



URGENT PRODUCT RECALL

IMPORTANT CUSTOMER NOTICE

AFFECTED PRODUCTS:
ALL 'DAILY BITE' & 'FRESH
TO GO' SANDWICHES AND
WRAPS WITH BEST BEFORE
DATES UP TO 23 FEB

DO NOT CONSUME.
RETURN TO STORE FOR FULL REFUND.
SEE CUSTOMER SERVICE FOR DETAILS.
APOLOGIES FOR ANY INCONVENIENCE.

TRACE AGAINST TIME: CLOSING THE £545,000 PRODUCT RECALL RISK IN UK F&B.

2026 REPORT

New research reveals a recall readiness gap across the UK's chilled, convenience and ready-to-eat food sector, where near-universal confidence sits alongside real weaknesses in the batch and expiry data every recall depends on.

www.balloonone.com

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1. Executive Summary.

New research that we (Balloon One) have undertaken reveals a recall readiness gap across the UK's chilled, convenience and ready-to-eat food sector. Businesses in the sector price the risk seriously: the mean estimated financial impact of a serious product recall, contamination issue, labelling error or traceability failure is £545,249, and 79.1% put the figure at £100,000 or more. Yet the batch, lot and expiry data that any recall depends on sits, for more than three-quarters of them, across two or more separate systems, spreadsheets or records.

This white paper explores the key findings of our research from 502 UK decision-makers in food and beverage businesses that manufacture, process, distribute or supply chilled, convenience or ready-to-eat products. We uncover a striking paradox: 92.8% are confident their organisation could manage a live recall quickly and accurately today, and 94.3% have rehearsed one within the past twelve months – yet 78.3% believe recalls have become more frequent over the past eighteen months, and the same respondents name precise weaknesses in the data a recall would rely on. Asked how long it would take to identify every affected batch, stock location and customer destination, the average estimate is four hours. Almost a quarter say five hours or more.

The findings clearly demonstrate that recall exposure is a visibility problem disguised as a competence problem. The procedures are written, the teams are capable and the rehearsals go well – which is precisely why the gap goes undetected. A mock recall tests whether an organisation knows what to do; it does not test whether the underlying data can be assembled at speed. Only 23.9% describe their traceability data as fully real time, a quarter still hold batch and expiry information in spreadsheets, and teams reconcile data between systems by hand an average of nearly nine times a month.

There is a structural reason for this. In most businesses the recall is run out of the ERP – the system that knows what was ordered, invoiced and shipped, but not which pallet, in which location, carried which batch. That resolution exists only in the warehouse. Until batch, lot and expiry data is held in a warehouse management system (WMS) and connected live to the ERP, the trace will always be a manual reconstruction. With an integrated WMS implemented by Balloon One, the same trace that currently averages four hours completes in under ten minutes. This document sets out the business case for making that change.

2. Introduction.

Product recalls are no longer an exceptional event in the UK food system. Food Standards Agency figures show that food alerts and recalls rose by 23% last year, and the businesses closest to the problem expect that trajectory to continue: 78.3% of the decision-makers we surveyed believe recalls and withdrawals in the chilled, convenience and ready-to-eat sector have become more frequent over the past eighteen months. Recall readiness has shifted from a contingency plan kept on a shelf to an everyday operational requirement.

Chilled and convenience categories are particularly exposed. Short shelf lives, complex multi-ingredient assembly, tight delivery windows and high retailer expectations combine to create an environment where a single batch-level uncertainty can quickly become a full-shelf clearance. In that environment, the decisive variable is rarely whether a business knows how to run a recall. It is whether the business can answer, quickly and precisely, where every affected unit has gone.

This white paper presents an in-depth analysis based on exclusive research conducted by Balloon One. We surveyed 502 decision-makers across UK food and beverage businesses that manufacture, process, distribute or supply chilled, convenience or ready-to-eat products, in order to quantify recall exposure, test stated readiness against operational reality, and identify where traceability breaks down. The results describe a sector that is confident, well-rehearsed and genuinely capable – and that is nonetheless carrying more than half a million pounds of estimated exposure on data it reconciles by hand every week.

This research follows our 2026 “Out of Date” study of 500 UK food and beverage supply chain managers, which found a sector running modern, fast-moving operations on ageing infrastructure. Warehouse and inventory management systems averaged 5.72 years old; nearly half (48.4%) had not been upgraded in six or more years, and 10.2% were running systems more than a decade old. That study identified outdated technology as a primary driver of avoidable waste for over a third (36.6%) of businesses. This report shows that the same infrastructure gap carries a second, sharper cost. When a recall happens, those systems cannot answer the question fast enough.

The purpose of this document is to give supply chain, technical and operational leaders a clear, data-backed view of that gap. We explore the financial and commercial consequences of recall exposure, examine what is actually being recalled and why, and demonstrate why a modern warehouse management system – not the ERP – is the layer on which recall readiness actually depends.

