

Minutes of the themed meeting of the Welsh Food Advisory Committee held on 25 October 2023

Hybrid themed meeting on Science and Innovation

Present

Welsh Food Advisory Committee (WFAC) Members Attending:

- Rhian Hayward, Chair
- Dr Philip Hollington
- Christopher Brereton OBE
- Georgia Taylor
- Dr John Williams
- Helen Taylor
- Jessica Williams

Food Standards Agency (FSA) Officials Attending:

- Nathan Barnhouse - Director for FSA in Wales
- Sioned Fidler – Head of Communications, Welsh Language and Business Support
- Lucy Edwards – Senior Business Manager
- Jonathan Davies – Head of Standards Policy and Consumer Protection
- Owen Lewis – Head of Regulatory Policy and Local Authority Partnerships
- Jane Clark – Head of Veterinary Services
- Kerys James-Palmer – Head of Legislative Strategy
- Christin Price – Field Veterinary Coordinator

Observers:

Representatives from:

- Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
- Trading Standards Wales
- NFU Cymru
- Coleg Menai Food Technology Centre
- Royal Welsh Agricultural Society
- Hybu Cig Cymru

Presenters:

- Dr Rebecca Charnock, Industrial Research Development Manager, AberInnovation
- Dr Catherine Howarth, Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences (IBERS), Aberystwyth University
- Dr Pip Nicholas-Davies, Department of Life Sciences, Aberystwyth University
- Professor Darrell Abernethy, Head & Chair Aberystwyth School of Veterinary Science

1. Introductions, apologies and minutes of the last meeting

1.1 The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting. No apologies were noted. The minutes of the July 2023 meeting were agreed.

2. Declaration of interests

2.1 No interests were declared.

3. Science and Innovation

3.1 AberInnovation - The committee received a presentation from Dr Rebecca Charnock, who explained that their mission is to provide facilities to support ambitious, collaborative companies to deliver innovative products and services in feed, food and fuel. The campus is one of a number of UKRI campuses and has world class facilities which include a Seed Biobank and Processing area, a Biorefining Centre, a Future Foods Centre, an Advanced Analysis Centre and an Innovation Hub. The campus also has an Incubator space which is business community of entrepreneurs, start-ups, established businesses and satellite offices which currently has 30+ tenants.

3.2 Dr Charnock went on to provide an overview of the key areas of research and development which include CBD, seaweed, health claim investigations, food quality, digestibility, alternative proteins and cultured meat growing media amongst many others. The committee were given an overview of case studies involving products such as palm oil, hemp seed and cheese.

3.3 The committee acknowledged the innovative work and discussion was held around funding for the campus and also costs for businesses, noting that the Centre assists businesses not only in Wales but across the UK and Internationally.

3.4 The next presentation was from Dr Catherine Howarth, who gave an overview of the IBERS plant breeding programme, over a century of development, experience and investment. Dr Howarth specifically focused on the Oat and Pulses breeding programme and research which works across scales from the genome to field covering genome sequencing, genetic diversity, Genotype Phenotype GxE, genetic marker association, improving breeding methods and novel variety to industry. The aim is to develop innovative varieties that have a significant impact in the market and on end use that are marketed by commercial planters via long-term relationships. Dr Howarth asked, "Why oats?" and answered that it's a quality grain is useful for human food, animal feed and for industrial use. All kinds of foods can be made from oats that could not previously. Research looks at the effects of future climates and the development of resilient oats. For example, environments are controlled to look at the effects of drought and water logging. 65% of oats used in the UK are bred at Aberystwyth and the varieties are marketed through Senova Ltd.

3.5 There was committee discussion around any impact that Precision Breeding may have on this work and discussion around the health benefits of oats. [Further information on Dr Howarth and her work.](#)

3.6 We then moved onto Dr Pip Nicholas-Davies who delivered a presentation on the Beef Quality Project. The aim of the project is to facilitate the improved eating quality and value of Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) Welsh Beef production. The objectives are to test and demonstrate an enhanced carcass eating quality grading system, based on the Meat Standards Australia model, which has worked in Australia for a long time. The key activities included grader training courses, conducting a survey of carcasses submitted for slaughter, consumer taste testing, an industry survey, case studies, industry communication and recommendations. A

product survey was carried out on 2090 carcasses across 8 factories, and samples were taken in February and August 2019 with 69 different breeds and crossbreeds identified. Dr Nicholas-Davies explained the difference between EQ (Eating quality) and the current EUROP system used for grading as well as giving an insight into the consumer taste testing and how the EQ was calculated. Recommendations were:

- Complement, not replace EUROP
- Transparent, national, eating quality prediction standards are required for the industry to move forward
- Data and model access – International Meat Research 3G Foundation
 - Data available for further research
 - Commercially for EQ prediction
- Further research
 - Interaction between EQ and
 - environmental quality agenda
 - Efficiency and performance objectives

3.7 The committee commented that there is a possibility to link the third pillar of the FSA strategy and explore the link between eating quality and nutrition. There was also input from the NFU representative who commented that this is important work that the industry welcomes this project and the progress of this to not only benefit the industry but also the consumer. There was also a question of whether there were links between eating quality and animal welfare and Dr Nicholas-Davies confirmed that this is currently being researched in Australia. [Further information on BeefQ - Beef Eating Quality — Aberystwyth Research Portal](#)

3.8 The final presentation was from Professor Darrell Abernethy, who talked about [Aberystwyth University School of Veterinary Science](#) and the Bachelor of Veterinary Science (BVSc) degree at Aberystwyth. The degree offers applicants a unique opportunity to train at two world-leading scientific and educational institutions: The Royal Veterinary College (RVC) and Aberystwyth University. The focus is on social studies, practical experience and emphasis on problem solving. They are also extremely passionate about developing Welsh graduates that can speak Welsh and provide a Welsh language service in Wales. Professor Abernethy also talked about the Veterinary Nursing Programme that is due to start in September 2024. The aim is to draw more vets back to Wales after qualifying as there is a shortage of vets and veterinary nurses, especially in more rural areas. The vision is to create a veterinary school that excels at veterinary education, research and awareness in a Welsh context, and which contributes optimally to the university's strategic plan, the veterinary profession and the livestock industry in Wales.

3.9 There was discussion around how this could potentially increase the number of vets in government posts and the committee noted the efforts to attract students from different demographics.

4. Panel and committee discussion

4.1 The committee commended the excellent work being undertaken in Wales in both Science and Innovation. The presentations demonstrated that we can undertake innovative projects here in Wales. We have a funnel from universities into food manufacturing and out into the market. It was noted that the history of the oat breeding is a jewel in the crown of Wales, promoting over 100 years of research and development and noting the commercial relationships built. Aberystwyth is one of the only locations in UK where this work has continued in so much depth. In terms of the Beef Quality Project, it's appealing to imagine having information for consumers which allows for greater information in consumer choice.

5. Chair's report

5.1 The Chair gave an oral update on her short time as WFAC Chair since her appointment in September which included details of her induction programme.

6. Director's report (Paper 23/10/03)

6.1 The Director gave an oral update on his report which included updates on Precision Breeding and Regulated Products.

7. Any other business

7.1 Members noted that the business meeting would be on 7 December.

The Chair closed the meeting.