

# Report from the Chair of the Wales Food Advisory Committee

FSA 25/03/07 - Report by Dr Rhian Hayward MBE

## 1. Summary

1.1 This report from the Chair of the Welsh Food Advisory Committee (WFAC) provides an update on the activity of the Committee.

1.2 The Board is asked to **note** the activities of WFAC over the last 12 months and **endorse** its plans for the year.

## 2. Role of WFAC

2.1 WFAC is defined in the Food Standards Act 1999. It is chaired by the FSA Board Member for Wales and its role is to advise the FSA on any specific Welsh elements linked to the remit of the FSA, as defined in the Act.

2.2 The Committee has a complement of eight Members, one of whom is also the FSA Board Member for Wales and WFAC Chair. All Members are recruited through an open public appointment process and are appointed by the Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing in Wales.

2.3 WFAC Members have a wide range of expertise, experience and practical knowledge that support the FSA's work in delivering its strategic outcomes. Biographies of current WFAC Members can be found [here](#).

2.4 I am pleased to say that since my last report Helen Taylor, Dr John Williams, Georgia Taylor and Jessica Williams have been re-appointed to the Committee for a second term. One Member (Chris Brereton) finished their term of appointment, and another (Dr Phil Hollington) will end their second term of appointment at the end of March. I would like to put on record my thanks for their work during their terms of appointment and for the insight and experience they brought to WFAC discussions.

2.5 A recruitment campaign is currently live to appoint two new WFAC Members. This will take us to a full complement of WFAC Members.

## 3. Committee Meetings – pre-Board and themed

3.1 This paper highlights the two types of meetings that have occurred over the last year – these are pre-board meetings and themed meetings.

3.2 WFAC meets ahead of each FSA Board to consider the papers that are tabled. These Board preparation meetings enable WFAC to provide a devolved perspective, enabling me as

WFAC Chair and Board Member for Wales to feedback nation specific comments and questions during Board meetings.

3.3 In addition to these pre-Board meetings, four themed meetings have taken place since my last report. These are open meetings that can (and are) attended by stakeholders, including members of the public. In a process of continuous learning about the food and feed landscape in Wales, WFAC invite speakers and domain experts to share a Wales perspective, and I value these deep dives and the interest taken by attendees in the topics. The themed meetings allow WFAC to gain a fuller and deeper understanding of the subjects and allow us to more actively feed into wider FSA priorities.

3.4 Guided by the recommendations of the 2023 Food Advisory Committee (FAC) review, i.e. to, where possible, align the themes discussed by both Committees, potential themes for 2024 were discussed at a WFAC meeting in October 2023 and then agreed by myself, as WFAC Chair in consultation with Anthony Harbinson, Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee (NIFAC) Chair. The themes discussed over the last year have been:

#### **April 2024: Challenges for growth and innovation within Welsh food businesses**

3.5 This meeting was hosted by [ZERO2FIVE](#), a Welsh Food Innovation Centre situated at Cardiff Metropolitan University which provides food and drink businesses with technical, operational and commercial support to enable them to compete more effectively.

3.6 The aim of this meeting was to hear directly from food businesses and those working with them on the challenges they face to grow and innovate. With that in mind we heard from [Lewis Pies](#), a family-run business, who highlighted two key challenges facing their business - difficulty securing staff and increased complexity in relation to how sustainability is measured and regulated.

3.7 Welsh Government officials presented on funded projects that support the food and drink industry in Wales, sharing details of Welsh businesses that have used this support. Moving on to how a regulator can support business, we then heard from Shared Regulatory Services (SRS), a partnership between Bridgend Council, Cardiff Council and the Vale of Glamorgan Council, who, as well as being the regulator provide resources such as newsletters, [‘Ask the Regulator’](#) podcasts, courses and training.

3.8 To close the meeting, WFAC Member Helen Taylor spoke about ZERO2FIVE’s work to support business innovation and growth, which was followed by a tour of their facilities, which include sensory evaluation suites for independent product testing and a cutting-edge perceptual experience lab to assist businesses with packaging design and format testing.

3.9 Hearing about the work of Welsh Government’s Food, Technology and Innovation clusters enabled the Committee to understand the strategic vision to grow the Food and Drink industry in Wales and highlighted the potential for working together to further enhance the connections between the University and Research Cluster and FSA Science and Evidence team. WFAC were impressed with the level of support afforded to Wales-based food and drink businesses by Welsh Government and the continued investment of public resource to expand the sector as a point of pride for Wales.

