

DFS FAQ

Who is supported by the Purple Foodservice Solutions (PFS) World Wide Food Supply Contract (FSC)?

PFS¹ supplies food to the UK Armed Forces personnel 'in barracks' when personnel are not being fed under the Catering, Retail and Leisure Pay As You Dine CRL/PAYD programme and to UK Armed Forces personnel serving on Op HERRICK in Afghanistan. The Falkland Islands, Belize, RN and RFA ships along side UK, large deployed exercises in UK and overseas are also supplied under the FSC.

What part do DFS play in the development of Operational Theatre Feeding Plans?

Operational Feeding Doctrine is detailed in JDP 4-01.4. Depending upon the location and duration of any future Operation, the feeding plan will be developed by PJHQ, the Joint Task Force Commander and the nominated Front Line Command in conjunction with DFS Team's advice on the ability of the Contractor to support fresh feeding in that location. The initial surge of forces into a location will require a large percentage of the force to feed off 24 Hr ORP. We will move to a 'centralised' group feeding solution using military chefs, cooking with 10 Man ORP, fresh rations or a combination of both as soon as the Contractor can establish food supply. Sustainment (SUSTAT) levels for reserve stocks of ORP and commercial holdings where appropriate are set for feeding locations and then stocked accordingly. An assured arrangement for 3rd Line supply¹ of ambient, fresh and frozen food in a suitable location will be the priority for DFS Team and the Contractor in the planning stages of an operation, as the UK will always aim to feed personnel using fresh rations as soon as practicable. For enduring operations, feeding plans mature and the Contractor can develop a firmer footprint, balance the requirements to store and distribute food and cope with changes to the operational tempo, thereby enabling a more efficient service.

What is a soldier's dietary requirement? (food and water)?

In hot climates such as Afghanistan soldiers require 4,000 Kilo Calories per day and 10 litres of water per day, reducing to 6 litres in the winter. These are drawn from the Military Dietary Reference Values that have been developed by nutritionalists and medical personnel and are under regular review.

What is a Multi Climate Ration (MCR)?

MCRs provide all the nutrition required for a single soldier over a 24 hour period. They provide 3 meals, plus snacking items, energy bars, flavoured drink powders, matches and dental chewing gum. Each box weighs approximately 2 Kilogram's and all the contents are pre-cooked and can be consumed cold or, when the opportunity arises, heated up using hexamine stoves and individual mess tins or self-heating bags. The menus are developed specifically for hot climates to encourage consumption despite the appetite suppression brought on by the heat.

¹ PFS is made up of 3 Preferred supplier: DBC, Supreme Food Services and Vestey Foods.

MCR menu variety

There are currently 38 different menus comprising 20 general menus, 6 halal menus, 6 Sikh and Hindu menus and 6 vegetarian menus. Every menu provides at least 4,000 Kilo Calories. Multi Climate Rations include dried fruits, ready made soups, oreo cookies (a real hit), chocolate chip cakes and nuts and raisins. These are particularly suited to carrying in webbing pouches and pockets for keeping energy levels up while out on patrol.

MCR feedback

Each ration box includes a feedback form and these, together with visits to troops in theatre, debriefs of detachments as they return to the UK and individual letters provide the Defence Food Services team with constant user impressions. To date, the feedback has been extremely positive and constructive allowing constant fine tuning - such as a reduction in the number of fish dishes provided and an increase the number of snacking items and drink flavourings that are included.

How was MCR developed?

The tactics of our forces in Helmand have evolved since 2006. Some units are based for extended periods in austere Forward Operating Bases and smaller Patrol Bases where the hazardous lines of communication and limited infrastructure require them to use operational ration packs for far longer than previously experienced. While extant ration packs contained the nutrition required, it was clear that they did not lend themselves to extended use, resulting in menu fatigue among the troops. In 2007, the rations were augmented with Hot Climate Supplements and chefs packs, however, these separate supplies added further strain on the supply chain. During 2008 enhanced menus were developed working with troops in theatre and the new Multi Climate Rations were available in theatre from May 2009 delivering a wider variety of hot weather suitable meals and all necessary sundries in a single box.

What is a 10-Man Operational Ration Pack (10-Man ORP)?

