

Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee (NIFAC) Directors' Report April 2025

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1. Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides a summary of activities relevant to the FSA remit in Northern Ireland since the last written report to the Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee (NIFAC) in February 2025.

1.2 Members are invited to:

- Note the update and
- Invite the Directors to expand on any issues for further discussion.

2. Chief Executive's Report to the Board

2.1 The latest Chief Executive Report that was presented to the March Board meeting can be found [here](#).

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

3.1 This section provides an overview of some of the key work undertaken by the Director of UKIA, Anjali Juneja, that will be of interest to NIFAC since the last report in February.

3.2 At the beginning of March, I attended the Northern Ireland Food and Drink Association (NIFDA) Conference. Around 150 delegates from the food and drink supply chain attended the Conference, with speakers drawn from across government, industry and academia. As part of the Conference, the FSA's Chief Executive, Katie Pettifer, delivered a keynote speech in relation to food safety and standards in a fast-changing world. The speech explored a number of areas, including the current challenges that the FSA is facing and how the organisation is responding to them – including better targeted regulation through the Food Standards Delivery Model and touching on National Level Regulation – and supporting innovation through the Market Authorisation reforms and the CCP Sandbox. Katie also highlighted the dietary health work we are doing the recently published data on consumer insights through the Making Food Better Tracker Survey. Finally, Katie joined a panel discussion on safety and standards. Questions during the discussion were focused on the biggest food safety risks in 2025, ultra-processed foods and food fraud.

3.3 The FSA Chair, Professor Susan Jebb, visited Northern Ireland at the end of March and met with Baroness Hayman, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at Defra. The Chair and Baroness Hayman had a constructive and wide-ranging discussion, touching on several areas

where the FSA and Defra can continue to collaborate, such as the Windsor Framework and the Border Target Operating Model. Both then visited a flour mill and met with the General Managers of two mills located in Belfast, as well as the Chief Executive of UK Flour Millers. Discussions were focused on the benefits and impacts of the Bread and Flour Regulations, grain sustainability, and how the flour mill industry can contribute to the UK's Food Strategy, including potential nutritional benefits.

3.4 In international activity, in February our Chair visited Paris, Geneva and Madrid. In Paris and Madrid, she had meetings to strengthen relationships and find areas for cooperation with France and Spain's national food authorities. Both France and Spain are significant food and feed trade partners for the UK. In Geneva, she met the World Health Organisation's Food Safety and Nutrition department and reiterated the FSA's ongoing support for their International Food Safety Authorities Network as a crucial tool for global information exchange. In April, our Chief Executive will be participating in this year's meeting of the International Heads of Food Agencies Forum, a senior-level forum of like-minded food agencies that the FSA will be hosting in 2027.

3.5 At the time of writing, the budget settlement for FSA in Northern Ireland has not yet been finalised. I continue to work with the team to discuss priorities and allocation and hope to be in a position to conclude this work in the coming weeks.

4. Update from the Director for Northern Ireland

4.1 **Brussels study visit** – A group of officials from Northern Ireland undertook a study visit to Brussels. During the visit, the team had several productive meetings with key stakeholders, including the European Commission, the Norwegian Mission to the EU, and Irish Government officials. These meetings provided practical insights into the implementation of EU law. The visit also highlighted the growing EU and wider interest in Northern Ireland's political and policy developments. The importance of collaboration with the Office of the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels was emphasised, with the visit demonstrating the benefits of strong relationships and efficient use of resources. This collaboration will support future work on EU legislation. Participants provided excellent feedback, noting valuable learning and insights that they will be able to apply in their roles.

4.2 **Point of Entry builds and designations** – Construction is ongoing at pace for the four permanent inspection facilities at Northern Ireland Points of Entry (POE). The FSA is working to ensure POEs comply with EU specifications to allow the formal designation of each site. Go Live preparations continue across competent authorities, this work is critical to ensure a smooth operational transition to the new facilities, to protect public health, biosecurity and comply with statutory requirement to be fully operational by 1st July 2025 under the Windsor Framework. In February, the European Commission visited the POEs to observe progress on construction of the new inspection facilities. Further visits are expected.

