

FACTFILE: GCSE HOME ECONOMICS: Food and Nutrition



Being an effective consumer when shopping for food – Northern Ireland Trading Standards Service

Learning Outcome

Students should be able to:

- Explain how the Northern Ireland Trading Standards Service offers protection for the consumer when buying food.

The role of the Trading Standards Service (TSS) is “promoting and maintaining fair trading, protecting consumers and enabling reputable businesses to thrive” (www.economy-ni.gov.uk)

The TSS work to ensure businesses comply with legislation set in place to protect consumers.

They work under a few key areas to ensure consumers are protected when buying food.

1. Weights and Measures

Inspectors regularly check businesses to ensure that accuracy is maintained in measuring and weighing goods sold by traders, record keeping is routinely checked and procedures inspected. This includes checking that the weight of a food product written on the label matches the weight of the food. TSS check that alcohol is not watered down in public houses and that consumers get exactly what measure they pay for. TSS investigates claims or complaints around issues of weight or volume measurements. Any business found selling inaccurate quantities can be prosecuted in a criminal court. Furthermore, if any business is found with food products that break these laws, the food or drink will be seized and will be used as evidence as the criminal court deals with the broken law. TSS are responsible for checking the calibration and accuracy of equipment used in food production premises to weigh and measure food and drink.

2. Misleading price marking

TSS have the responsibility of checking pricing in shops selling food and investigating any disputes or problems with this. TSS can advise retailers of what is expected on pricing labels. This includes having price per unit on a food product label, this makes it much easier for consumers to compare prices when out shopping and ensures they have all the information required to do so. Each trader must give genuine and fair prices and must not mislead the consumer. Products sold must be accurately labelled and described.

3. Educating traders in legislation

Trading Standards Service educates retailers and consumers on legislation and how to trade fairly via media publications, leaflets and telephone advisors. It is possible for traders to directly contact TSS for advice and to ask questions on trading.

4. Counterfeit Goods

TSS work to reduce the trade of counterfeit goods, this includes food products like alcohol that have been distilled illegally and are sold as a genuine product. TSS has the authority to seize goods being sold to be used in the criminal court as evidence for prosecution.

TSS protects consumers by:

- Investigating complaints and handling disputes;
- Inspecting food retailers, checking calibration, record keeping and labelling;
- Educates retailers and consumers on legislation;
- Seizes counterfeit goods from rogue traders;
- Collects evidence to use in prosecution.

Revision questions

1. Explain two ways the consumer is protected by trading standards services when buying food.

Bibliography

<https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/topics/consumer-affairs/trading-standards-service>

