,4%, 100%, 99,9% and 92% of the controls showed compliance respectively. 9.235 vehicles transporting animals were inspected at the place of destination; 99,2% of them were found to be in compliance.

The [trade in endangered species](#) is governed by strict regulations in accordance with the international CITES convention (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora). In most cases, a special licence is required for this kind of trade. A health certificate must always accompany the animals.

Controls on the illegal introduction into Belgium of protected animal species or products thereof (ivory, skins of reptiles, of mammals...) come under the responsibility of the FASFC. These controls are performed either simultaneously with other controls or as targeted controls. Some of the controls are conducted with the aid of customs officers, police officers or inspectors of the FPS Public Health, Safety of the Food Chain and Environment.

In 2006, 27 monkeys, 2 birds of prey, 27 parrots, 122 tortoises, 52 pieces of coral, 7 crocodile skins, 23 products made from reptile skin, 89 objects made of ivory, 3 tusks, 2,5 kg caviar, 69 teeth of mammals, 2 hippopotamus skulls and 152 Asian drugs made of felines were seized. Some of these items were given to universities, museums and animal parks while others were destroyed.

4.5. Public health

4.5.1. Microbiological controls on food

More than 3,500 **microbiological tests** were performed on samples of food taken in processing businesses of manufacturers, horeca, institutional kitchens and the distribution sector. The tests were aimed at detecting indicator germs and pathogenic germs. More than 97% of the samples showed compliance.

In all, the microbiological quality of the foodstuffs sampled in 2006 is satisfactory, both in **processing** businesses and in **distribution** businesses. The food offered to consumers is almost trouble-free as far as contamination with pathogenic micro-organisms is concerned. For some foodstuffs improvements are however advisable with respect to hygiene during preparation and storing (e.g. soft ice, spices).

As for Salmonella and Listeria monocytogenes in particular, one may conclude that the application of the microbiological food safety standards laid down in the new European regulations is satisfactory.

4.5.2. Foodborne outbreaks

The term foodborne outbreaks refers to the occurrence of similar symptoms in equal circumstances in at least two persons with a (probable) causal connection to one single source of food.

In Belgium, the FASFC performs **food investigations** and takes **samples** of the 'suspect' foodstuffs, in co-operation with the Communities, the national reference laboratory (SIPH) and the national platform for foodborne outbreaks and foodborne zoonoses.

In 2006, 212 suspicions of foodborne outbreaks were reported to the FASFC, 117 of which were in fact foodborne outbreaks involving a total number of 1.033 persons. The cause of 45% of the foodborne outbreaks was identified: most of the time, the cause was Salmonella, coagulase positive Staphylococcus and Bacillus cereus. Foodborne outbreaks were found in restaurants (39%), private households (35%), itinerant businesses (15%), schools (5%), hospitals or homes for the elderly (4%) and holiday camps (2%).

The foodstuffs involved most often in foodborne outbreaks were, among others, meat and meat products (17%), Chinese meals (7%), pastas (5%), dishes prepared with raw eggs (4%) and pizzas (4%). In the case of salmonellosis, consumption of raw eggs or food containing eggs was the most frequent cause.

4.5.3. Controls on tobacco regulations and smoking ban

In *horeca*, controls on the application of tobacco regulations are performed each year. In 2006, 2535 visits were made to *horeca*; 90% of the controls revealed compliance.

The main offences are related to specific requirements (absence of a separate no smoking area, no clear indication that smoking is not allowed in the no smoking area).

It should be noted that regulations have become stricter since 1 January 2007, at the request of the Minister of Public Health.

4.5.4. Fight against fraud and hormones

With a view to fighting fraud in the field of food chain safety, the national investigation unit of the FASFC takes part in the working groups of:

- the *Multidisciplinary hormones unit*,
- the Interdepartmental commission for the co-ordination of fraud prevention in economic sectors,
- the Interdepartmental co-ordination unit for food safety control.

For hormones, 40 positive samples were found in 2006:

- 3 in abattoirs during random controls,
- 12 in abattoirs during investigations,
- 1 on a farm during targeted controls,
- 21 on farms during investigations,
- 3 on the basis of notifications.

4.6. Import controls

Animals, feed, food and other products of animal origin imported from third countries are controlled at the border inspection posts (BIP) of the FASFC. These BIP are located in Belgian harbours and airports.

Number of consignments in 2006

Type of consignment	Number of consignments
Live animals	1.684
Animal products for human consumption	25.454
Food of non-animal origin	176
Animal products not for human consumption	4.425
Feed	2.530
Plants and plant products	369

Non-compliant control results entail refusal of the consignment which will then be either returned to the country of origin or destroyed.

Consignments refused as a consequence of import controls

	Number of consignments refused	Examples of types of consignments or causes
Live animals	28/1.684 (1,6%)	Birds, dogs, cats
Animal products for human consumption	105/25.454 (0,4%)	Contaminants in fish, Salmonella in frog's legs
Food of non-animal origin	2/176 (1,1%)	Aflatoxins in pistachio nuts and hazelnuts
Animal products not for human consumption	27/4.425 (0,6%)	Pet food, game trophies
Feed	1/2.530	Dioxins in additives
Plants and plant products	113/561 (20,1%)	Plant health controls, pesticide residues in fruit and vegetables

Non-compliances found in the Member States of the European Union must be notified when a direct or indirect risk for human health related to food or feed has been established.