3. Methodology.

The research was conducted by Censuswide, among a sample of 502 decision-makers working in UK food and beverage businesses that manufacture, process, distribute or supply chilled, convenience or ready-to-eat food products (aged 21+). The research was designed to gather quantitative data on recall exposure, operational readiness, traceability infrastructure and commercial risk. Respondents represented a diverse range of company sizes, from businesses turning over under £1 million to enterprises with more than £500 million in annual revenue, and held roles including QA and food safety management, technical direction, operations, supply chain and general management. The data was collected between 27.07.2026 and 04.08.2026. Censuswide is a member of the Market Research Society (MRS) and the British Polling Council (BPC), and a signatory of the Global Data Quality Pledge. Censuswide adheres to the MRS Code of Conduct and ESOMAR principles.

The survey questionnaire focused on four key areas:

Readiness and Confidence:

Testing stated confidence against estimated time-to-trace and rehearsal frequency.

Recall Incidence and Causes:

Establishing which categories are affected and what is driving the incidents.

Systems and Integration:

Mapping how batch, lot and expiry data is captured, held and reconciled.

Commercial Exposure:

Quantifying the financial impact of a serious recall and its near-miss costs.

The data was analysed to identify mean values, trends and significant correlations between variables such as turnover, temperature profile and job role. This rigorous approach ensures that the insights provided are robust, representative of the sector, and offer a solid foundation for strategic decision-making.

4. The Problem: A Half-Million-Pound Exposure.

The chilled and convenience sector understands that a serious recall is expensive. What the research reveals is how widely that exposure is distributed, how disproportionately it falls on smaller manufacturers, and how much of it is already being incurred quietly through incidents that never reach the point of a formal recall at all.

4.1. The Financial Cost of a Serious Recall.

Our research quantifies what the sector believes a serious traceability failure would cost. The figures include direct costs, wasted stock, labour, retailer penalties, lost orders and contracts, legal and compliance costs, and reputational damage.

Average Estimated Impact:

The mean estimated financial impact of a serious recall, contamination issue, labelling error or traceability failure is £545,249 per business.

Six-Figure Exposure Is the Norm:

79.1% put the figure at £100,000 or more, and almost a quarter (22.9%) at £500,000 or more. Nearly one in ten (9.8%) estimate over £1 million.

Smallest Firms, Biggest Bill:

Manufacturers turning over £1 million to £9.99 million anticipate the highest exposure of any turnover band, at a mean of £971,326, with 23.7% expecting a hit of over £1 million.

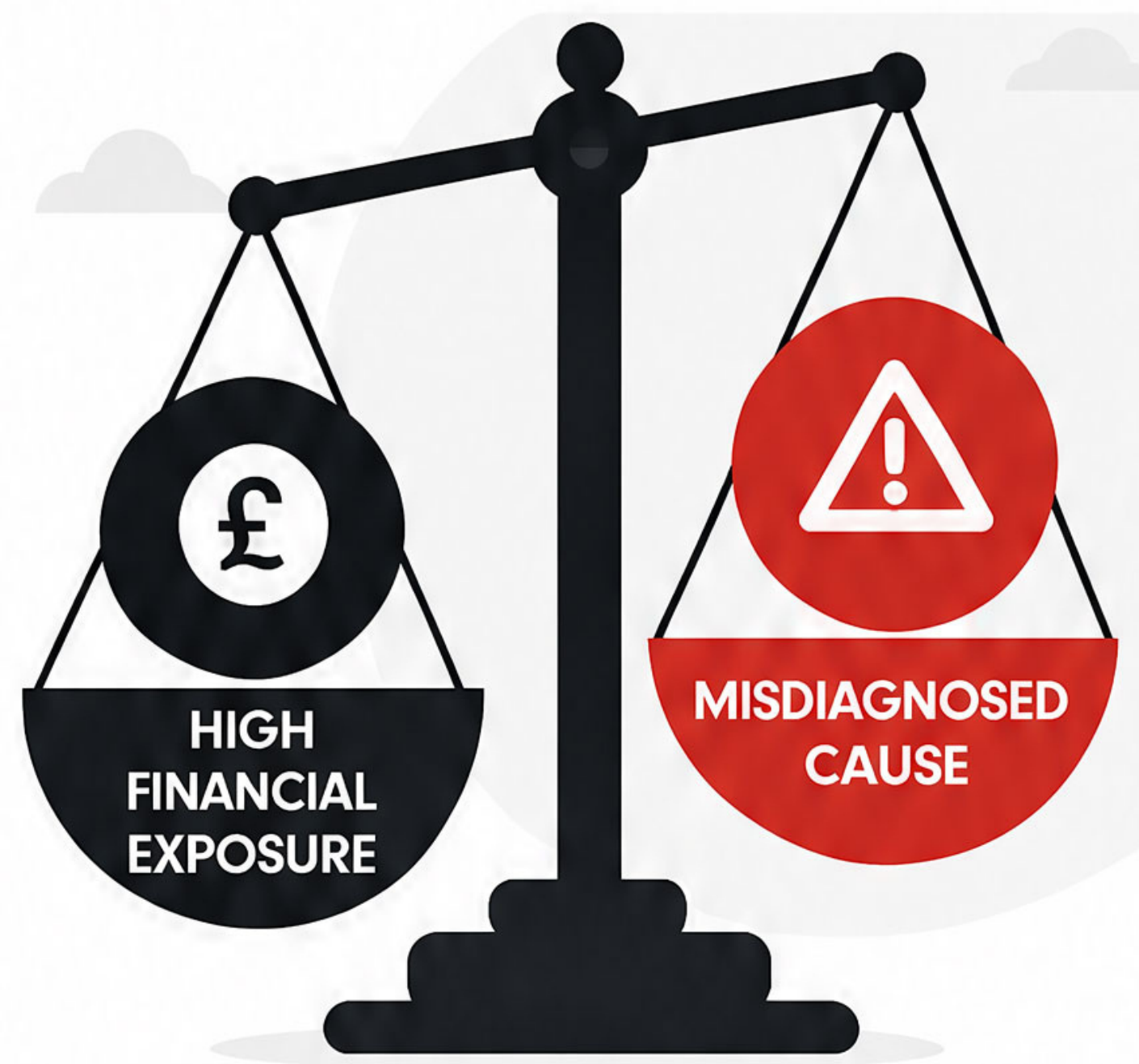
The Near-Miss Costs:

