

# THE HORSEMEAT SCANDAL

## The allegation

According to the *Guardian*, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) delayed the publication of an independent report into the contamination of supermarket meat products with horsemeat.<sup>15</sup>

## Timeline

- Jan 2013 Frozen meat processed at plants in Ireland and England tested positive for horse DNA. Supermarkets withdrew dozens of products.<sup>16</sup>
- Jun 2013 Defra asked Chris Elliott, professor of food safety at Queen's University Belfast, to conduct an inquiry into the integrity of the food supply network.
- Aug 2014 The *Guardian* reported that publication of the inquiry's final report was delayed.<sup>17</sup>
- Sep 2014 The inquiry's final report was published.<sup>18</sup>

## How were government policy and public debate affected?

The inquiry's interim report had raised a concern that cuts to local authority services had reduced the number of staff with food law enforcement skills and could undermine enforcement against crime in the meat industry. Delayed publication of the final report prevented scrutiny of these claims, and gave rise to speculation that the report was likely to be embarrassing for the government. It prevented the public from getting a full picture of the causes of a serious contamination event, and while it is understandable that ministers wanted to be well organised to respond, the delayed publication ended up creating a more challenging environment in which to make that response.

<sup>15</sup> Lawrence, F (2014)

<sup>16</sup> BBC News (2013)

<sup>17</sup> Lawrence, F (2014)

<sup>18</sup> Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Food Standards Agency (2014)