

FSA 22-06-10 - The FSA's International Objectives and Priorities

This paper sets out the FSA's international objectives and priorities for the next 12-18 months.

Report by Anjali Juneja.

1. Summary

1.1 This paper sets out the FSA's international objectives and priorities for the next 12-18 months. Specifically, it includes our proposed international objectives which will be used to guide and shape our work plan. To illustrate the current state of play, and to provide context, it also includes an overview of our achievements over the last 12 months.

1.2 The Board is asked to:

- agree the international objectives which will drive the FSA's work in this area; and
- note the proposed areas of focus for the next 12 to 18 months.

2. Introduction

2.1 The Board agreed the FSA's International Strategy in June 2018, and has received regular updates on our international work. The last update was provided in [November 2020](#).

2.2 Following the UK's departure from the European Union (EU), the impact of COVID-19 and the launch of the FSA strategy, it is now a good opportunity to consider the FSA's international objectives and priorities over the course of the next 12-18 months.

3. Context

3.1 The FSA has always played an important role internationally through a number of international fora. This includes our involvement in multilateral groups such as Codex and the World Health Organisation for animal health (OIE). The FSA values its membership of global technical and scientific groups, as well as reactive groups on crisis management and food fraud. The integrated global structure of the food system requires stronger and more cooperative international engagement and partnership to effectively protect consumers and help raise food standards throughout the world.

3.2 The UK's exit from the EU makes the FSA's role as a regulator for the food system even more important. We need to take a more prominent role to demonstrate our confidence in our food systems, our expertise and our ability to highlight and tackle problems where we see them. Our international programme plays a vital role in supporting our ambitions.

3.3 The UK food and agricultural regulatory system for almost half a century has been intrinsically linked to the UK membership of the EU. During this time, the FSA played a significant

role in direct negotiations on technical agreements and directives. However, with the UK's withdrawal from the EU, the FSA has regained control over regulatory competencies which cover food and feed safety and has developed capacities, competencies and procedures (e.g., risk assessment of regulated products) that have not been required domestically for many years.

3.4 For the FSA there is now an opportunity for the UK to assert itself more fully in the field of food safety on the global stage and the international plan will support this ambition. We will use our role as a convenor and collaborator to support shared goals and objectives with our international counterparts and ensure that influential actors in the food system are working together.

3.5 Although the context in which we work has changed and we see an opportunity to do more, it is important to note we are not initiating this work from a standing start. The FSA's activity in the last 12 months includes the following:

- our work on Third Party Assurance (TPA) has resulted in the adoption of a global Codex guideline. UK and its working group co-chairs (Canada and Mexico) secured the adoption of the guidelines by leading, drafting and gaining agreement to the text. this guideline will enable competent authorities across the world to use effective assessment and transparent use of reliable TPA programme information and data to support national food control system (NFCS) objectives.
- the FSA and Food Standards Scotland (FSS) hosted an international conference in the margins of CoP26 which brought together regulators to discuss Sustainable Food Regulation. We initiated the start of a conversation between government, businesses, and academia to broaden understanding of the roles and responsibilities the different sectors have in addressing the sustainability challenge.
- the FSA hosted the Global Food Security and Incident Emergency Response conference between 13-15 October 2021. The conference virtually brought together international regulators, food safety scientists, food laboratory experts and technical experts from the food industry across the world. This conference cemented the UK's leading role within the global community and the International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) network. It demonstrated our commitment to working cohesively to mitigate food safety risks across the world.
- we have played a supporting role on trade deals, most recently for Australia and New Zealand and are working with the UK Office for Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Trade Assurance to assess thirty-eight (38) market access requests from eighteen (18) different countries requesting access for fourteen (14) different commodity types.

3.6 Partly in the light of the increased breadth of policy, trade and international work in the FSA, and to grow our ambition, the FSA has created a dedicated International and UK Affairs directorate which came into existence on 1 April, to increase our bandwidth across all the aspects of our international work and to ensure appropriate resource and support is in place to maximise our efforts in the global sphere. Part of the work of the directorate will focus on delivering against our international priorities and will be responsible for coordinating our international efforts.

4. Our Approach to Working With the Devolved Administrations

4.1 The purpose of the FSA's international work is to work towards a more secure, global food system that is safe, authentic and sustainable for all consumers, both domestically and for our international partners. We will work closely with FSS, departments across Whitehall and with the Devolved Administrations (DAs) to ensure our international plan complements the work of colleagues across Government in the international space.