#### **July 2024: Incidents and Resilience**

3.10 This meeting saw us deep dive into the FSA’s work on Incidents, Resilience and Prevention work. Thank you to all FSA officials who supported this meeting. As expected, WFAC members were particularly interested in the Wales-specific incidents data detailed in the Annual Incidents and Resilience Report and were interested to understand some of the detail of these incidents and the challenges in the Welsh context.

3.11 We also heard about the use of Whole Genome Sequencing to link and cluster incidents cases and the work of the National Food Crime Unit (NFCU) including the Food Crime Strategic Assessment and proposals to extend NFCU powers. WFAC was extremely pleased to see the four-country approach to incidents, and this was proposed as a model that could be rolled out wider across the FSA's work.

#### **October 2024: Exploring new ways to regulate**

3.12 Following intense discussions at the September Board and strong feedback from Welsh LA representatives, we held a deep dive on new ways to regulate in the Autumn. This included hearing from Shared Regulatory Services on how Primary Authority Partnerships have been successful in Wales and getting early insight from FSA officials, and pilot Local Authorities (LAs), on the proposed changes to the Food Standards Delivery Model.

3.13 FSA officials also joined to present on next steps on National Level Regulation, and WFAC welcomed strong Welsh representation on the Senior Steering Forum that was set up after engagement with the FACs. A constructive and frank discussion was had, where we were able to better understand some of the concerns of Welsh LAs. This has allowed us to review how we engage and communicate with key representatives of the LAs in Wales to ensure that we have a more open and comprehensive dialogue, in line with the collaborative agreement between Welsh Government, the FSA and Welsh Local Government Association.

#### **February 2025: Nutrition and Dietary Health**

3.14 Noting the interest from the House of Lords Obesity Committee on the role of the FSA in relation to nutrition and dietary health, and the upcoming report from the Wales Future Generations Commissioner on food, it was timely to hold a session looking at how nutrition and dietary health is managed across the UK.

3.15 From a Welsh perspective, Welsh Government colleagues provided an update on progress to the Healthy Weight, Healthy Wales 10-year strategy, including the next stage of the delivery plan which will focus on enabling and supporting children in their early years to subsequently lead generational change in the food system. As the delivery partner for this work, Public Health Wales presented on the evolving issues of weight, nutrition, and lifestyle, highlighting the link between deprivation and obesity.

3.16 It was clear to WFAC Members that there is a huge amount of work going on within this subject, but that positive change will take time. In the meantime, the plethora of initiatives can seem confusing and, at times, duplicative. I am grateful to the team in FSA in Northern Ireland for presenting on their work on dietary health and nutrition; and how they engage with the Department of Health in a roadmap toward improvements. It was useful also to hear on the priorities of the UK Government in this area, and how this relates to the upcoming Defra food strategy.

3.17 WFAC felt that, even with food policy being devolved, there needs to be some commonality and collaboration across all four UK nations to ensure progress in this area. The meeting concluded with a visit to a local Health Centre, where WFAC Members engaged directly with Public Health Wales dietitians on the range of community initiatives in place to tackle obesity.

#### **Other meetings**

3.18 The Committee and I were pleased to welcome the FSA Board to Llandudno for its June 2024 meeting, providing the opportunity to showcase some of the fantastic research facilities and small businesses that we have in Wales and allowing Committee Members valuable engagement time with Board Members.

3.19 Additionally, the WFAC Committee and I have attended numerous stakeholder events over the past year to promote the work of the FSA. This includes the Royal Welsh Show, National Eisteddfod and the Blas Cymru/Taste Wales conference. These have given us the opportunity to speak to consumers, businesses and key stakeholders.

3.20 The Chair and I have met with the previous and current Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing, and the next meeting is scheduled for later this Spring. We also had a very constructive meeting with the Menai shellfish harvesters in relation to issues they are facing with classification.

3.21 I recently met with Professor Huw Jones (ACNFP) and Bill McDonald, Chief Plant Health Officer for Wales, in Aberystwyth, along with Sian Bowsley, Jonathan Davies and Xosé Alvarez of the FSA. The meeting focused on a discussion of Welsh Government's current position on the regulation of Precision Bred Organisms (PBOs), the interests for industry and consumers, and how best to help the discussion around these subjects to support Welsh Ministers and Members of the Senedd. The meeting was very fruitful, and we agreed engagement actions and to meet again in the future.