Beyond a full recall, poor expiry visibility has already generated rework or repacking (55.2%), emergency stock checks (50.6%), customer complaints (38.8%) and retailer chargebacks or penalties (32.7%) within the past 12 months.

The inversion by company size is the most commercially significant finding here. The businesses that anticipate the largest losses are not the largest businesses — they are the small and mid-sized manufacturers with the least margin to absorb them, and typically the least mature traceability infrastructure to prevent them.

COMMERCIAL EXPOSURE AND THE MISDIAGNOSED CAUSE

Businesses in the sector expect a serious recall to be expensive, and smaller manufacturers expect it to be the most expensive of all. But when asked what is pushing recall risk higher, very few of them point at their own data and systems.



THE COMMERCIAL EXPOSURE



£545,249

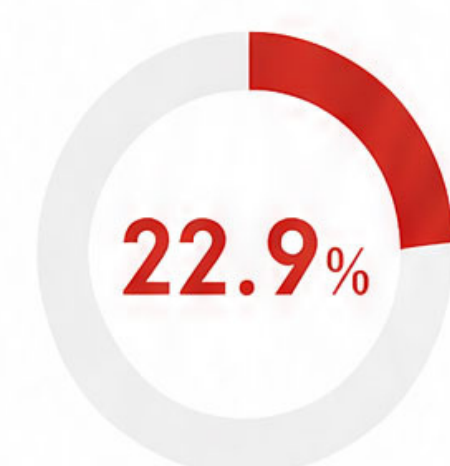
**MEAN ESTIMATED
FINANCIAL IMPACT**

The mean estimated financial impact of a serious recall, contamination issue, labelling error or traceability failure.



OVER £100,000

79.1% of businesses expect a serious recall to cost £100,000 or more.



22.9% expect the hit to be £500,000 or more.



**SMALLEST FIRMS,
BIGGEST BILL**

Manufacturers with £1m–£9.99m turnover anticipate the highest exposure of any band.

£971,326

MEAN ESTIMATED IMPACT



23.7% expect a hit of over £1 million.

BEYOND A FULL RECALL

Other costly consequences experienced in the past 12 months.



55.2%

Rework or repacking



50.6%

Emergency stock checks



38.8%

Customer complaints



32.7%

Retailer chargebacks or penalties

OPERATIONAL CONCERNS

Where product recall or withdrawal ranks among operational concerns.

1

43.2%

Short shelf-life waste

2

42.6%

Dispatch or picking accuracy

3

36.7%

Product recall or withdrawal

THE MISDIAGNOSED CAUSE

Very few point to their own data and systems as the reason recall risk is rising.



51.4%

Commercial pressure



46.2%

Supply chain complexity



12.7%

Poor visibility of batch, lot or expiry data



11.4%

Disconnected systems

TAKEAWAYS



The cost is clear.
Over half a million pounds is on the line for most businesses.



The cause is unclear.
The sector points to pressures outside its control—not its own data and systems.



Internal weaknesses are acknowledged.
Data visibility and system disconnects are cited—but by only a minority.



The risk is already costing money.
Rework, stock checks, complaints and penalties add up fast.



