

Chief Executive's Report to the Board

FSA 25-12-03 - Report by Katie Pettifer

SPS Agreement with the EU

1. At the June Board meeting, I provided an update on the UK Government's intention to negotiate an Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) agreement with the EU. This continues to be a very high priority for the FSA. The UK has begun negotiations with the EU, and we are closely embedded in the work taking place across government, providing evidence-based advice to ministers and government officials to inform negotiations, legislation and implementation. We remain committed to working on a four-country basis and engaging closely with stakeholders throughout this process.
2. The Government has stated its intention to have a deal negotiated quickly and to have implementing legislation in place in 2027. To meet that timetable, it will be critically important that we start working with businesses to help them prepare for the upcoming changes as soon as possible; we cannot wait until a deal is agreed. To support business readiness, the FSA participated in Defra's inaugural large Industry Stakeholder Forum on 18 November, which brought together 278 businesses. We have also been carrying out our own industry engagement over autumn, hosting approximately 15 events with multiple stakeholders and trade associations across all sectors. The Cabinet Office and Defra are convening a series of roundtable discussions with businesses. We have participated in four of these and will lead several more ourselves in December. We also expect a substantial increase in communications and engagement activity in the new year.
3. The commitment by the EU and UK Government to work towards an SPS agreement is a significant change in our operating context, and we have also been thinking about its impact on our own work. We need to create the capacity to deliver work on the SPS agreement, and we are aware that any work currently underway that could create divergence from the EU may be quickly overtaken by dynamic alignment once the agreement takes effect.
4. Of course, we will continue to carry out our statutory functions, and to act where food safety risks arise. However, we are also conscious of the need to make the best use of taxpayers' funds and businesses' time. Given this, we have paused work that might increase divergence with EU law, except in cases where there is good reason for such work to continue (such as an immediate public health risk we need to address, a statutory requirement, or a clear Government priority such as the areas where we have been given ring-fenced funding for research).
5. The FSA did not receive any additional funding for SPS in the latest Spending Review, and we have already had to reprioritise to fund this work in 2025/26. We are continuing to work with His Majesty's Treasury (HMT) on the resourcing challenges this presents over the Spending Review period (2026/27 to 2028/29).

Future of Food Regulation: Budget 2025 Announcement

6. In announcements made as part of the Budget last month, the UK Government has asked the FSA to “streamline food standards and hygiene regulation for large and regulation-compliant food businesses, including supermarkets.” The FSA has been asked to “develop a consistent, national approach in England for the regulation of large food businesses.” Funding was provided to us within the Budget for this work.

7. This request from the Government builds on work we have already done, most notably the trial of ‘National Level Regulation’ that we carried out with major retailers, looking at whether we could more effectively regulate the biggest businesses at a national level, scrutinising their data and systems, combined with some checks on the ground. But that is part of a much wider piece of work. Over the past few years, we have put a series of papers to the Board on the building blocks for future regulation, informed by engagement with local authorities, businesses and many other stakeholders. Those ideas included an enhanced registration system, greater use of data and intelligence, and more effective local enforcement powers. Strong consumer information, building on our trusted food hygiene rating scheme, is also an important element that many stakeholders have raised with us.

8. Following this request, we propose to ramp up our work with partners and stakeholders across the food system to develop specific proposals. We propose to bring a paper to the March Board on how food regulation could evolve to keep protecting consumers and supporting businesses at both local and national level in the future.

Regulation for Growth

9. In October, the Department for Business and Trade (DBT) and HMT launched a Call for Evidence from business about regulation which unjustifiably inhibits growth and committed to strengthening the Growth Duty for regulators. We continue to engage with DBT and HMT on how the FSA can best support economic growth, while upholding our core statutory purposes. All the commitments made in our Regulation Action Plan have been delivered or are on track for delivery at the end of this year, several of them feature in this update.

10. We are also preparing a written submission to the House of Lords’ Industry and Regulators Committee, which has launched an inquiry into the relationship between regulators and economic growth. I will be giving oral evidence to the Committee in January as part of this inquiry.

Food Innovation

11. The Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Regulations 2025 came into force on 13 November 2025, which means businesses can apply for a Precision Bred Organism [\(footnote 1\)](#) a food and feed marketing [authorisation](#).

12. Before applying to the FSA, applicants must first apply to Defra for confirmation of Precision Bred Organism status and marketing notice. Once this is granted, applicants can apply to the FSA for a food and feed marketing authorisation. Further advice on the authorisation process can be found [on our website](#). We are grateful for the valuable input from stakeholders, which has helped strengthen our guidance, ensuring we support innovation while always maintaining safety.

13. The Cell Cultivated Products (CCP) Sandbox continues to make progress. In October we published the first piece of regulatory guidance, refreshed [novel food taste trial guidance](#) setting out the FSA’s advice on conducting tastings for research and development ahead of market approval. Last week, we published further [guidance on the categorisation of CCPs](#) as products of animal origin and how producers should manage hazards through critical control points in the production process, as well as [scientific guidance on hazards associated with allergenicity and nutrition in CCPs](#).