## 4. Forward Look

4.1 Ideas for themed meetings for 2025 were discussed with the FSA Chair and NIFAC Chair and were then discussed at the December 2024 WFAC meeting, taking a forward look at the work of the FSA over this period and any developments that are Wales specific.

4.2 With that in mind, the following themes have been agreed:

4.3 **Deep dive on Cell Cultivated Products (CCP):** A key development for the FSA in 2025 will be the launch of the CCP sandbox and there is interest at NIFAC and WFAC to understand more about what this will entail. We have proposed that this could be a joint meeting to help build relationships across both FACs. Both FAC secretariats are working with relevant policy colleagues to align the meetings and content.

4.4 **Delivery of Cymru Can: the work of the Wales Future Generations Commissioner:** Derek Walker, the Future Generations Commissioner is due to publish a Wales Community Food Strategy later this Spring and it will be useful to learn how we can collaborate to deliver the aims of that Strategy.

4.5 **Food hypersensitivity:** There has been increased interest in the work of the FSA and Welsh Government in terms of labelling and awareness of food hypersensitivity. The FSA will be publishing business guidance in this area over the next few months and it is important for WFAC to understand better how this will be implemented in Wales, and what role WFAC has to amplify key messages.

4.6 **The feed landscape in Wales:** Quite a broad topic noting that the FSA is responsible for the delivery of feed audits in Wales, but that there has been a lot of interest in the process of approving feed additives, notably 3-NOP/ Bovaer. There are also a number of research projects live in Welsh academic institutions looking at new types of animal feed that look to provide additional benefits – to animal welfare, the environment, eating quality, perishability etc.

4.7 This is currently our forward look plan, but this may need to flex as and when additional issues come to the fore. The Welsh Government sponsored review of the FSA in Wales is also live (with recommendations due in July) and a Senedd election is due in May 2026 - both may lead to new priorities for WFAC to consider. Any changes will be discussed with the FSA Chair and the NIFAC Chair.

4.8 Alongside the formal meetings, WFAC will continue to engage directly with stakeholders in Wales to amplify the FSA's key messages. This will include the Wales Food and Drink Awards in Llandudno in May, the launch of the Annual Report of Food Standards in Cardiff Bay in July, attending the Royal Welsh Show in July and engaging with consumers at the National Eisteddfod in August. As WFAC Chair I will also continue to meet with key stakeholders such as the Welsh Ministers (alongside the FSA Chair), Directors for Public Protection Wales and Welsh Local Government Association.

4.9 The WFAC forward look for 2025 is as follows:

Date	Meeting/Event and location
Thursday 20 March 2025	Board preparation meeting (online)
Tuesday 8 April 2025	WFAC themed meeting in Cardiff – Cell Cultivated Products ( <i>potentially a joint meeting with NIFAC</i> )
Wednesday 30 April 2025	FSA and WFAC Chair meet with Sarah Murphy, Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing
Thursday 22 May 2025	Food and Drink Wales Awards, Venue Cymru, Llandudno
Thursday 12 June 2025	Board preparation meeting (online)
Tuesday 8 July 2025	WFAC themed meeting in Cardiff – Cymru Can Community Food Strategy tbc
Wednesday 9 July 2025	Annual Report of Food Standards Launch at the Pierhead Building, Cardiff Bay
Monday 21 – Thursday 24 July 2025	Royal Welsh Show, Builth Wells
Saturday 2 – Saturday 9 August 2025	National Eisteddfod, Wrexham
Thursday 11 September 2025	Board preparation meeting (online)
Tuesday 21 October 2025	WFAC themed meeting location TBC
Thursday 4 December 2025	Board preparation meeting (online)

## 5. Conclusions

5.1 This paper provides a full report of the work of the WFAC over the last 12 months, and the plan for the next 12 months. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have supported me in my role as Chair of the Committee, as well as those that have presented at WFAC or hosted WFAC meetings.

5.2 2025 will be another busy year for WFAC as we see the conclusion of the Welsh Government review of the FSA in Wales, the launch of the Community Food Strategy and preparations for the Senedd Election in May 2026. WFAC will take every opportunity to support the work of the FSA in delivering for Welsh consumers, businesses and other key stakeholders. We will continue to build the strong relationship with the FSA Chair, the FSA Board and the NIFAC.

5.3 The Board is asked to **note** the activities of WFAC and **endorse** the plans for the year ahead.