The opportunity is being missed.
The part of this risk you can control is the part you're overlooking.



THE HALF-MILLION POUND BLIND SPOT.
FOOD BUSINESSES PRICE A SERIOUS RECALL AT £545K, BUT ONLY ONE IN EIGHT SEES DATA VISIBILITY AS THE RISK.
Balloon One's position is that the part of this risk a business can control is the part it is currently overlooking.

4.2. The Recall Index: What Is Being Recalled, and Why.

Recall activity is not concentrated in a single high-risk category. It is spread almost evenly across every chilled and convenience product line we tested, which makes readiness a sector-wide requirement rather than a category-specific one.

Sandwiches, wraps and food-to-go



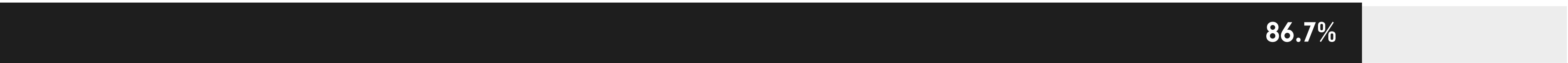
Chilled ready meals



Prepared salads



Chilled meat, poultry or seafood



Proportion who have recalled, withdrawn or investigated a potential issue in the category within the past 18 months.

The frequency is as notable as the spread. More than a quarter (28.1%) dealt with an issue involving chilled ready meals within the past three months alone, and around one in five did so for prepared salads (21.3%) and chilled meat, poultry or seafood (19.9%). For most businesses in this sector, investigating a potential product issue is a routine quarterly occurrence rather than a rare crisis.

When we asked what had driven those incidents, the leading causes were overwhelmingly ones that batch-level traceability helps contain.

Foreign Material (56.4%)

Physical contamination is the single most common cause. Containment depends entirely on being able to isolate the affected production window and trace it forward to specific pallets and customer destinations.

Undeclared Allergens (40.2%)

Allergen incidents carry the greatest regulatory and reputational consequence, and require the ability to link raw ingredients to finished goods – something 38% say they find difficult.

Labelling and Packaging (38.8%)

Labelling errors often affect a defined print or packing run. Where run data is not captured at batch level, businesses withdraw far more stock than the incident required.

Chemical Contamination (37.2%)

Chemical issues frequently originate upstream, making supplier and ingredient-level traceability the determining factor in how far the withdrawal has to extend.

Biological contamination (34.9%), adulteration and authenticity issues (28.5%) and spoilage or stability problems (21.8%) complete the picture. By contrast, outright regulatory non-compliance accounts for just 3.6% of incidents.

That distribution matters for how the sector should think about readiness. The dominant causes are not failures of intent or knowledge of the rules. They are events that originate in production or supply and then have to be located, bounded and contained – and the speed and precision of that containment is determined almost entirely by the quality of the batch, lot and expiry data available at the moment the problem is identified.

A quarterly event, not a rare one

More than nine in ten businesses in the sector have recalled, withdrawn or investigated a potential product issue in the past 18 months. Recall readiness is an everyday operational capability, not a contingency plan.

It also reframes where recall exposure sits on the risk register. Product recall or withdrawal is already the third biggest operational concern in the sector (36.7%), behind short shelf-life waste (43.2%) and dispatch or picking accuracy (42.6%). What is striking is that all three of those concerns share a single root cause: the visibility of accurate, current, batch-level stock data. They are not three separate problems competing for attention. They are three symptoms of the same underlying condition, and they respond to the same intervention.

5. Findings: The Readiness Paradox and the Integration Gap.

Our research confirms that the cost of recall exposure in this sector is fundamentally a data problem. The procedures are in place and the teams are competent. What is missing is the integrated, real-time visibility that would allow those procedures to be executed at the speed a modern recall demands.

5.1. The Recall Readiness Paradox.

The defining finding of this research is a disconnect between how ready the sector feels and what the sector describes about its own systems in the same breath.

Near-Universal Confidence:

92.8% are confident their organisation could manage a live product recall quickly and accurately today, with 38.4% very confident. Just 7.2% are not confident.

And It Is Rehearsed:

This confidence is not idle. 94.3% have conducted a mock recall or recall simulation within the past 12 months, and only 0.4% have never run one at all.

Yet Risk Is Seen as Rising:

78.3% believe recalls and withdrawals have become more frequent over the past 18 months, including 16.5% who say much more frequent. Only 3.4% think they have become less frequent.

And the Weaknesses Are Known:

Asked what would make a live recall difficult, respondents named incomplete or inconsistent batch and lot information (55.4%), manual or paper-based records (44.2%) and expiry data that is not visible in real time (42%).

These three positions are held simultaneously by the same respondents. The sector believes it is ready, believes the risk is growing, and can list the specific gaps in the data any response would depend on.