This network for notifications to the Commission is known as the RASFF (rapid alert system for food and feed). In 2006, the FASFC sent 46 alert notifications and 33 information notifications to the Commission, to inform the Member States.

Frequency of the notifications sent by Belgium in 2006 according to the nature of the hazard

Hazard		Number
Chemical hazards	Heavy metals	14
	Residues of veterinary medicinal products	10
	Industrial contaminants	9
	Migration	7
	Mycotoxins	6
	Food colouring and food additives	4
	Pesticide residues	2
	Chemical contaminants	1
Biological hazards	Pathogens and altering agents	9
	Marine biotoxins	1
Other hazards	Abnormal organoleptic results / fishery products	5
	Non authorised GMO rice	2
	Documentary non-compliance	2
	Non-authorised food supplements	2
	Non-authorised novel food	1
	TSE (SRM) / beef	1
	Non-authorised irradiation	1
	Histamine / fishery products	1
Non-notified allergen / chocolate	1	
Total		79

4.7. Communication

In accordance with legal requirements, communication is unmistakably one of the tasks the FASFC must fulfil. From the start, the FASFC has considered openness in communication of paramount importance.

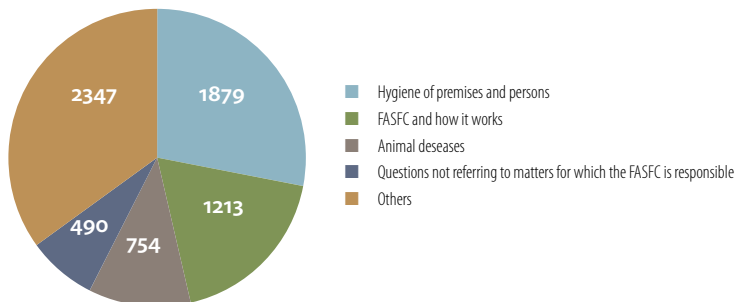
The FASFC uses various means of communication for the purpose of external communication, such as the **contact point** for consumers, contacts with the press (**spokesperson**), **press releases**, **publications** ("Bulletin/Nieuwsbrief", posters and brochures on particular topics), participation in trade fairs and **events**, and the **website** (<http://www.afsca.be>). For instance, the summer campaign on handling food during youth camps was run once again in 2006 along with further efforts for the introduction of a smiley.

4.7.1. Contact point

Since 2002, the FASFC has a contact point to which consumers may submit their questions or complaints related to food safety or other relevant matters.

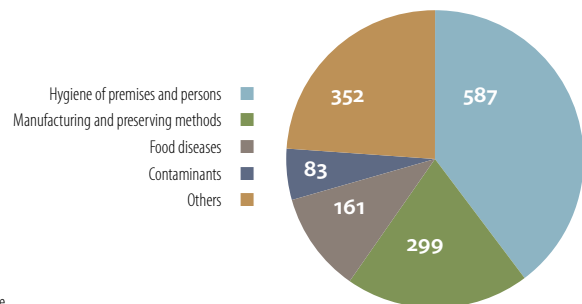
In 2006, the contact point recorded 6.683 **questions**, i.e. 23 % more than in 2005.

Most frequent topics of the questions to contact point



1428 **complaints** were recorded in 2006, which is more or less the same number as in 2005 (-1%).

Most frequent topics of complaints to the contact point



4.7.2. Website

In 2006, the website of the FASFC was given a thorough technical facelift. A search function has finally been installed.

Statistics on the number of visitors are available since June 2006. These show a substantial increase in the number of visits in August and September, due to the bluetongue crisis.

Number of visits to the FASFC website in 2006

	Number of visitors	Number of visits
June	19.096	36.273
July	15.686	29.938
August	42.406	99.443
September	54.725	121.276
October	30.783	65.558
November	27.067	53.751
December	22.793	43.748
Total number	212.556	449.987



Abbreviations

APFACA/BEMEFA	Professional association of compound feed manufacturers
ASBL	Association without lucrative purpose
BCE	Banque carrefour des entreprises
BIP	Border inspection posts
BSE	Bovine spongiform encephalopathy
CITES	Convention on the international trade of endangered species of wild fauna and flora
DG	Directorates general
EU	European Union
FASFC	Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain
FEDICHEM	Federation of the chemical industries
FEVIA	Federation of food industries
FPS	Federal Public Service
FTE	Full-time equivalent
GMO	Genetically modified organism
ICT	Information and communication technologies
PCU	Provincial control unit
RASFF	Rapid alert system for food and feed
SIPH	Scientific Institute of Public Health
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprise
SRM	Specified risk materials
TSE	Transmissible spongiform encephalopathy
VWA	Veterinarians with assignment



facts & figures

2006

the belgian food safety agency (fasfc) in 2006

federal agency for the safety of the food chain

wtc 3 • boulevard simon bolivar 30 • 1000 brussels • t +32 2 208 34 11 • f +32 2 208 33 37 • www.afsca.be • info@afsca.be

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.