4.3 **Cross-Agency Training Event** – Last month, over 100 competent authority staff participated in two training sessions organised by the Trade, Imports, and Exports Team in Belfast. The aim was to enhance understanding across staff operating at POEs (district councils, DAERA Veterinary, DAERA Plant Health and Border Force). The training improved knowledge and collaboration across competent authorities ahead of the permanent inspection facilities becoming operational later this year.

4.4 **Cell-cultivated Products (CCP) sandbox launch** – The FSA has launched a two-year "sandbox" programme to support innovation in cell-cultivated products while ensuring they meet our rigorous safety standards. CCPs are innovative foods grown from animal cells rather than traditional farming. The FSA will now begin work on the two-year programme, collaborating with academic bodies, the CCP industry and trade organisations. The programme's aim is to gather

rigorous scientific evidence about CCPs and how they are made, to inform how the FSA and Food Standards Scotland regulate these products. The evidence will enable the FSA to assess CCP applications more efficiently and make sure they are safe before they can be sold to consumers. The FSA will provide clearer guidance to businesses, and address questions that must be answered before any CCPs can enter the market. Through the programme, the FSA is committed to completing the full safety assessment of two CCPs within the next two years. As part of the work in Northern Ireland, the team held a learning session for officials in the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and the Department of Health. It provided officials with an overview of CCP; the sandbox programme; the EU position on CCP; impacts on Northern Ireland and an overview of the upcoming safefood research on Novel Foods.

4.5 Food Standards Delivery Model (FSDM) – District Councils and the Food Standards team are currently focusing on the implementation of a new approach to food standards inspections across all district councils in Northern Ireland, making it more risk-based and intelligence driven. The FSDM will enable district council officers to provide more targeted and proportionate support for businesses. This new approach will help to make the food regulation system more sustainable and effective, reducing the burden on many compliant businesses.

4.6 Annual Shellfish Classification Process – The 2025 annual shellfish classification process in Northern Ireland has been completed. All Food Business Operators have been notified of their classifications and they have been [published](#).

4.7 Provision of Information Best Practice Guidance – The FSA has issued new best practice [guidance](#) on the provision of allergen information for non-prepacked foods. The guidance aims to support businesses keep consumers with food hypersensitivities safe and to meet consumer expectations by adopting good practices and enabling consumers to make informed choices about the food they eat more easily. The publication of the guidance follows a consultation, as well as [FSA research](#) and engagement with consumers and food businesses to better understand how food businesses could improve written information for consumers with food hypersensitivities.

4.8 Launch of the Public Consultation on proposed amendments to the Food Law Code of Practice – The public consultations on proposed amendments to the Food Law Code of Practice and Practice Guidance in [Wales](#) and [Northern Ireland](#) were published on 24th February. A similar consultation has also been published in [England](#). The consultations are open until 19th May. The proposed amendments are intended to enhance more effective use of local authority/district council resource, increase consistency in the delivery of official controls by providing clarification on existing policy, and ensure the continued protection of public health and consumer confidence.

4.9 The Northern Ireland consultation includes a proposal to incorporate more explicit reference and descriptors, regarding food safety culture, into part 3 of the food hygiene intervention rating scheme. This follows an amendment to Regulation (EC) 852/2004 which is in force in Northern Ireland under the Windsor Framework. Assimilated Regulation (EC) 852/2004, in England and Wales, has not been amended in the same way. In Wales, the consultation includes a proposal to implement the new food standards delivery model, currently in the process of being implemented in Northern Ireland and England.

4.10 Breakfast Directives Consultation – In April 2023 the EU published initial proposals to amend four of the seven 'Breakfast Directives.' Amending Directive EU 2024/1438 was published in the Official Journal on 24th May 2024. The amending directive lays down changes to rules on the composition, labelling and processing of products such as honey, fruit juice, jam, and marmalades and persevered dehydrated milk with the aim of increased transparency and helping consumers make informed and healthier decisions. It is intended that Northern Ireland will

transpose amendments to these directives, into domestic legislation by 14th December 2025 with the transitional period for food businesses to comply being no later than 14th June 2026. On 19th March, the FSA launched a public consultation called the [Breakfast Directives Consultation](#) seeking views on the transposition and approach to enforcement of the new requirements outlined in amending directive (EU) 2024/1438. Enforcement provisions are required to ensure there is a proportionate consequential deterrent for non-compliance for the new requirements. It is intended that the new legislation will extend the use of Improvement Notices to the new requirements, in line with the current enforcement regime of these products.

