

Welsh Food Advisory Committee Directors Report - July 2024

Report by Anjali Juneja, Director for UK & International Affairs and Nathan Barnhouse Director for FSA in Wales.

1. Summary

1.1 This report provides a summary of subjects introduced by the Chief Executive at the last Board meeting, held on 19 June 2024, a summary of senior engagement across the UK and International Affairs (UKIA) Directorate and an overview of matters of interest to WFAC relating to Wales.

1.2 Members of the committee are invited to:

note the update

invite the Directors to expand on any issues for further discussion

2. Chief Executive's Report to the Board

2.1 This is the latest [Chief Executive's Report](#) presented to the June Board meeting.

3. Overview from the Director of UK and International Affairs (UKIA)

3.1 Since my last update, there is a new Government in Westminster. Big issues we know the new administration are interested in, as outlined in the Labour manifesto, include a veterinary agreement to prevent unnecessary border checks and help tackle the cost of food. This is an area which is of significant interest to the FSA, and we will be working closely with Other Government Departments as we begin to assess the new Government's agenda.

3.2 On 26 June, the Chair and I met with Minister Bryant who is the Minister for Mental Health and Early Years in the Welsh Government. The Minister was very much in listening mode as this part of our portfolio is new to her. The Chair updated the Minister on a variety of workstreams including Precision Breeding, Regulated Products, Achieving Business Compliance and Local Authority work. The Minister was enthusiastic about the work of the FSA and agreed that regular quarterly meetings with the Chair would be helpful. The Minister and the Chair are also planning a visit within the Minister's constituency in the coming weeks.

3.3 On Tuesday 18 June we had our June Board meeting which included a visit to two sites at Bangor University. It was fantastic to see the research projects being undertaken at Henfaes Farm including studies monitoring microplastics and the impact on soil health and nutrient dynamics, and projects monitoring greenhouse gas emissions to develop more sustainable cultivation methods. At the Wastewater Research Centre on the main campus, we learned about

the wastewater surveillance programme which aims to monitor, predict and limit the spread of norovirus, AMR genes, Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) and other viruses from hospital and domestic wastewater. Bangor University is one of the partners involved in the [Pathogen Surveillance in Agriculture, Food and Environment \(PATH-SAFE\) Programme](#) and it was fascinating to see the laboratories in action and learn more about how risk modelling helps monitor sources of contamination in shellfish harvesting waters. Other visits by the Board were to the Food Technology Centre, Llangefní and to Llwyn Banc Dairy Farm.

3.4 The second phase of the BTOM went live at the end of April. This included the commencement of physical checks at the border on imports from the EU and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). Imports from the rest of the world are also now being subject to the new risk-based approach to controls. This uses a model that assesses the risks posed both by the commodity as well as the country of origin, allowing our border controls to be applied proportionately to the risk posed. Border checks on EU goods are being introduced using a phased approach that sees those goods posing the highest risk to public and animal health, such as poultry and pork products, the first to be subject to controls, gradually adding further tranches of commodities. This has been designed to allow time for businesses and competent authorities to adapt, and to avoid a big bang implementation for new IT systems. The FSA is carefully monitoring delivery as it rolls out to ensure that the implementation meets our food safety objectives. Delivery remains at an early stage and so we do not yet have sufficient information to come to any conclusions. This is a major milestone in the control of imports from the EU and it means that we are now in a better position to be able to reassure consumers that our imported food meets the UK's high standards.

3.5 In international news, I can advise our Chair visited Rome on 16-17 May. She had engagements at the Food & Agriculture Organisation (FAO) which were helpful for promoting the FSA's science and evidence credentials and commitment to the rules-based system of Codex, including with the FAO Assistant Director General, Deputy Director for Nutrition and Head of Agri-food Systems & Food Safety. Discussion included cell-cultivated proteins and Ultra Processed Foods, and there was interest in Northern Ireland's nutrition work. She met the Italian Ministry of Health, achieving our objective to establish a relationship with the food safety authorities of an important EU trading partner and gain commitment to ongoing dialogue. It was a positive, friendly meeting with discussion covering regulated products, novel foods, genetic technology, BTOM and imports, food contact materials and incidents. We are planning further discussion on food contact materials and incidents. Finally, she met the Italian food fraud authorities within the Ministry of Agriculture, building on NFCU's positive relationship with Italy with further follow-up planned.

