

# Chief Executive's Report to the Board

FSA 24/12/03 - Report by Katie Pettifer

## 1 Reappointment of Professor Susan Jebb as Chair of the Board

1.1 On behalf of the Executive, I'd like to take this opportunity to put on record that we warmly welcome Susan's [reappointment as Chair](#) of the Board. I'm grateful for the continuity of her leadership and wealth of experience and insight she brings to the Food Standards Agency.

## 2 Spending Review and Budget

2.1 Following the first phase of Spending Review 2025, we have had an indication of the anticipated settlement for FSA Westminster, although we await official confirmation. The Spending Review process also sets the headline funding allocations for all devolved administrations. Welsh Government and NI Assembly are then responsible for determining the split of this funding. As part of this process, FSA Wales and FSA NI have bid for their 25/26 budgets. We expect the Welsh Government to publish their draft budget (with details of FSA funding) in early December. No timeline has been given for the NI Executive's decision on departmental allocations.

2.2 The Spending Review sets our overall financial envelope for next year, and EMT are now working through our annual Business Planning process to confirm budgets. We know that there will be a multi-year Spending Review to cover 2026-27 and 2027-28, which will be mission-led, technology-enabled and reform-driven. We are working across the department to explore how we can deliver even better value for money for the taxpayer, and how we will realise the benefits of new technology to do this.

2.3 In the Budget, the Government also announced taxation measures which will have an impact on the FSA, our delivery partners and contractors, and the industry we regulate, such as the changes to employers' National Insurance contributions. We have been monitoring the response from the food industry to the budget overall and will continue to consider the implications with businesses and delivery partners.

## 3 FSA Delivered Official Controls (FSADOC) for Meat Retender Outcome

3.1 In October, the Cabinet Office and HM Treasury approved the FSA's Full Business Case for the retender of these critical service contracts to deliver official controls in the meat sector. Seven of the nine geographical areas are to be awarded to Evile and Jones Ltd, and two are to be awarded to a consortium led by Hallmark Meat Hygiene for a contract term of five years. Letters were sent to all bidders on 24 October to inform them of the contract award, which was followed by a standstill period in line with Procurement Regulations. Communications were

sent to all staff and stakeholders.

3.2 This outcome of the tender will increase our resilience and, service delivery capacity, whilst also providing value for money. A key factor in determining the outcome of the retender was our desire to ensure that food businesses and stakeholders have full confidence in our ability to maintain high standards in the delivery of official controls in meat plants.

3.3 The project has now moved into a transition and mobilization phase. We are focusing on the smooth transfer of operational activity between suppliers in the impacted geographical areas.

## 4 Bread and Flour Review

4.1 FSA officials in Northern Ireland and Wales, alongside officials in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Food Standards Scotland undertook a four-nation review of the Bread and Flour Regulations 1998 and the Bread and Flour Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1998. The review fell under the arrangements of the Food Compositional Standards and Labelling provisional Common Framework.

4.2 The general aim was to ensure that the Regulations lead to improved public health, support UK industry, assist enforcement authorities and protect consumers. In 2021, the UK Government and devolved governments agreed for the mandatory fortification of non-wholemeal wheat flour with folic acid to help prevent neural tube defects in foetuses. The implementation of this policy was also coordinated as part of the wider review.

4.3 FSA officials in Northern Ireland and Wales worked with counterparts across the UK to prepare the legislative changes. The new regulations have been published and laid in relation to England and Northern Ireland and are expected to be laid soon for Scotland and Wales. This includes a transitional adjustment period for industry, with the new compositional requirements coming into force on 13 December 2026.

## 5 Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)

5.1 As noted in Emily's July 2024 report, AMR remains high on the agenda for the FSA and across government and the FSA's funded AMR surveillance and research programme, alongside the [PATH-SAFE programme](#) continues to make significant contributions to the UK's 2024-2029 AMR National Action Plan ([NAP](#)).

5.2 Most recently those contributions were noted in the UK Veterinary Antimicrobial Resistance and Sales Surveillance ([VARSS](#)) report, which is published annually and brings together antibiotic sales, usage and resistance data for the UK's farmed animal population. In the 2023 edition (just published), the contribution of PATH-SAFE has been recognised. In particular in Chapter 3, showing how the programme has provided departments across government with the opportunity to investigate knowledge gaps in AMR and foodborne disease within agri-food chains. Under PATH-SAFE, a number of AMR surveillance pilots were carried out to address these knowledge gaps, particularly in AMR in cattle and sheep. These pilots were made possible through extensive collaboration between government departments and industry partners, driven by FSA with the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) and the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA).