14. We also hosted the first in a series of industry webinars in October, to keep the wider sector informed of the work of the Sandbox, with over 40 participants. This covered learning to date via the Sandbox on important issues such as hygiene, toxicology, microbiology, labelling, production, and regulatory approval. Three more industry events are planned for 2026, which will enable the Sandbox to gather feedback from industry on the published guidance.

15. Through our Innovation Research Programme (a rapid one-year programme to enhance our capabilities and expertise in regulating innovative food technologies, particularly precision fermentation), we have now launched two key services: the [Innovation Guidance Hub](#) (a channel for regulatory guidance on novel foods) and [Business Support Service](#) (pre- and post-submission consultations for precision fermentation businesses). We have also held two events with experts from industry, academia, and relevant scientific organisations to explore the data that needs to be supplied by applicants during risk assessment. This has supported the publication of a [targeted review on the safety assessment challenges related to precision fermentation products](#).

16. We have also been learning from international regulators and sharing our own experiences. In September, the FSA met with a Spanish Agrifood Delegation to the UK. In November, the FSA collaborated with the Singapore Food Agency on a 'desk exchange.' This involved an FSA risk assessor visiting the Singapore Food Agency and learning from their approach to CCPs, including identifying lessons that could be applied at the FSA. We participated in Innovate UK's week-long Global Expert Mission to Switzerland, where we gained insights into the Swiss regulatory model, and visited several organisations focused on food innovation. We also participated in the Europe Nutraceutical and Functional Food Summit where we presented on the UK's work on food innovation. We have also run a series of 'Innovator Workshops' which has helped deepen our understanding of the challenges that applicants face within the market authorisation process.

CBD

17. This autumn we held a public consultation on three proposed authorisations for Cannabidiol (CBD) food products as novel foods. The consultation set out our thinking on a range of issues, such as the protection of vulnerable groups, their categorisation as food supplements and the proposed terms of authorisation specific to each product.

18. We received a total of 46 responses, split between:

- 18 from individuals (mostly consumers)
- six from Local Authorities and representative bodies
- seven from CBD applicants
- 15 from other organisations (trade groups and other CBD businesses not linked to applications)

19. Nine of the responses were received from outside of the UK - primarily the USA and Europe. We are pleased to have had such a strong response to the consultation and are now analysing the evidence and views submitted. We will return to the FSA Board with a further update in due course. Food Standards Scotland (FSS) also intend to consult on the CBD applications and are working to finalise a launch date in the new year.

20. We also published new data on consumer behaviours, reliance, and awareness around CBD products sold in the UK, this month. The full report can be found here: [Use of CBD Products | Published in FSA Research and Evidence](#)

FSA Section 42 Report on Trade Agreement with India

21. On 25 July, the Minister of State for Trade Policy asked FSA and FSS to assess whether the UK-India Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement preserves statutory protections for human health. In parallel, the Trade and Agriculture Commission (TAC) reviewed policy areas under their remit.

22. To inform our advice, we ran a Call for Evidence (1 Aug–26 Sept) and received nine responses. Stakeholders raised concerns about differing food production standards, especially pesticide use. While acknowledging these stakeholder concerns, our assessment found UK food safety protections are maintained, supported by robust import controls, and the agreement will not limit future SPS negotiations with the EU. The advice was submitted on 23 October and published on GOV.UK alongside the TAC assessment.

South Korea Audit

23. In September 2025, South Korea conducted an audit to assess compliance with their requirements of establishments approved, or seeking to be approved, for export to that country. Defra has confirmed that all seven slaughterhouses involved have either maintained or re-gained approval, and no non-compliances have been raised against the Competent Authorities. No further action is required and there will be no formal report.

Radiological Protection

24. The FSA recently published the thirtieth annual [Radioactivity in Food and the Environment \(RIFE\) Report](#). The report presents the results of independent monitoring of radioactivity levels in food and the environment across the UK. It supports the enforcement of environmental and food safety regulations and ensures that radiation exposure from food and the environment remains below the legal safety limit.

Recycled Plastics Audit

25. As part of the Regulation Action Plan, the FSA formally agreed to take on the UK Competent Authority responsibility under Commission Regulation (EU) 2022/1616 on recycled plastic materials and articles in contact with food. This will enable UK-based plastic recyclers to continue supplying recycled plastic to the EU market.

26. Since then, the FSA and FSS have worked together to establish a fully functioning auditing programme across all four countries. Ministers in England and Wales have formally delegated competent authority responsibilities to the FSA. In Northern Ireland, District Councils will undertake the physical audits, as the enforcing competent authority, and verification checks will be completed by the FSA. In Scotland, we expect the FSA to be informally asked to carry out the audit of the single recycler there on behalf of FSS.

27. I am pleased to confirm that the first audit under this new programme was completed on 25 November at a recycling facility in Gateshead, England, meeting the deadline set out in the Action Plan. We have scheduled a second audit to take place on 16 December. Documentary checks have been completed for a further two recyclers that are considered ready for audit.

