

Report prompts indie hygiene fear

BY **ANDREW DON**

The results of a UK-wide investigation into food businesses' compliance with hygiene regulations has prompted debate about how well the independent retail sector follows best practice.

Consumer watchdog Which? found one in five high- or medium-risk food establishments – including restaurants, takeaways and retail outlets – were failing to meet requirements across the country

Food hygiene expert Sarah Daniels, of The RedCat Partnership, told *FFD* that independent retailers tended to be “more high risk” because they pushed boundaries, such as selling unpasteurised cheese or milk, and they could score the same as the worst takeaways if not well managed.

She added that some people that ran “lifestyle” businesses did not have the hygiene knowledge. “It’s the people running businesses that are hazardous, not the businesses,” she said.

Georgie Mason, director of Gonalston Farm Shop in



Indie shops may be higher risk because they push boundaries more

Lowdham, Nottinghamshire, agreed the artisan sector was “potentially high risk”.

“A lot of these businesses open and they take off and the ideas go wild and all of us think we can produce this, that and the other.”

Operators could be farmers one day and shopkeepers the next, she added.

Sarah Fraser-Steele, proprietor of The Deli Downstairs in east London, said all the businesses she knew that were similar to her own were “pretty good” but she acknowledged

there could be a hygiene knowledge vacuum where, for example, someone went from trading in a market to opening a shop.

Fraser-Steele said when food safety enforcement became extreme it could become difficult such as when environmental health officers initially wanted her eggs stored in a fridge which she said was unnecessary.

Paul Castle, consultant at Farrington's Farm Shop in Farrington Gurney, Bristol, said: “There is very varied compliance in our sector. The best businesses are the ones that don't see it [compliance] as a burden.”

The Food Standards Agency categorises risk from A – the highest – to E – the lowest – determined by the type of establishment, the types of, and number of, people it serves and management competence.

The Which? hygiene report found that two in every three food businesses were failing to comply with legal requirements in the worst area – Hyndburn Borough Council, Lancashire.