5.3 FSA research teams and the PATH-SAFE programme have also engaged with initiatives across government, academia and industry to promote a joined-up approach to AMR. These activities include contributions to the recent [World Antimicrobial Awareness Week](#) communications campaign (which is a global campaign to raise awareness and understanding of AMR and promote best practices to reduce the emergence and spread of drug-resistant

infections), participation in [new research networks](#) which will tackle antimicrobial resistance being led by UKRI under their Tackling Infections theme and the hosting of a cross government AMR Surveillance Workshop in collaboration with the Microbiology Society.

## 6 Allergen Labelling Consultation

6.1 At the December 2023 Board meeting, the Board agreed that FSA should set an expectation that food businesses provide allergen information in writing for non-prepacked food, and this should be supported by a conversation.

6.2 We have worked with stakeholders to draft best practice guidance for food businesses on providing written allergen information for non-prepacked foods and supporting this with a conversation.

6.3 On 3 October we launched a public consultation on the new draft best practice guidance. The consultation ran for eight weeks (starting 3 October and ending 27 November).

6.4 To support the introduction of the guidance we are producing several tools for businesses including a range of symbols to represent the 14 allergens, a new allergen sign and a downloadable matrix. We hope to publish the new guidance and tools in the new year. We are also carrying out two research projects – a consumer survey and a food business survey – to help us understand the allergen information provision landscape and assess any options for potential legislative change.

## 7 Bovaer Cow Feed Additive

7.1 In early December there was widespread discussion on social media, reported in mainstream media, about the safety of an animal feed additive which had previously been through our market authorisation process. This discussion followed an announcement by the food manufacturer Arla that it would be carrying out trials to assess the efficacy of the additive in reducing methane emissions on some farms and was unfortunately fuelled by some misinformation. The FSA issued a statement, Robin May gave media interviews and we produced a [blog](#) setting out the facts. We explained that the additive was authorised as safe for use in the UK, and in other countries including the EU, Australia, Canada and the US. In our safety assessment, FSA had concluded that at the intended dose it posed no safety concerns to consumers, animals or the environment and had advised ministers to authorise the feed additive.

## 8 Funding From DBT on Support for Trade

8.1 A £2.3 million 'Regulatory Partnership for Growth Fund' (RPGF) has been announced by the SoS for Business and Trade which makes funding available to regulators and other standards setting bodies, to unblock market access barriers across a range of sectors: [Regulatory Partnership Growth Fund](#)

8.2 The FSA is one of the regulators that will receive funds, in 24/25, for the work we do to support government's export ambitions. It is very positive that the FSA is getting recognition by DBT for the key role we play in supporting Defra to provide assurance to trading partners that maintains existing export markets as well as agreeing export health certificates for new UK market access. The FSA would welcome this funding becoming available on a longer-term basis to ensure that we are able to continue to assist Defra in undertaking this important activity.

## **9 House of Lords Report: *Recipe for Health: A Plan to Fix Our Broken Food System***

9.1 The House of Lords Food, Diet and Obesity Committee report [Recipe for health: A plan to fix our broken food system](#) was published on 24 October 2024. It describes obesity and diet-related disease as a public health emergency, and calls for significant changes to the food system, including a national food strategy, legislative framework, and changes to policy interventions to make healthy food more accessible, and less healthy food less accessible.

9.2 The report included recommendations that the FSA should take on a greater role in oversight of the food industry.

9.3 It will be for ministers in the Department of Health and Social Care to decide how to respond to the recommendations in the report, including those on a potential future role for the FSA. We obviously have a significant interest in that response, both because of the recommendations in which we are named and because it touches on many areas relevant to our devolved responsibilities in Northern Ireland and Wales. We expect the DHSC to respond to the report in January and we will work closely with them on that response.

## **10 Food and You 2 and the Consumer Insights Tracker**

10.1 In September we published results from [Wave 8](#) of our Food and You 2 survey which was conducted between October 2023 and January 2024. Findings indicate that consumer confidence in food safety (90%) and authenticity (82%) remains high. However, around one in four (24%) respondents continue to be food insecure. In Wave 8, fieldwork was extended to Scotland for the first time. Results for Scotland will be published separately by Food Standards Scotland in February 2025.

10.2 In October we also published our Consumer Insights Tracker [quarterly report](#) which presents findings from July to September 2024. Food prices (87%) remained the top concern for consumers in September 2024, followed by ultra-processed, or the over processing of food (76%) and the healthiness of people's diets (75%). Consumer trust in the FSA saw a brief rise from June (57%) to July (65%) but has since returned to previous levels (62% in August, 56% in September).