3.6 On Friday 14 June, I chaired an inward visit from Vietnam's Ministry of Health in Clive House. The delegation of four were visiting the UK for a ten-day long study tour and the International Strategy team received a request from Defra to help host as some topics of interest fell under the FSA's remit. I set out the work of the FSA and colleagues presented on food imports to GB, FSA's risk assessment and communication and FSA's incident handling and prevention, and engagement with [INFOSAN](#). Inward visits provide us with a valuable opportunity to engage with our food safety counterparts from around the world with objectives of establishing contacts and working relationships, facilitating a two-way information exchange on all things food safety, and putting the FSA in a strong position to deal with any potential issues or incidents efficiently.

4. Update from the Director for FSA in Wales

4.1 **General Election** – following the announcement of the 4 July General Election in May, the FSA have been adhering to the guidance for departments and civil servants on the pre-election period around the need to maintain the impartiality of the Civil Service. This has impacted on some of the team's work, with some work and events being put on hold until after the General Election.

4.2 Regulated Products – the [Food Additives and Novel Foods \(Authorisations and Miscellaneous Amendments\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2024](#) (for 8 regulated products applications), came into force in June with parallel Instruments laid in Scotland and England. A consultation on a batch of 25 Feed additive applications closed on 17 June, and all responses are being considered prior to sending advice to Ministers on these. The next batch of potential authorisations have been identified and risk management activity has started on those applications.

4.3 Regulated Products Reform – in March, the then Deputy Minister agreed in principle, with support of the Counsel General, to the Regulated Products reforms delivered in a GB Statutory instrument which included:

- Removing the need for some products already authorised as safe to go through a fixed 10-year renewal requirement, regardless of whether there is evidence on safety changes. This would bring the regulation of these products in line with how we regulate other food and feed products.
- Removing the requirement to legislate to authorise regulated products and instead allow authorisations, following approval by ministers in Wales, England and Scotland, to come into effect following publication in an official e-register.

4.4 To support the consultation on these reform proposals, and ensure a broad spectrum of opinion from stakeholders in Wales, we boosted promotional activity including:

Industry – direct emails to 27 key stakeholder bodies in Wales with an interest in regulated products. These included industry trade associations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

- Consumers – boosted Welsh and English adverts on Facebook targeting adults in Wales, reaching just over 19K users across both languages.
- LAs – engagement with all LAs in Wales via our Food Safety Expert Panels, Safe Sustainable Authentic Food Wales and direct emails to all Directors of Public Protection in Wales (DPPWs).

4.5 We received 17 responses to the formal consultation from stakeholders in Wales. There were 123 responses to the consultation overall.

4.6 We will continue to work with Welsh Ministers and Welsh Government officials to finalise these initial reforms and in development of longer-term reforms of modernised market authorisations.

4.7 Precision Breeding – due to the General Election and at the time of writing, all parliamentary business and proceedings for the secondary legislation of the Precision Breeding Regulations is on hold. The Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Act 2023 (“the PB Act”) is now in statute and it includes powers to make regulations for, amongst other things, the regulation of PBOs used in food and feed. Following the General Election and the formation of a new Government, a decision will be made by the new Secretary of State on whether and how to use these powers.

4.8 Local Authority (LA) audits – the service delivery planning, processes, arrangements, and relevant open audit action programme for 2024/25 has commenced. Three LAs have been audited to date and one is scheduled to take place mid-July. The programme will run until the beginning of next year.

Preparations are in place for the second audit programme, which will test LA out of hours systems to gain assurance that effective arrangements are in place to deal with emergencies outside of normal working hours.

4.9 Bread and Flour – plans to make changes to bread and flour legislation in July have been affected by the General Election and with summer recesses to come, the new plan in each nation

is to make the legislation before the end of 2024.

4.10 Food Hypersensitivity – prior to the General Election announcement, the FSA held a series of workshops with industry and LAs in respect of the provision of information in the out of home sector (restaurants, cafes) policy area. This is the policy that would potentially mandate written allergen information and conversations with customers about allergens being provided in those settings. Feedback from these workshops is being assessed prior to guidance being produced in the first instance, ahead of future legislative discussions.

4.11 Farm Assured Welsh Livestock (FAWL) Scheme – the team have completed this year's review of the FSA's approval of Welsh Lamb and Beef Producers Limited (WLBP) FAWL Scheme for the purposes of earned recognition. An annual review is required and consistent as part of the overall FSA approach. The review recommends that approved status continues for a further year.

4.12 Recent incidents – The team have been actively involved in a number of national outbreaks with potential impact on Wales. We have been working closely with Public Health Wales and UKHSA who are leading a multi-agency response to an outbreak of E.coli (STEC). To date there have been a total of 275 cases, 31 of which are in Wales. The FSA have been leading on food chain investigations which have resulted in several sandwich manufacturers taking precautionary recalls due to a possible link to a lettuce product. Complex investigations remain ongoing with food businesses based in England.