The 10 man Operational Ration Pack (10 man ORP) is used by military chefs to provide group feeding cooked on Operational Field Catering Sets. They include all that is required to provide 3 meals over the day for 10 personnel and include a chefs pack with flour, yeast, spices and other condiments to enable individual variety. The contents, such as chicken or mince, require proper cooking hence the restriction to use, where possible, by trained chefs to ensure proper food hygiene.

How was the 10-Man ORP developed?

Since 2006, the contents in the 10 man ration pack have been constantly reviewed to make it more versatile and provide chefs with as much flexibility as possible. Initially it was augmented by a separate chefs pack, but since 2008 this has been an integral part of the ration box including flour, yeast and spices. The whole pack has been developed in close consultation with military chefs and working with industry to develop optimal bulk catering packaging. The pallets used to carry 10 man rations are now loaded with all 5 menus together to prevent bulk delivery of single menus and therefore reduce menu fatigue.

How are soldiers fed at Main Operating Bases (MOBs)?

Main Operating Bases such as Camp Bastion and Lashkaghar typically cater for several thousand personnel each per day. Food is cooked in purpose built kitchens and consumed in temporary dining halls, dining off disposable plates and cutlery (to save on water). There are no limitations on supply to these bases and they typically use 87% fresh, frozen and standard commercial rations, supplemented by 13% of 10 man ration packs. Currently 25 tonnes of soft fruits, fresh vegetables and salad gear is flown into Bastion every week, this is currently more than sufficient. Water is a combination of pre-packed bottles and boreholes from water bottling plants.

How are soldiers fed at Forward Operating Bases (FOBs)?

Forward Operating Bases can support up to about 400 personnel; the dynamic nature of operations mean they are temporary locations and can be moved at short notice. They are supported by military chefs who use field kitchens and makeshift dining halls. The amount of fresh and frozen provisions that can be used is dependent upon the infrastructure available and security of the lines of communication. Currently (June 2010), about 80% of the rations at Forward Operating Bases are fresh, dried and frozen, supplemented by 10-man ration packs. FOBs always hold a reserve of 10 man ration packs in case access is temporarily constrained, and usually have a water borehole as well as bulk packs of bottled water.

How are soldiers fed at Patrol Bases (PBs)?

Where size and infrastructure allow, military chefs are moved up to Patrol Bases to cook from 10 man ration packs on field kitchens. However, the temporary nature of most Patrol Bases means that the troops often tend to rely on 24 hour Multi Climate Ration packs. These allow for a breakfast, such as muesli and a pouch with egg, bacon, sausage that they heat in boiling water, lunches are typically along the lines of a pasta dish, again in a pouch and suppers are cooked over individual cooking stoves in mess tins. Usually a temporary waterbore hole provides water into temporary holding tanks in the Patrol Base, augmented by pre-packaged water.

How are soldiers fed on patrol?

Troops collect a 24-hour MCR and tend to break it down depending on personal preference, probably eating the breakfast there and then, leaving main meal coffee and tea etc with their personal kit in the base and filling their pockets, webbing and backpacks with sufficient items to cover the duration of the patrol. If they are likely to be out for several hours, they will take snacking items and light pasta style meals. If for several days, they will draw as many boxes as needed and break them down into their packs and webbing. Water is carried in water bottles and service issue 'camel back'.

How are FOBs and PBs supplied?

Bulk resupply is provided by vehicles escorted as part of combat logistics patrols, sometimes having to quite literally fight their way through. Supplementary top-ups are provided by helicopter lift.

What about feedback from soldiers and other stakeholders?

Each ration box has a feedback form, for return to the Defence Food Services Team (DFS), part of the Logistics Commodities area of the Joint Support Chain, within Defence Equipment & Support. These are proving to be well used. Units are debriefed on return to the UK, and members of DFS regularly visit theatre to get firsthand feedback, monitor typical usage and spot items that are popular or often discarded. DFS is working closely with the Surgeon General and Institute of Naval Medicine to conduct an in-depth study into all factors surrounding feeding practices and health in theatre; this is tracking specific groups from pre-deployment, including food diaries, physical and physiological evidence, gender and cultural tastes, until their return to the UK.

Are there Lines of Communication (LOC) problems?