The resolution to that paradox lies in what a mock recall actually tests. A simulation confirms that an organisation knows the steps, that responsibilities are assigned, and that the workflow functions. It does not, in most cases, test the assembly of live data under time pressure across every system that holds a piece of the answer. This is why near-universal rehearsal has not surfaced the problem: the sector is testing competence, and the gap is in visibility.

That gap becomes measurable the moment the question changes from “do you know what to do?” to “how long would it take?”

4 hours

The average estimated time to identify every affected batch, stock location and customer destination in a live recall – roughly half a working shift. Almost a quarter (23.5%) say they would need five hours or more.

Only 24.7% believe they could complete the trace within two hours. For a chilled product with a short shelf life already moving through distribution, four hours is not a neutral interval. It is four hours in which affected stock continues to be picked, dispatched and put on shelf, and in which the eventual withdrawal grows wider than the original incident required.

A second, quieter version of the same paradox appears in stock rotation. 96.2% are confident that the correct stock is always picked, packed and dispatched in the right shelf-life order – the highest confidence score anywhere in the research. Yet only 38.6% have fully automated FEFO (first-expired, first-out) rotation through their warehouse systems. The majority (52.2%) run it partly automated with manual checks, and a further 9% manage it mostly or entirely by hand. Confidence in this sector consistently runs ahead of the systems underneath it.

THE RECALL READINESS PARADOX

Food and beverage businesses are confident they could handle a live recall, yet believe recalls are rising and know there are gaps in the systems a recall would rely on.

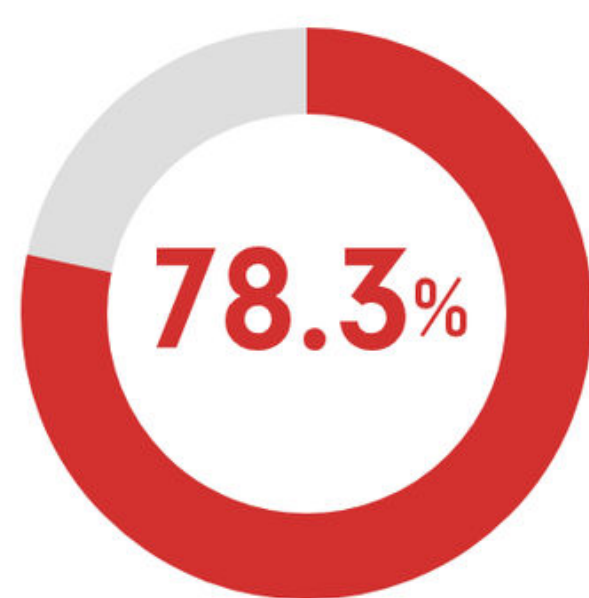


THE DATA



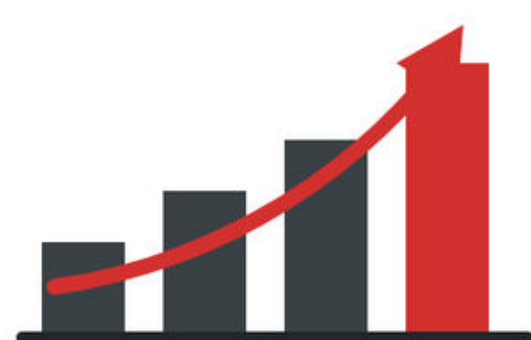
CONFIDENT TO RECALL

92.8% of decision-makers are confident their organisation could manage a live product recall quickly and accurately today, with **38.4%** very confident.



RECALLS ARE RISING

78.3% believe product recalls and withdrawals have become more frequent over the past 18 months, including **16.5%** who say much more frequent.



Only **3.4%** think they have become less frequent.



TOP SYSTEM WEAKNESSES

The most common obstacles in a recall are:

55.4%
Incomplete or inconsistent batch and lot information

44.2%
Records still held manually or on paper

42%
Expiry or shelf-life data that is not visible in real time



TIME TO FIND EVERYTHING

When asked how long it would take to identify every affected batch, stock location and customer destination:

4 HOURS

Average estimate

23.5%
say they would need 5 hours or more.

TAKEAWAYS



Confidence is high, but so is perceived risk.
Recalls are seen as happening more often.



The real issue is visibility, not competence.
Gaps in batch, expiry and record systems create blind spots.



Mock recalls don't catch it. The problem lives in the data and systems your recall depends on.



Recall readiness must be measured in hours and systems, not in how confident people feel.



DON'T GUESS. MEASURE.
JOIN CUSTOMERS LOCATING RECALLS IN UNDER 10 MINUTES.

Balloon One gives you real-time visibility of batch, expiry and stock across every location—so when it matters, you can act.

5.2. The Integration Gap.

The four-hour trace time is not a training issue. It is an arithmetic consequence of where batch and expiry data lives. In most businesses in this sector, it lives in several places at once, and the connective work is done by people rather than systems.

