

Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee (NIFAC) Director's Report April 2026

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1. Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides a summary of activities relevant to the FSA's remit in Northern Ireland since the last written report to the Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee (NIFAC) in February 2026.

1.2 Members are invited to:

- **Note** the update and
- **Invite** the Director to expand on any issues for further discussion.

2. Chief Executive's Report to the Board

2.1 The latest Chief Executive Report that was presented to the March Board meeting can be found [here](#).

3. Update from the Director for Northern Ireland

3.1 **Cereulide Contamination in Infant Formula** – The FSA responded to a non-routine incident involving the contamination of cereulide toxin (*Bacillus cereus*) in infant and follow-on formula. This was a wide-ranging issue affecting over 60 countries, generally involving products manufactured outside the UK. The contamination was potentially linked to arachidonic acid (ARA) oil, a commonly used base ingredient in formula products, although investigations are ongoing to establish the root cause. The incident involved close working with the manufacturers and retailers as well as departments across government and health protection bodies in both the UK and the Republic of Ireland to ensure affected products were removed from sale.

3.2 **Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee** – The team has submitted written evidence on the EU's proposed Food and Feed Safety Simplification package to the Northern Ireland Assembly Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee (DSC). The European Commission had proposed technical clarifications and simplification of administrative procedures for: the authorisation of feed additives; notification of national food hygiene measures; accreditation of National Reference Laboratories; products obtained using genetically modified microorganisms as processing aids; and testing of Food Contact Materials. The proposals would create no new requirements and make no changes to the level of protection for consumers. The European Parliament and EU Member States must agree the proposals before they can become law. We expect to receive an invitation to attend a DSC meeting to discuss the Simplification package, alongside officials from the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and the Department for the Economy who lead on other aspects of the proposals, in the coming

weeks.

3.3 The team has also provided the DSC with updated written evidence on the proposed EU Regulation on plants obtained by New Genomic Techniques and their food and feed, following the EU institutions reaching provisional agreement on the draft legal text. Final publication of the EU Regulation is expected in summer 2026, with the changes applying two years thereafter.

3.4 **UK and EU Relationship** – Negotiations between the UK and EU on a Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Agreement remain ongoing. The UK Government has committed to an ambitious timeline of concluding negotiations on the Agreement and having the necessary legislative and operational arrangements in place by mid-2027. To prepare, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) recently launched an industry [Call for Information](#) to gather stakeholder insights. The FSA is ensuring that Northern Ireland stakeholders are engaged in this and other government led engagements. The UK Government remains committed to ensuring that the benefits realised by Great Britain in any agreement will extend to businesses and consumers in Northern Ireland. The FSA has established a cross-agency SPS Agreement Programme to support negotiations and prepare for implementation. The Programme is ensuring Windsor Framework interests and impacts are captured. The FSA's approach is underpinned by a commitment that any SPS Agreement would continue to protect public health and maintain high standards of food and feed safety, so that we can maintain consumer trust and confidence in UK food standards throughout the process.?

3.5 **Consultation on Proposals for a Revised System of Financial Support for Abattoirs and Game Handling Establishments** – The FSA has completed an evaluation of the existing discount scheme applied to approved abattoirs and game-handling establishments. The current system grants all establishments some level of discount regardless of throughput. Following FSA Board consideration and stakeholder engagement, the FSA has launched a 12-week public [consultation](#) on proposals for a revised model in Northern Ireland, England and Wales. The proposals within the consultation would end the current system of universal support and will focus future financial support towards smaller abattoirs and game handling establishments, basing the eligibility for support and the level of support on the number of animals/birds they process. The revised system aims to target government support more effectively while reducing barriers to business growth. The consultation includes Northern Ireland-specific questions seeking evidence and views on whether the proposed model requires adaptation to reflect Northern Ireland business structures, including potential impacts on: the viability of small and medium slaughterhouses; competition with slaughterhouses in the Republic of Ireland; fixed-cost pressures within Northern Ireland's regulatory delivery model and; the wider economic role of local abattoirs in rural communities. Further stakeholder engagement is planned during the consultation period to ensure stakeholders fully understand the proposals and any associated impacts.