In a dynamic war zone, such as Helmand, the security of the lines of communication can always be at changing levels of risk. To mitigate against this, there are always reserves of rations boxes pre-positioned at all bases. Generally, though fresh fruit, vegetables, eggs and sausage and bacon are pushed as far forward as possible, recognising that at times that the level of risk for those conducting the resupply will outweigh the advantages of fresh supplements, and deliveries will be suspended except for necessities such as ammunition and medical supplies.

Is there still a problem with menu fatigue?

Since autumn 2009, the different menus of both 10 man and 24 hour are outloaded from source in the UK in mixed outer boxes and pallets, to provide as wide a range of menus as possible. However, at times the danger incurred in resupplying the highest threat Patrol Bases will constrain the opportunities to push fresh supplements forward.

Are soldiers losing weight?

This is a constant area for review. The interim report from the Institute of Naval Medicine, which is conducting a study in theatre as part of the Surgeon General's Armed Forces Feeding Programme, has not identified any immediate cause for concern. It has been suggested that factors that influence the issue are the shift from a less healthy diet in the UK where troops exercise their own discretion over what they eat, to a nutritionally designed diet on operations, absence of alcohol and sugar rich drinks together with peak physical fitness.

What future developments are planned?

12 Hr ORP

The 12 Hr ORP was trialled in Afghanistan in the summer of 2009 and was well received. This ration has been developed in response to the requirement for a lightweight ration pack that could be used for a patrol of 4 to 12 hours duration. It is based on snack items that can be eaten on the go, and has one main meal pouch plus a flameless ration heater to assist in the heating of the pouch, and obviate the need to carry a Hexi cooker. This ration will help to reduce the weight burden on the troops who undertake these patrols.

The Ship Emergency Ration

The Ship Emergency Ration (SER) has been developed to replace the use of 24 Hour Operational Ration Packs (ORP) as emergency provisions onboard HM Ships. The SER is expected to improve emergency feeding evolutions by providing a ration that is bespoke to a ship's requirements; reduce the storage space required onboard; rationalise the volume of waste generated; remove unnecessary components; and finally to realise financial savings.

Jungle Rations

The Jungle ORP has been developed as a response to the requirement for a ration that is suitable for use in tropical and sub tropical rain forest. It is based on the MCR ration with the addition of a shelf stable sandwich and beef jerky plus a flameless ration heater, giving an energy value of 4500 Kcals per ration. These rations are continuing in development.

Cold Climate

The Cold Climate Ration has been developed for use above the snow line or the Arctic Circle where a lightweight, dehydrated and high-energy ration is required. This ration has a minimum of 5,500 Kcals and consists of dehydrated main meals, breakfasts and puddings supplemented by a range of snacks and drinks.

Are there long term problems with the soldier's diet?

None have been identified but this remains an area of review. The composition of rations, fresh and preserved, has been developed along with nutritionalists and is probably healthier than most diets, especially considering the care taken over salt content and the balance of food types provided.

Why do soldiers still ask for food from home?

The comfort factor of packages from home is significant, especially if they include brands that individuals favour. While nutritionally this may not be necessary, the boost to morale that these links to home offer is of immense value. Troops are consistently surveyed to get a feel for particularly fashionable food types and brands that ask to be sent out and rations can be adapted accordingly.

How much does all this cost?

For group feeding from commercial rations, caterers are allocated a Daily Messing Rate of £3.60p per man per day. This sum is calculated from a nutritionally developed food basket against the cost of products from the supplier. By comparison, the allowance in UK is currently £2.73p. A 10-man ration box costs in the order of £55 and a 24-hour Multi Climate Ration is in the order of £10. (Product cost only)

Why are personnel in central feeding facilities in Afghanistan not able to eat off proper plates, knives and forks?

Disposable eating utensils are provided to reduce the water supply burden on a base's infrastructure. Infrastructure surrounding feeding facilities is often austere, without the capability of operating dishwashers in which reusable cutlery and tableware can be hygienically cleaned. The use of reusable eating utensils in this type of environment would therefore represent a considerable food safety risk. For this reason, metal utensils are not sent to service personnel on active duty. That said a more sustainable and environmentally acceptable solution of wooden eating utensils is shortly to be trialled, which will reduce the burning requirement associated with the plastic versions. Equally the situation with regards the potential to enhance facilities with Dishwashers is continually reviewed.

How will the initiative of outsourcing the procurement and packing of ORP benefit the military customer?