Multiple Sources of Truth:

76.9% would need to consult two or more separate systems, spreadsheets or records to manage a live recall. Only 23.1% could work from a single source.

Rarely Fully Real Time:

Only 23.9% describe their traceability data as fully real time across warehouse, production and customer orders. A further 51.8% are mostly real time, but with manual updates filling the gaps.

Fragmented Capture:

Batch and expiry information is captured across production systems (55.8%), warehouse management systems (41.2%), QA systems (39.4%) and ERP (35.1%) — while a quarter (25.1%) still use spreadsheets and 15.3% still use paper records.

Reconciled by Hand:

Teams manually reconcile data between warehouse, production, QA, ERP and customer systems an average of 8.95 times a month, and 78.4% do so at least weekly. That is more than 100 manual reconciliations a year.

Age compounds the problem. A quarter of businesses (25.1%) are already relying on systems six to ten years old for batch, lot and expiry visibility. Our “Out of Date” research put the wider picture in sharper relief: warehouse and inventory systems averaging 5.72 years, with nearly half (48.4%) not upgraded in six or more years and one in ten (10.2%) more than a decade old. A system specified before the pandemic was never designed for the batch-level traceability retailers and regulators now expect as standard.

But age is only half of it. The deeper issue is architectural: each system holds a fragment of the traceability picture, and assembling those fragments into a single answer remains a manual act. Every one of those 100-plus annual reconciliations is a point at which the data can drift, and a live recall is simply the moment when a business attempts to perform that reconciliation under maximum time pressure — using an ERP that was never built to hold the answer.

5.3. Why the ERP Cannot Answer the Question.

When a recall begins, most businesses turn first to the ERP. It is the system of record, it holds the customer accounts, and it is where the commercial consequences will eventually be settled. It is also the wrong place to start.

An ERP knows what was ordered, invoiced and despatched. It records that a customer received a quantity of a product code on a given date. What it does not hold — because it was never designed to — is which pallet, in which location, carrying which batch, was actually picked to fulfil that line. When three part-pallets from two production runs sit in the same pick face, the ERP cannot distinguish between them. Only the warehouse can.

Our data shows exactly this split. Batch and expiry information is captured in production systems by 55.8% of businesses and in a WMS by 41.2%, but in the ERP by only 35.1%. The record that matters most in a recall is the one least likely to sit where the recall is being run from.

Withdrawn by code, not by batch

A recall run from the ERP can identify every customer who received the product. It cannot identify which of them received the affected batch. So the business withdraws the product — and destroys stock the incident never touched.

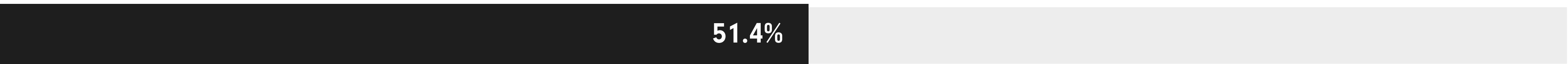
This is the mechanism behind the sector's own reported experience: rework and repacking (55.2%), emergency stock checks (50.6%) and retailer chargebacks (32.7%) are all downstream symptoms of a business that cannot bound the problem precisely. Every hour of imprecision widens the withdrawal, and every unit withdrawn unnecessarily is margin destroyed to compensate for a gap in data.

A warehouse management system inverts the question. Because it records every movement at pallet, location and batch level as it happens, it can answer "where did batch X go?" directly rather than by reconstruction — and, just as importantly, answer "what else is affected?" with a defensible, auditable trail. The ERP remains the system of record for the commercial recovery. The WMS is what makes the recall fast, and narrow.

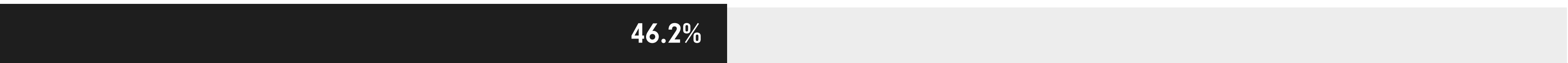
5.4. The Misdiagnosed Cause.

Presented with the FSA’s finding that food alerts and recalls rose 23% last year, we asked respondents what they believed was most likely to increase recall risk for their sector. The answers pointed almost entirely outward.

