

The April Lecture was given by Dr Alisdair Whotherspoon, Joint Head of the Chief Scientist Team of the Food Standards Agency (FSA), who spoke on "What role does Science play in food safety and healthy eating?".

The FSA was established in 2000, after the BSE crisis, as an independent government department. The Government decided to separate assessment and management of food safety from political control. The Agency has a staff of 750, half scientists, and a budget of £140M. Increasing emphasis is being given to the role of social scientists.

The key roles of the FSA are to protect public health and to establish standards for nutrition. It also represents the UK on EU food programmes.

An example of a major FSA ongoing programme started from a news headline "Killer in Chicken". This is *Campylobacter*, which is now the biggest cause of food-borne disease, with the more serious effects on the over 60s. The Agency is studying the production, slaughtering and consumption of meat, applying the scientific approach to all its analyses. The aim is to identify how the bacteria develops, and to decide what can be done to eradicate or limit it. The assessed information will be circulated to industry and used to produce leaflets and TV and radio programmes. Care will be taken to assess the effectiveness of the dissemination.

The French discovered that some chilli powder was contaminated. In response, the Agency carried out exhaustive chemical analyses, since many foods use chilli as an additive, in turn this led to a major recall of different foods by British manufacturers.

The speaker discussed the advice the Agency gives to consumers on healthy eating. An example was the work being done with the food industry to limit salt intake to 6 gms/day. It has been shown that there is a direct link between salt in the diet and high blood pressure, but progress remains slow.

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