## **11 Engagements**

11.1 Over the past few months, in my new capacity as Chief Executive, I have had introductory meetings with a wide range of stakeholders in the food industry, government and other sectors, and I have many more introductory meetings planned.

11.2 In the UK government and devolved nations, I have had introductory meetings with Peter May, the Permanent Secretary at the Department of Health in Northern Ireland, Andrew Goodall, the Permanent Secretary to the Welsh Government, Dr Jenny Stewart at the Animal and Plant Health Agency, Professor Dame Jenny Harries at the UK Health Security Agency and Dame June Raine at the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency. I have met with multiple officials from UK Government departments including DHSC and Defra. Internationally, I also met Pamela Byrne, the CEO of FSA Ireland.

11.3 Within the food industry, I have held introductory meetings with representatives of food businesses including Andrew Opie, Director of the British Retail Consortium, Richard Griffiths, the CEO at the British Poultry Council, Nick Allen and David Lindars, CEO and Technical Operations Director at the BPMA, Terry Jones, the CEO at the National Farmers' Union, and Sarah Bradbury

and Naomi Kissman at the IGD, as well as with a range of food businesses leaders. I joined the British Retail Consortium's regular technical leaders call with FSA and attended a discussion with the Institute of Grocery Distribution (IGD) on incident handling.

11.4 I have also met a wide range of other stakeholders with an interest in the food sector and regulation, including Anna Taylor, the Executive Director of the Food Foundation, Harriet Lamb and Estelle Herszenhorn, the CEO and Head of Food System Transformation at WRAP, Henry Dimbleby and Archie Mason at Bramble Investments, Jeremy Oppenheim and Christine Delivanis at Systemiq, Professor Tim Lang at City University London's Centre for Food Policy, Professor Chris Elliott at Queen's University Belfast, Judith Batchelar the Chair, Non-Executive Director, Trustee and Advisor at Food Matters International Ltd, Lizzie Lockett, the CEO at Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, Professor Christopher Hodges, the Chair of the Regulatory Horizons Council and Sterling Crew, President of the Institute of Food Science and Technology.

11.5 I have also held two roundtables and a series of individual meetings with organisations representing environmental health and trading standards officers and local government, following our national level regulation trial. These included meetings with Fran McCloskey (the CEO at the Chartered Institute for Environmental Health), John Herriman (CEO at the Chartered Trading Standards Institute), Mark Norris (Assistant Deputy Director at the Local Government Association) and Annie Albon (the Chair of the Association of Chief Environmental Health Officers). More details about our engagement on this topic are included in the relevant Board Paper.

11.6 I visited Fera Science Ltd and spoke at the Chartered Institute for Environmental Health's recent food safety conference. I have attended dinners hosted by the Northern Ireland Food and Drink Association, the King's Fund on the Health Mission, the IGD with Chief Executives in the food industry, and the Food and Drink Federation awards. I have also visited the FSA's offices in Wales and NI to meet staff.

## **12 FSA People News**

12.1 Steve Wearne is retiring following an over 30-year career in the Civil Service dedicated to food safety and public health. Steve has worked at the FSA since its inception in 2000, having previously worked in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF). Steve has held several roles at the FSA, including Director of Policy and Science and Director for Global Affairs. However, his impact at the FSA goes far beyond his job title, Steve's work helped to ensure the FSA is recognised internationally as a World Class Regulator, led the successful reduction of *Campylobacter* in chicken project, and started the discussion around appetite for risk and "risky foods" (such as less than thoroughly cooked burgers).

12.2 For the past seven years he has served as vice-chair, then chair of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC). Under Steve's tenure as Chair of Codex, which he cites as the highlight of his career, Codex has led and developed two strategic plans, the latest adopted only last week covering the period 2026-2031 meaning his influence extends a further six years. As Chair, Steve has been at the helm for the adoption of over 1,500 international reference texts, including the revised general principles of food hygiene and its HACCP annex, and guidelines for food hygiene control measures in traditional markets. Only last week, in Steve's final meeting, work on the food fraud guidelines, the precautionary allergen labelling guidelines were both progressed, and the e-commerce guidelines which were finalised, all of which are important for the UK.

12.3 On a personal note, Steve's knowledge has been a huge benefit to me and to EMT. He has been an oracle on food safety and standards and the wider FSA remit. We will miss him very much and we wish him all the best in his retirement.