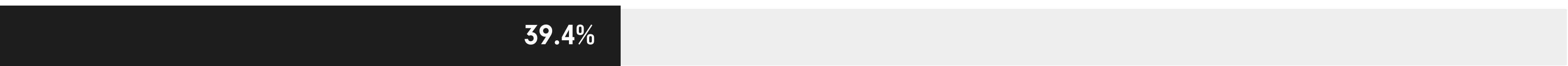
Pressure to move products quickly through the supply chain



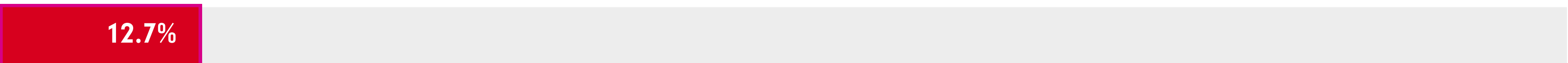
Greater complexity in chilled and ready-to-eat supply chains



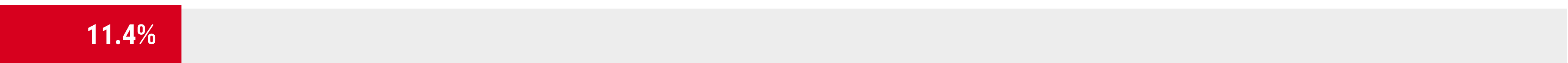
Shorter shelf lives and tighter delivery windows



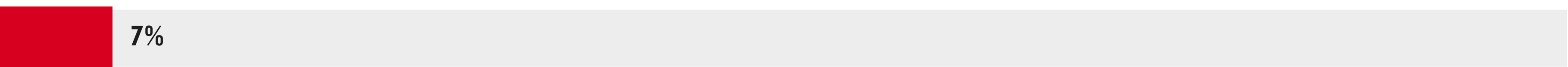
Poor visibility of batch, lot or expiry data



Disconnected warehouse, ERP and production systems



Continued reliance on spreadsheets, paper or manual processes



Commercial pressure and supply chain complexity are real, and they are largely outside any individual business’s control. Internal data and systems – the factors a business can actually change – sit at the bottom of the list. Only 12.7% see poor visibility of batch, lot or expiry data as a driver of rising recall risk, and only 11.4% point to disconnected systems.

Set that against what the same respondents said elsewhere in the survey. When asked directly what would make a live recall difficult, 55.4% named incomplete batch and lot information, 44.2% named manual records and 42% named expiry data that is not visible in real time. The sector describes its data weaknesses clearly when asked about execution, and then discounts those same weaknesses when asked about causes.

This is the commercial heart of the issue. More than half a million pounds of estimated exposure per business is being carried against a risk the sector attributes primarily to forces it cannot influence – while the portion it can influence goes largely unrecognised.

6. Recommendations: From Rehearsed to Ready.

The findings present a clear call to action. Recall readiness in this sector is not held back by a lack of process discipline or a lack of investment appetite. It is held back by fragmented data. The following steps translate that diagnosis into practical action.

Measure Readiness in Hours, Not Confidence:

The 92.8% who are confident in their recall capability should replace that confidence with a number. Run a timed trace on a live batch and record how long it takes to identify every affected stock location and customer destination. If the answer is closer to four hours than to forty minutes, the gap is in the data, not the team. Making time-to-trace a tracked operational metric turns an assumption into something that can be managed and improved.

Test Data Assembly, Not Just Workflow:

With 94.3% already running mock recalls annually, the opportunity is not to rehearse more often but to rehearse differently. Design simulations that require live data to be pulled from every system that holds a fragment of the answer, rather than confirming that the workflow and responsibilities are understood. A simulation that does not stress the data will not reveal the weakness the data contains.

Close the Batch and Lot Gap at the Point of Capture:

Incomplete or inconsistent batch and lot information is the single most-cited obstacle to a live recall (55.4%). Traceability that is reconstructed after the fact will always be slower and less complete than traceability captured once, correctly, at goods-in and carried forward through every subsequent movement. Scanning at receipt and at each transfer point is the foundation everything else depends on.

Run the Recall From the WMS, Not the ERP:

The ERP is the right system for the commercial recovery and the wrong one for the trace. Make the warehouse management system the system of record for physical stock — every movement captured at pallet, location and batch level — and integrate it live with ERP, production and QA. This is what moves a business from the 51.8% who are “mostly real time” to the 23.9% who are genuinely real time, and eliminates the 100-plus manual reconciliations a year that let the record drift.

Automate FEFO End to End:

With 96.2% confident that stock is always picked in the correct shelf-life order but only 38.6% running fully automated FEFO, this is the clearest gap between belief and system in the research. Automated enforcement of first-expired, first-out logic at the pick face removes reliance on manual checks, reduces short shelf-life waste — the sector's single biggest operational concern at 43.2% — and ensures that the stock record used in a recall reflects what physically moved.

Build the Business Case for Traceability Investment:

Frame integration not as a compliance cost but as a strategic enabler. The business case rests on three pillars:

Financial ROI:

Use the sector's own estimate of £545,249 for a serious recall as the benchmark, alongside the near-miss costs already being absorbed — rework (55.2%), emergency stock checks (50.6%) and retailer chargebacks (32.7%).