4.11 Publication of the Making Food Better Tracker Survey – Results of the FSA's Making Food Better Consumer Tracker have been [published](#). The consumer tracker monitors Northern Ireland consumers views on healthy eating. Results were circulated to key stakeholders along with infographics summarising findings of relevance to retailers, manufacturers and the out-of-home sector. The results show that promotions continue to influence consumer purchasing of less healthy products. More consumers reported difficulty in choosing healthier options in vending compared to the previous year. Consumer understanding of front of pack traffic light labelling is high, however only half of consumers that recognised it reported using it when shopping. Awareness of energy recommendations remains low.

4.12 Veterinary Public Health Programme (VPHP) Conference – The VPHP Conference was held in February, bringing together Official Veterinarians, Meat Inspectors, DAERA management and FSA operational policy for a day of Continuing Professional Development. The theme of the day was Meeting the Standards with Consistency. DAERA deliver Official Controls on behalf of the FSA in approved slaughterhouses, meat cutting and game handling establishments, and on primary production premises. FSA officials delivered presentations on topics including using Lough Neagh as an example of the approach to a new food safety incident and food crime. The event successfully built on the relationship between FSA operational policy representatives and DAERA staff on the 'coal face' and was well received.

4.13 Institute of Food Science and Technology (IFST) event – Officials from across teams attended an IFST event Establishing a strong food safety culture: legislative requirements and experiences from across the island of Ireland. This was held in response to a recent safefood funded research project which indicated that small business owners and Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) wanted some more support in this area. Attendees were from the north and south of Ireland and included Ulster and Queen's University researchers, Environmental Health Officers, Teagasc, safefood and food businesses. An official from our Local Authority Policy and Delivery team in Northern Ireland co-presented with FSAI counterparts on the legislation pertaining to food safety culture and the challenges that this presents for operators and regulators. EHOs and small/medium food business representatives shared their perspectives regarding barriers and facilitators to the implementation of the legislation.?

4.14 Representation at the Northern Ireland Science Festival – This is the second year that we had a stand at the Northern Ireland Science Festival held in Derry/Londonderry. The Science Festival was attended by Primary and Secondary School pupils on the Friday and by the general public on the Saturday. Our stand focused on the Eatwell guide with interactive elements such as an Eatwell guide game and colouring pages.

4.15 Emergency Preparedness Group (EPG) Workshop in Belfast – The Communications team in Northern Ireland sits on the Northern Ireland Emergency preparedness group, through which agencies and organisations come together on a regular basis to share learnings relating to resilience, preparedness, and incident response. The group coordinates emergency planning, in the wake of incidents such as Storm Eowyn, with the Strategic Communications Group acting as the channel for agencies to share and coordinate their comms approach, messaging and channels.

4.16 The EPG held a Workshop in Belfast in February. District councils, Utilities, Health Trusts, the Education Authority, Emergency Services and the FSA were active participants in scenario planning, using multi-agency civil contingencies and METHANE and [JESIP](#) principles. Overall, it was an excellent learning experience and opportunity to network and strengthen multi-agency relationships.

4.17 **FSA Stand at Loughry Careers Fair** – We exhibited at the Loughry Careers Fair on in March. The team had the opportunity to engage with local teachers about the work the FSA does in schools, including delivering talks to nutrition students, as well as informing teachers about the different career paths that can be taken within the food industry. They also had the opportunity to talk to the students that attend the college providing insights into the FSA's role in the food industry and showcasing the many career paths available in the organisation as an alternative to traditional industry roles, including opportunities in food policy, nutrition, science and communications.

5. Consultations

5.1 Current live FSA consultations can be found [here](#).

6. Forward Look

- 10th April – Northern Ireland Grain Trade Association Annual Dinner
- 11th April – Meeting with the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland
- 14th – 17th May – Balmoral Show
- 20th May – Meeting with safefood