4.13 June Board meeting in Llandudno – taking the Civil Service restrictions on communications activities during the pre-election period into account, the Chair and Chief Executive decided to continue with the Board's programme of events in Llandudno with some modifications. The meeting was recorded, but not live streamed. Papers were not published, questions were not taken in advance and the meeting was not open to the public. The recording of the discussions and all the papers have subsequently been [published on our website](#) and written questions can still be submitted for response as per the usual arrangements. The original agenda was amended to delay the substantive policy papers until September. In addition to the Board visits outlined in Section 3.3 above, the Board held a working dinner and received presentations from Lewis Pies, Maggie's African Twist and Menter a Busnes.

4.14 Delay of publication and launch of 'Our Food' 2023 – the FSA and Food Standards Scotland's latest Annual Report on Food Standards – Our Food 2023 – was due to be published in June. The report was to be launched in Wales with a roundtable discussion with Members of the Senedd on 26 June. However, due to the pre-election period, the publication and launch have been paused and we are looking to reschedule around the autumn.

4.15 Food & You 2 (Wave 7) – the latest wave of the FSA's flagship consumer survey, [Food and You 2](#), was published on 10 April. Fieldwork for Wave 7 was conducted between 23 April 2023 and 10 July 2023 with a total of 5,812 adults (aged 16 years or over) from 4,006 households across Wales, England and Northern Ireland completing the survey. Topics covered in the [Food and You 2: Wave 7 Key Findings](#) report include: food you can trust, concerns about food, food security, food shopping and labelling, online platforms and novel foods.

4.16 Communications activity – since the last WFAC themed meeting, the communications team in Wales have worked with colleagues across the FSA on the following campaigns, incidents and media interest:

- **Bore Cothi Radio interview** – the Wales team recently provided a Welsh language interview on the [BBC's Bore Cothi programme](#) covering food waste and safety, following which we saw a corresponding spike in people searching for advice on reheating rice and visiting the Home Food Fact Checker pages on [food.gov](#), demonstrating the impact of what we do.

5. Consultations

5.1 Live Consultations: [Call for Evidence: Ashwagandha](#) - seeking stakeholder views on ashwagandha food supplements in order to build an evidence package that will inform any future risk management advice.

Date launched: 8 July 2024

Closing Date: 2 September 2024

6. Forward look

6.1 Royal Welsh and National Eisteddfod – we will be attending both these national events this year:

- The FSA's Chair, the Chair of WFAC and the Director of the FSA in Wales are attending a series of engagement meetings and opportunities in this year's Royal Welsh Show. This includes attending the First Minister's reception, attending the Food Innovation Wales breakfast, a meeting with NFU Cymru and Farmers Union Wales and a tour of the Food Hall with an opportunity to meet with some of the independent Welsh food businesses.
- The FSA in Wales will have a stand at the [National Eisteddfod](#), which is being held in Pontypridd this year. The stand will include information modules on the FSA's key areas, and will be staffed by FSA volunteers.

6.2 Annual Report on Food Standards – as mentioned earlier in the report, the 'Our Food 2023' report will be published before the end of the year.

6.3 We also have the following communications activity coming up over the next few weeks:

- **Always On social media campaign: Alerts and Recalls** – this campaign was put on hold following the announcement of the General Election and will recommence toward the end of July. The campaign will focus on raising awareness of the FSA alerts platform, educate consumers about the FSA's role in food safety and encourage sign-ups to the service. It will be undertaken via social media ads, organic social media content on FSA platforms and partner/local authority content sharing via toolkits we develop internally.
- **Summer eating communications campaign** – we will be issuing the usual messaging this year around safe summer eating focussing on eating outdoors, and particularly barbecues and picnics. The campaign will focus on consumer advice around the essentials – cooking, cleaning, chilling and avoiding cross-contamination with the aim of enhancing public understanding of safe food practices. This year the campaign will also likely focus on messaging around washing salads or bagged salads before eating following recent food incidents related to salad products.
- **Student campaign (19 August – 20 October)** – we will be running this campaign again at the start of the new academic year to improve awareness of good food safety and hygiene practices in the UK student population. [Research into UK student populations](#) has highlighted particular challenges for this group in relation to food safety and hygiene practices, such as finding it difficult to maintain cleanliness in shared kitchens, with many students not following recommended food safety and hygiene behaviours.