Risk Mitigation:

Narrowing the trace window directly narrows the withdrawal. Faster, more precise containment means less stock destroyed, fewer customers affected and a smaller regulatory and reputational footprint.

Commercial Protection:

Demonstrable traceability is increasingly a condition of retailer listings. The ability to evidence batch-level control protects existing contracts and strengthens new tenders.

Proportionate to Size:

The case is strongest for smaller manufacturers, who anticipate the highest exposure of any turnover band at a mean of £971,326 and have the least capacity to absorb it.

From Four Hours to Under Ten Minutes.

The gap this research identifies is closable, and the measure of whether it has been closed is a single number: how long it takes to identify every affected batch, stock location and customer destination. The sector's current average is four hours. With an integrated warehouse management system implemented by Balloon One, that trace completes in under ten minutes.

Under 10 minutes

Full batch trace — every affected pallet, location and customer destination — with an integrated WMS from Balloon One, against a sector average of four hours.

That difference is not a matter of working faster. It is a matter of the data already being in the right place, in the right shape, before anyone asks for it. Four things make it possible:

Capture at Goods-In:

Batch, lot and expiry data scanned on receipt and carried through every subsequent movement — closing the gap 55.4% name as their single biggest obstacle.

One System of Record:

Pallet, location and batch-level truth held in the WMS, so a trace is a query rather than a reconstruction across the two or more systems 76.9% currently consult.

Live ERP Integration:

The WMS and ERP connected so commercial and physical records stay aligned — removing the 100-plus manual reconciliations a year that let data drift.

Automated FEFO:

First-expired, first-out enforced at the pick face, so the stock record reflects what physically moved — and short shelf-life waste falls with it.

Balloon One has spent over two decades implementing warehouse and supply chain technology for UK food, beverage and distribution businesses. We are a technology partner rather than a reseller: we assess the operation first, specify the system that fits it, and integrate it with the ERP and production systems already in place. For food and beverage clients that has meant order accuracy above 99%, lower inventory holding costs, and recalls that are bounded, evidenced and closed in minutes.

7. Conclusion.

The UK chilled, convenience and ready-to-eat food sector is not unprepared for recalls in any conventional sense. Procedures exist, teams are trained, and simulations are run annually by almost everyone. On every measure of process discipline, this is a sector that takes recall readiness seriously.

And yet it estimates the cost of a serious recall at £545,249, believes that recall risk is rising, and would need an average of four hours to establish where affected product has gone. The gap between those positions is not a failure of competence. It is a failure of visibility — batch, lot and expiry data spread across two or more systems, reconciled by hand more than 100 times a year, and fully real time for fewer than one business in four.

The most consequential finding in this research is that the sector does not currently see this as the problem. Asked what is pushing recall risk higher, only 12.7% point to poor visibility of batch data and only 11.4% to disconnected systems, attributing the trend instead to commercial pressure and supply chain complexity. Those pressures are real, but they are not controllable. The data is.

Closing that gap means putting the warehouse management system at the centre of the recall process. The ERP will always be the system of record for the commercial recovery, but it cannot answer the question a recall actually asks. A WMS can — because it holds batch, lot and location data as a live record of what physically moved, rather than a reconstruction assembled under pressure. With that system in place and integrated, four hours becomes under ten minutes, a precautionary product-wide withdrawal becomes a targeted batch recall, and readiness stops being a matter of confidence and becomes a matter of record.

The sector has done the rehearsing. The opportunity now is to make sure that when a live recall comes, the data is as ready as the team — and that is a conversation Balloon One would welcome having with you.

A Note From Our Directors.



Craig Powell

Managing Director

Almost every business we speak to is confident it could handle a recall, and I understand why. The procedures are written, the teams are capable, and the rehearsals go well. But what this research shows is that confidence and capability are not the same thing once the underlying data sits across several systems. In my experience, the businesses that come through a recall well are the ones that can answer the question in minutes, not the ones that felt sure they could. Getting there is rarely about buying more technology. More often it is about putting the warehouse system at the centre of the process and connecting what is already there.



John Burgess

Innovation Director

Four hours to identify every affected batch, stock location and customer destination is not a training problem. It is an integration problem. When batch and expiry data is captured once and flows through the warehouse, production and order systems without anyone having to reconcile it by hand, that four hours becomes under ten minutes. The ERP will tell you who bought the product. Only the warehouse system can tell you who received the batch. What we see with our clients is faster withdrawals, tighter stock isolation, and far less product written off than the incident ever actually required.



At Balloon, we hold firm to a pragmatic approach. We only provide solutions that deliver tangible results for our wholesale distributor, ecommerce and retail clients. We provide a platform for growth for your distribution business, with integrated technology solutions across the entire supply chain, delivering a fully integrated and optimised distribution operation for your business. Partner with us, draw on our end-to-end supply chain expertise and benefit from effective solutions that provide real value and growth for your business.