4.2 Presently the FSA works closely with the DAs on our international plans and seeks to ensure we take forward a common UK wide view when representing UK interests internationally. How we work with FSS on international matters is set out in the FSA-FSS Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). Our commitments to collaborate on these issues also reflect the commitments made in the overarching Devolution MoU between the UK government and the DAs.

4.3 Close working relationships with the DAs and other UK government departments enables us to proactively and jointly drive changes at international level through bodies such as INFOSAN. Where the development of international policy, positions or objectives relate to food safety matters (e.g., Codex international standards and the World Trade Organisation (WTO), we share information across the FSA and FSS on the formulation of positions to ensure teams in all four nations can contribute. Any new obligations for the FSA arising in an international context will be considered on a four-nation basis.

5. Our International Objectives and Work Plan

5.1 Our international work plays a key role in the delivery of the FSA's vision of 'food you can trust' as set out in the [FSA strategy](#). For example, our work to support 'food is safe' encompasses our work as an evidence generator to influence and learn from international partners and to develop multilateral guidance that is based on science. We support 'food is what it says it is' in our role as a collaborator and convener when working through international fora to address food fraud. We will support 'food is healthier and more sustainable' through our commitment to work with multilateral groups, partner countries and key non-government organisations to support the development and adoption of international guidance which supports healthy and sustainable food and feed products.

5.2 We propose that our international work should focus on the objectives set out below. We have also outlined examples of how we see this work being driven over the next 12 to 18 months:

1. Consumer protection

Consumer protection is a key deliverable under the FSA's strategy and fundamental to the FSA's core purpose, our international work supports this by working to mitigate risks to the global food system. By managing food safety outbreaks and incidents, investigating food fraud, and collaborating on developing initiatives with international partners, we increase our capacity to protect consumers.

For example, looking at eco-labelling, there are no internationally agreed standards for environmental sustainability labelling and no agreement on what 'sustainable production' should measure. There are a range of schemes in development but all measure and present information in different ways. There is a lack of transparency, and claims are not easily verifiable. Solutions are needed to collect data, analyse it and share it in a consistent way across the system, our work will seek to collaborate with partners to better understand their schemes and to understand where the UK can be a trusted voice to create universal standards.

2. Knowledge Sharing

The FSA is a trusted voice on food and feed safety, in building, maintaining and actively participating in relevant fora within our international networks. We will use our role as a collaborator and convener to work with regulatory partners, share our knowledge and to learn from global partners.

For example, we are currently scoping work with Codex to review and update guidelines on traceability, remote and virtual audit and assurance. We plan to heighten our engagement and opportunities to partake further in meaningful exchanges of science and data/digital, collaboration and learning on issues such as transparency of the food supply chain.

3. Being an effective regulator

The global food system is evolving and as the regulator, the FSA has to be influential and alert in understanding new technologies and innovations to ensure that our regulations are fit for purpose. We will strive to ensure that we are bridging knowledge gaps, working with the FSA's horizon scanning team. We will seek to learn from our international colleagues and our active participation in global discussions will ensure that we are supporting that growth to the benefit of all.

For example, on novel foods we are seeking to engage with partners to learn and share best practice to ensure that our risk assessment process is robust and practical and that we are at the forefront of potential new products that could be made available to consumers.

5.3 The **examples given above do not form an exhaustive list** of the areas of work the FSA would like to take forward in the international space as we recognise that given the current global uncertainty, we will need to ensure that our approach is sufficiently agile to seize opportunities and address challenges as they arise.

Does the Board agree with the proposed areas of focus?

6. Next steps

6.1 The proposed international objectives will seek to set the tone and pace for the FSA to work effectively on the global stage. We will prioritise our work in line with these and continue to map these against the FSA's strategy, mission and vision.

6.2 The work highlighted in this paper provides an outline of how the FSA will prioritise its international work in the next 12-18 months. If the Board agrees with these proposals, we will further develop our international work plan with the underpinning detail, building on the objectives reflected in this paper.

7. Conclusions

7.1 The Board is asked to:

- agree the international objectives which will drive the FSA's international work; and
- note the proposed areas of focus for the next 12 to 18 months.