

# Developing a new database and tools to help fight food fraud

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Impressive progress has been made in better understanding food fraud and developing online tools that will help the food sector tackle this threat.

Food fraud is committed when products are deliberately placed on the market with the intention of financial gain through consumer deception. Recent examples include the undeclared substitution of horse meat in beef products, the addition of melamine to milk and infant formula and the adulteration of chili powder with Sudan Red. The cost to the food sector in terms of product recalls and declining consumer confidence can be catastrophic.

Launched in 2014, the five-year FOOD INTEGRITY project has made

solid progress towards establishing an online Knowledge Base. This will provide the food industry, regulatory authorities and research organisations with access to information, along with analytical tools that have been shown to effectively combat food fraud.

Work to date has focused on designing and developing a suitable structure for this online database. Once up and running, the tool will contain details on all major food commodities, potential food fraud issues and links to existing methods to tackle threats.

The project has also analysed tools that are currently used to detect food fraud and identified reliable indicators that can be used in monitoring. Feedback from stakeholders along the supply chain – from packers to vendors – has been collected, which will be used in the development of stronger and more effective methods to tackle fraud.

Chinese consumer attitudes towards the safety and integrity of imported European foods have also been examined. China is the world's largest consumer market for food and beverage products, making this market increasingly appealing for foreign brands, especially as consumer behaviour shifts.

Although European food products are usually associated with high quality and safety, these attributes make some imports susceptible to imitation and counterfeiting. Researchers found that Chinese consumers were indeed concerned about fraudulent activities associated with European food imports, and risk relieving strategies for this market will now be identified and developed.

Taken together, these findings will help to strengthen the integrity of the EU [food supply chain](#), which is under constant threat from fraudulently labelled imitations. Providing assurance to consumers about the safety, authenticity and quality of European food will have significant economic

benefits.

This team will now build on what has already been accomplished in order to further facilitate information sharing, provide access to existing databases and address research gaps. The project has access to some EUR 3 million to commission studies and projects that will advance food supply security.

By the time the five-year project is completed – at the end of 2018 – it is hoped that a self-sustaining food-fraud early warning system for identifying emerging fraud risks will be in place, along with a self-sustaining global network of stakeholders to ensure maximum uptake of the project's legacy. Improved verification procedures will also have been developed for better food control, along with expert [food](#) authenticity platforms to provide independent expert opinion on [food fraud](#) to the European Commission, Codex and other international bodies.

**More information:** FOOD INTEGRITY project website:  
[secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/foodintegrity/](https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/foodintegrity/)

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