

Summary of discussions at the FSA Board meeting – 22 March 2023

Operation Hawk?

Emily Miles, Chief Executive of the Food Standards Agency, updated the Board on the organisation's handling of Operation Hawk, a criminal investigation into potential food fraud. She said:??

Criminal investigations of this nature take time to go through evidence and arrive at an informed outcome including potential prosecutions. We have to act in a way that doesn't jeopardise any future legal proceedings.

The FSA advised retailers last year to check their cooked meat suppliers. When the FSA asks businesses to look at their supply chains we expect them to apply extra due diligence. We don't give out these alerts without a reason.

The FSA will continue to take action when we need to, including criminal investigations. As the national regulator, we are the last line of defence. At a time when cost pressures and other challenges mean the risks of food fraud might be increasing it is really important that everyone involved in the food system is extra vigilant.

During the course of the Board meeting, the FSA's National Food Crime Unit, working with Derbyshire Constabulary and Derbyshire County Council Trading Standards, made an unannounced visit to a premises linked to this live criminal investigation. ?

The Retained EU Law Bill?

In her report to the Board, FSA Chief Executive Emily Miles informed members that the FSA is waiting for a decision from the UK Government on recommendations the FSA has made to retain or?extend the majority of the retained EU law which sits within its remit. She outlined the need for four-country working and the FSA's aim to carry out public consultation as soon as possible after the Bill received Royal Assent.?

In response, FSA Chair Susan Jebb said:?

I've heard a lot from industry and businesses who are looking for certainty on the future of food law. It is important that we allow adequate time for agreeing an approach that works for all four countries and for a meaningful public consultation, which is a statutory requirement. I do hope we have decisions from Government soon on these important laws that exist to protect public health and maintain the safety and standards of UK food.

Board approves a new model for food standard controls

The Board discussed papers from the Achieving Business Compliance Programme and agreed to begin implementing a new way for local authorities to verify that food businesses are complying with food composition and labelling requirements. This aims to target businesses where the potential for food fraud or inaccurate labelling presents the greatest risk.

The new model for local authority food standards controls was successfully piloted last year in England and Northern Ireland, where a public consultation on changes to the Food Law Codes of Practice to introduce the new approach has been carried out. ?

The Board showed strong support for implementation of the new model in England and Northern Ireland, although some voiced concerns around resourcing within the FSA and at local authority level to support implementation of the new model. Board members were reassured that once the decision to proceed has been made and we have agreement to issue revised food law codes of practice, this will be a priority project of FSA. The FSA will be working with local authorities to help them implement the new model successfully.??

The Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Bill?

The Board considered consumer information following the [publication of consumer research](#). As part of this, the Board talked about the importance of developing consumers' understanding of precision breeding and of building public confidence around the science being used.??

FSA?Chair, Professor Susan Jebb, said:?

There is strong feeling in the room that we need to keep this [consumer information] under careful review and return to it in due course. Board members have been very clear that we need to use the time we have to best effect, by really understanding how we can best help consumers to have access to reliable, evidence-based information, and how can we most usefully help consumers to develop their understanding of precision breeding.”

The topics of safety and traceability were also discussed by the Board with continued interest in the development of the regulatory framework, and process, and of the recommendations by the FSA's independent scientific advisory committee, the ACNFP.

Further information?

All Board papers from this week's meeting can be viewed on the [FSA website](#). You can also watch the full video recording of the meeting by visiting [the FSA's Youtube channel](#).

The next FSA Board meeting will take place in Belfast on 21 June 2023.