The initiative of outsourcing the procurement and packing will benefit the customer by increasing variety and reducing menu fatigue. It is intended that the procurement process by which the components are purchased will be made faster, up thereby reducing menu fatigue by increasing the frequency in which the ration components and menus can be changed. It is intended that after 18 months of the new outsourced contract there will be a completely new range of ration, thereby further ensuring that troops on operations, training and exercises are provided with varied and nutritional meals.

Does the DFS Team have a Sustainable Procurement strategy?

Yes and it is posted on the DFS Internet Page

Does the MoD have a Buy British policy and how do we support British Farmers?

PFS is required to buy British products for the Armed Forces whenever they are competitive within the constraints of Articles 28 and 30 of the EC Treaty of Rome, and where they meet MOD quality standards. EC procurement legislation aims to ensure fair competition between all suppliers in the EU and they do not permit discrimination against overseas suppliers. For reference, the amount of indigenous products purchased are recorded annually by DEFRA within the Public Sector Food Procurement Initiative Survey, (<http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/policy/sustain/procurement/awareness.htm>) and as reported in the last annual report, the volume of indigenous food purchased directly by MOD Ops rose from 59% to 62%. DFS continues to work with DEFRA and other Public bodies to identify further opportunities in which it can work with British producers and there have been a number of successful initiatives to increase the volume of British Commodities purchased. For example, this relationship (with the assistance of the English Farming & Food Partnerships and Vestey Foods UK) concluded with a 'pilot scheme' raising awareness and providing provenance of British reared Beef. Additionally, projects to assess the viability of British bacon have been thoroughly investigated although cost remains prohibitive at this time. Finally, of note, DFS were awarded the David Black award for support to the UK pork industry in 2009.

Why can't the DFS simply extend the existing arrangements considering that they work so well?

Deciding whether to extend the current contracts or find a new solution is an investment decision and all investment decisions in the DE&S must be supported by a business case, which considers the options available and identifies the one, which both meets the requirement and offers best value for money. The existing contractors have indeed provided a very good service overall and we would expect them to be fully capable of meeting our future requirement. However, we cannot assume that the existing contracts represent best value for money for the future, particularly when the volume of food required will be so much less than it was when the current solution was chosen in 2005. That said, extending the current arrangements would certainly be one of the options evaluated by the project.

Is the Next Generation of Food Supply Solution going to affect the way I buy my meals at my unit?

No it won't – The Next Generation of Food Supply Solution will primarily cover meals where there is an entitlement to feed at Crown expense such as exercises and operations. That said, CRL would continue to be rolled-out that would result in the majority of UK units moving from the old Daily Mess Rate to new contract catering arrangements.

When is the Next Generation of Food Supply Solution going to take effect?

The earliest opportunity is October 2013 although it would be possible to extend current contractual arrangements until October 2015 if the project determines that this is the most suitable approach.

Will I notice a difference in the food I am provided when the Next Generation of Food Supply Solution takes effect?

If the project results in a decision to change supplier, then it is likely that some products supplied to kitchens will be slightly different from those provided under the current contract. However, the quality standards will be identical, so there should be no material or detrimental changes. It is unlikely that the end consumer will notice any difference at the hotplate.

Is the Next Generation of Food Supply Solution looking for cost savings over existing arrangements?

No: the project has no target for cost savings and no expectation that it will produce efficiencies. The business case will recommend the most cost effective way of meeting the requirement. In practice, there will be upward pressure on cost as the volumes reduce and economy of scale is diminished and it will be the project team's task to contain that cost growth as far as possible.

How will Next Generation of Food Supply Solution ensure that the solution remains effective in providing food to operations?

First, no solution will be recommended unless the evaluation process is satisfied that it will meet all the Key User Requirements (KURs). Support to operations is documented fully in the draft User Requirement Document and can be expected to feature as a KUR when these are identified early in 2011. Secondly, the project team is very alive to the challenge of transitioning to a new solution while operations are in progress. We have reserved a 6-month window after contract let for transition activities and transition planning will be given very high priority throughout the project.

What are the key dates for Next Generation Food Project?

The Initial Gate Business case is currently planned to be approved by the IAB in Jul 11 and Main Gate is Feb 13. Contract transition will begin in Apr 13 and contract start is Oct 13.

Who is doing the cost modelling?

As this is a Cat A project, cost modelling is being undertaken by CAAS.

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