

Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee (NIFAC) Minutes of the Open Meeting on 26th April 2023

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Executive Summary

Attached are the minutes of the 26th April 2023 NIFAC meeting.

Members are invited to:

1. Agree the minutes as a true record of proceedings.

OPEN MEETING OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND FOOD ADVISORY COMMITTEE (NIFAC) ON Wednesday 26th April 2023 at Fane Valley Feeds Ltd, Omagh

Those Present:

NIFAC Members

- Anthony Harbinson – Chair
- Fiona Hanna
- Judith Hanvey
- Greg Irwin
- Ciaran McCartan
- Lynne McMullan
- Ellen Finlay

FSA Officials

- Andy Cole – Director for Northern Ireland
- Kathryn Baker – Head of Local Authority Policy and Delivery
- Roberta Ferson – Head of Corporate Services and Strategic Engagement
- Firth Piracha – Head of EU Relations, Trade and Legislation
- Ruth Watson – Head of Audit, Business Support, Assembly Liaison and Communications

- Gerard Smyth – Senior Advisor (Primary Production)
- Jayne McGlaughlin – Senior Advisor – Assembly Liaison
- Michael Sewell – Advisor – Assembly Liaison

External Presenters

- Gill Gallagher, Northern Ireland Grain Trade Association (NIGTA)
- Robin Irvine – Food Fortress
- Ronan McCanny – Fane Valley Feeds

Apologies

- Lorraine Crawford – NIFAC Member
- Cathal McDonnell – NIFAC Member
- Sharon Gilmore – Head of Standards and Dietary Health

1. Welcome and Housekeeping

1.1 The Chair welcomed all NIFAC members, FSA officials and presenters to the meeting and thanked Fane Valley Feeds for hosting NIFAC.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting of 18th January 2023

2.1 The Chair asked if there were any comments on the minutes of the previous NIFAC meeting held on 18th January 2023. No issues were raised and the Secretariat agreed to publish the minutes.

3. Declarations of Interest

3.1 The Chair asked if Members had any interests to declare. No interests were declared.

4. FSA Feed Colleagues

4.1 The Chair invited Gerard Smyth to deliver a presentation on the FSA's role and position in respect to feed policy.

4.2 Gerard outlined feed controls and highlighted data that showed high levels of compliance in the feed industry. He also detailed ongoing stakeholder engagement in this area, including cross border engagement with the FSA's counterparts in the Republic of Ireland.

4.3 During considerations, Members asked if there had been input from Local Authorities in work related to regulated products. Gerard explained that Local Authorities have input in Great Britain but not in Northern Ireland. The Committee supported the FSA's work in this area and considered the impact that a major incident might have both on industry and the handling by the FSA.

4.4 Members wanted to know if levels of compliance are similar in the Republic of Ireland. Gerard explained that high levels of compliance are also present in the Republic of Ireland because businesses apply similar standards with some operating in both nations.

5. NIGTA

5.1 The Chair invited Gill Gallagher, Chief Executive of NIGTA, to deliver a presentation which covered NIGTA's role in the agricultural sector in Northern Ireland and current challenges in the global supply chain.

5.2 Gill highlighted that the majority of raw materials used for feed production are imported and that the global supply chain is vulnerable to the impact of geopolitical issues. She explained that the current challenges for NIGTA are the war in Ukraine, rising costs, labour, EU Exit, and climate change.

5.3 Members questioned if there are opportunities for NIGTA to engage with education to encourage students to consider a career in this area, adding that A-Level Food Science and Nutrition could be an entrance point. Gill explained that due to resource constraints, this is not something that NIGTA had been able to look at in detail, but they would be keen to explore ways to engage in the education space.

5.4 The Committee discussed how disruptions in the global supply chain had impacted members and asked what mitigations had been put in place.

5.5 Gill said that although NIGTA members have been able to source materials, it is a challenging issue to create a contingency plan for.

5.6 The Committee discussed whether precision bred feed manufactured in Great Britain could be imported into Northern Ireland under the terms of the Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Act 2023.

5.7 The FSA team clarified that precision bred products will be imported into Northern Ireland at the retail level but noted that there will be a time delay until the effects of these changes are felt.