3.6 **UK (Northern Ireland) Contaminant Control Plan 2026-27** – Under Commission Regulation (EU) 2022/931 and 2022/932, Northern Ireland is required to submit a chemical contaminant control plan to the EU by 31 March annually. The control plan sets out planned sampling for chemical contaminants in food placed on the Union market and for food of animal origin entering the Union. The 2026/2027 Northern Ireland contaminant control plan was submitted to the EU on 30 March. The next stage is to report the results of last year's plan to the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) by 30 June.

3.7 **Raw Pet Food Survey** – The FSA has [published](#) the findings of a raw pet food survey, which involved testing 380 raw dog and cat food products bought between March 2023 and February 2024 from online and retail stores. The laboratory testing carried out by the UK Health Security Agency looked for microbiological and antimicrobial resistance (AMR) contamination. The survey found that:

- 35% contained harmful bacteria including Salmonella, Campylobacter and E. coli that can cause illness in people
- 29% failed to meet UK legal safety standards
- 20% of all samples was found to contain E. coli with resistance to penicillin and other antibiotics
- No resistance to carbapenem antibiotics was detected (carbapenems are known as a 'last resort' antibiotic used in human treatment).

These findings have provided valuable evidence on the potential risks associated with these types of products. Where issues were identified, the FSA worked with local authorities to address them. The publication has also been used to reinforce that following simple hygiene practices when storing, defrosting, handling and preparing these products can reduce the risk of illness to pet owners and their families. There has been a positive reaction to the communications on the findings of the survey and the public health messaging that accompanied it.

3.8 Northern Ireland Food and Drink (NIFDA) Awards – The NIFDA Awards took place on Friday 27 February at the Crowne Plaza Hotel. The FSA sponsored the Healthier Product Innovation Award, which aims to encourage businesses to make healthier products through innovation and reformulation. The winner of this award was Fibre Up, a fruit-based soft drink that provides 50% of the recommended daily fibre intake in a single serving. The award supports the aims of the FSA's Making Food Better programme which aims to create a healthier food environment through supporting food businesses to reduce the calories, fat, sugar and salt in the products they produce, sell or serve.

3.9 IFEX – IFEX is renowned as Northern Ireland's flagship trade event for the hospitality, foodservice and retail sectors. Members of the Dietary Health team participated in a live cookery demonstration and panel discussion with two of Northern Ireland's top chefs to promote healthier children's menus to the restaurant sector and local ingredient suppliers. The team also took the opportunity to promote the joint FSA, Public Health Agency and Safefood [Nutritional Standards](#) for Health and Social Care and wider public sector settings, with the aim of encouraging local food manufacturers and suppliers to provide products that meet the standards. The FSA stand was also used to promote resources for food businesses including the free allergen checklist. Overall, the messages were well received and led to productive engagement with representatives from across the food industry.

3.10 Northern Ireland Foyle Science Showcase – The team attended the Science Festival to showcase the Eatwell Guide. Over the two-day period, 765 students, 78 teachers and 1,612 members of the public were provided with information on the Eatwell Guide, a tool that makes healthy eating easier to understand by showing what foods are needed to have a well-balanced diet. Hundreds of children completed the interactive task and embraced the associated learning.

3.11 Food Hypersensitivity Engagement – At the end of March, the team attended and presented at an event for an allergy project, led by the Open University in Ireland, supported by Belfast Met. The event showcased the STAR allergen safety system, a pilot initiative to improve food allergy safety across food businesses. As part of this event, the team presented on the role of the FSA in relation to food hypersensitivity, including available guidance and training resources. Also in attendance at the event was Paul Carey, from the Owen's Law Campaign, as well as project leads from the Open University, and pilot businesses.

3.12 Engagement – As well as the various engagements noted above, it has been a busy period for stakeholder engagement. This has included meeting with the new Safefood Chief Executive, Dr Joanne Uí Chruailaíoch, the Ulster Farmers' Union Annual Dinner and the Northern Ireland Leadership and Governance Conference. Looking ahead, plans are underway for the Balmoral Show which is due to take place in May and we are looking forward to having the FSA Chair, Professor Susan Jebb, and the FSA's new Chief Scientific Adviser, Professor Ian Young,

with us for a number of engagements over the course of the Show.

4. Consultations

4.1 Current live FSA consultations can be found [here](#).

5. Forward Look

- 16 April – NIGTA Annual Dinner
- 13 – 16 May – Balmoral Show
- 17 June – FSA Board Meeting