28. In addition to official controls of recycling installations, the FSA is responsible for rigorous documentary checks of novel technology applications under the EU regulation. Technical reviews are being undertaken by the Science, Evidence and Research Division (SERD) risk assessors and the Joint Expert Group for Food Contact Materials.

29. In November, we submitted our first formal notification to the European Commission to confirm that our review had been completed for a novel technology developer based in England. Checks are ongoing for a further four recyclers.

EFRA Committee

30. In October, [I gave oral evidence](#) to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Committee in the House of Commons alongside Geoff Ogle, Chief Executive of Food Standards Scotland.

31. The Committee's ongoing inquiry on [animal and plant health](#) has covered a range of topics, including the implementation of the Border Target Operating Model (BTOM) and the anticipated SPS. agreement with the EU. It follows two reports published in September about [Britain's illegal meat crisis](#) and [UK-EU trade](#), both urging a robust and resilient border strategy.

32. The Committee members were particularly interested in how the FSA and FSS collaborate in fulfilling their core responsibilities across the four nations of the UK. The discussion covered numerous topics including the SPS agreement, advancements in precision breeding, concerns about illegal meat imports, the impact of ultra-processed foods, abattoir operations, and ongoing workforce and recruitment challenges.

33. We have also worked closely with Defra on their responses to recent EFRA Committee reports, which included several recommendations of interest to the FSA including on the response to illegal imports.

Christmas Consumer Campaign

34. In the lead up to Christmas, we will be building on our successful 'Bacteria love it here' campaign to warn people of the festive food hygiene pitfalls. This campaign aims to reduce the risk of foodborne illness over the festive period by promoting safe food handling behaviours among consumers, particularly those cooking at scale or for vulnerable groups.

35. This will be an integrated campaign, utilising partnership channels and media. We have shared campaign materials with local authorities and are working with charities whose audiences include older people, those with compromised immune systems, and carers. NHS doctor, Doctor Lilly, will be sharing our advice on her social media pages too.

36. In addition to our core consumer campaign, we will be running other strands of activity, including a 'protecting your Christmas plate' social media and internal campaign, featuring the work of FSA staff in keeping people safe this Christmas. This will be an advent calendar of different stories throughout December.

Engagements

37. Since the last Board meeting, I have met with a wide range of stakeholders. I began in September with some international engagement, including an online meeting of the International Heads of Food Agencies Forum Committee to determine the theme and agenda of the 2026 Annual Meeting planned for New Zealand. I was also pleased to host the North and Irish Sea sub-group of the International Heads of Food Agencies Forum, in London, taking our counterparts in Scotland, Republic of Ireland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and France on a visit to the

London Gateway Port. This was a great opportunity to strengthen bi-lateral relations and facilitate further collaboration and knowledge exchange.

38. I also continued my engagement with other government departments, including meetings with my counterparts in Defra and the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), and an introductory meeting with the new Permanent Secretary at Defra, Paul Kissack. In October, I attended a roundtable hosted in No.10 with officials and stakeholders to discuss school food standards. I attended cross-government officials' meetings on the SPS agreement. Susan and I also met with Minister Dalton as part of a new series of performance review meetings between ministers and the regulators they sponsor.

39. More recently, I attended the National Leadership Forum which brought together leaders from across the public sector to discuss system-wide challenges and provided an opportunity for me to meet leaders across the public sector, including local authority chief executives and leaders in the education sector. Susan and I also attended the DHSC Arms-Length Bodies Senior Leaders Meeting, where we met other Chairs and Chief Executives in agencies sponsored by DHSC to discuss the government's 10 Year Health Plan and the 'productive and agile state' agenda.

40. My engagement with stakeholders in Wales and Northern Ireland also continued. In October, I was pleased to give the keynote presentation at the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health's (CIEH) conference in Cardiff, where I took the opportunity to thank environmental health professionals for their vital work. With Sian Bowsley, our Director of Wales, I also had an introductory meeting with John Mercer, Director of the National Farmers' Union (NFU) Cymru. Alongside Andy Cole, our Director for Northern Ireland, I met with Wesley Aston (CEO of Ulster Farmers Union), and Marie Ward, Chief Executive of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council and current Chair of the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) Northern Ireland.

41. My engagement with industry included a visit to Wayside Farm, a dairy farm on the outskirts of Watford, where I was encouraged by the productive working relationships with our FSA operational team. I also met with representatives from UK Hospitality and the National Farmers Union, as well as British Retail Consortium Technical Directors. In November, Susan and I attended the Food and Drink Federation's President's Reception. I also met with consumer and not-for-profit organisations alongside our Chair via our regular Consumer Stakeholder Forum, and had an introductory meeting with Matthew van Duyvenbode, Co-CEO at Trussell Trust.

1. Precision breeding is a means of changing the DNA of plants in a precise way, using techniques including gene-editing. These changes must be equivalent to those that could have been made using traditional plant breeding methods.