5.8 During considerations, the Committee agreed that communications are of high importance and there is work to do to ensure that any changes are communicated with industry.

6. Food Fortress

6.1 The Chair invited Robin Irvine from Food Fortress to deliver a presentation which covered the context and background of Food Fortress and their role of preventing potential feed contaminations.

6.2 Members recognised that an important function of Food Fortress is the confidence and assurance of feed safety and asked if Food Fortress should be thinking more widely about how this message is conveyed.

6.3 Robin explained that the issues are well published with high levels of awareness in the feed trade, although Food Fortress would like to improve the understanding among retailers and consumers.

6.4 Members questioned if imported feed is ever rejected and sent back at Points of Entry. Robin assured the Committee that batches of non-compliant or contaminated feed are rejected as importing companies want to avoid reputational damage.

7. Fane Valley Feeds

7.1 The Committee received a presentation from Fane Valley Feeds, Project and Sustainability Director, Ronan McCanny.

7.2 Ronan provided an overview of Fane Valley Feeds' business and operations. The business operates two feed mills in Omagh and Newry with its own in-house quality, assurance, and technical programme. Ronan told the Committee that the standards of corporate customers are rising.

7.3 Members discussed the effect of the last bird flu outbreak and asked if Fane Valley Feeds do their own biohazard work.

7.4 Ronan explained that the business has two dedicated vehicles which it uses for this purpose and that contact is ongoing with customers around this sensitive issue.

7.5 The Committee agreed that the requirements and demands of consumers are constantly evolving.

7.6 Following the presentation, the Committee undertook a tour of the Fane Valley Feeds facilities.

8. Roundtable Discussion

8.1 The Chair invited the Committee and presenters to participate in a roundtable discussion.

8.2 NIFAC agreed that food fraud is an issue that the Committee must be mindful of. Gill highlighted technological innovation that is helping businesses to prevent it.

8.3 Members suggested that the importance of the feed industry needs to be fed back to the Board, with sensitivities around the EU exit being key to this message.

8.4 The Chair noted that he appreciated this opportunity to explore the issue of feed, with a number of key issues to share with the Board. He noted that it would be beneficial for NIFAC to look at the theme of feed on an annual basis.

8.5 In relation to precision breeding, Gill expressed her thanks for the work that the FSA has and continues to do with stakeholders. She noted that she is keen to continue the conversation in this area and the Committee agreed that it is important that the FSA keeps those communication channels open.

8.6 Gill raised sustainability issues in Northern Ireland including the valorisation of emissions and ecolabelling. She informed the Committee that ecolabels are being used to inform consumers of the environmental impact of the products that they buy.

8.7 Gill explained that the issue is that there are currently too many ecolabels to inform the customer in any meaningful way. She would welcome any further engagement on this issue. However, she noted that she understands that the policy remit rests across departments.

9. Director and Chair Updates

9.1 The Chair provided an update about Board related activities. The Chair confirmed that he had taken the questions that Members raised at the previous NIFAC meeting to the March Board meeting and agreed to discuss further with the Committee once the Board minutes are published.

9.2 The June Board meeting will take place in Northern Ireland. The Board's visit to Northern Ireland will include engagement with FSA in Northern Ireland staff and external stakeholders.

9.3 A paper on the review of the Food Advisory Committees (FACs) will be delivered to the Board by the NIFAC Chair. The paper will cover the structure and remit of the FACs. The paper will seek Board agreement to update some of the working practices of the FACs to ensure that they are working in the most efficient way. The Chair agreed to share the paper with NIFAC members.

9.4 The Chair would like NIFAC members to create extended networks with stakeholders in Northern Ireland and to have a stronger relationship with the Welsh Food Advisory Committee (WFAC).

9.5 The Chair invited Andy Cole, Director for Northern Ireland, to present his update to the Committee.

9.6 Andy highlighted a number of issues contained within his report, including the Retained EU Law, Windsor Framework and the Border Target Operating Model.

9.7 The Committee discussed newly implemented changes to school dinners that aim to make menus more appealing to students and reduce food waste. Members highlighted that the small number of school dinner suppliers in Northern Ireland is a potential food security risk.

10. AOB

10.1 No further business was raised and the meeting was closed.