

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

3.2 The Northern Ireland Executive has approved budgets across Northern Ireland departments. The FSA received a minor increase on our resource budget of £500k and received £151k against our capital bid of £251k. This marginal increase in resource is absorbed by increased pay and prices across payroll and programme lines and has required a careful prioritisation of our budget to ensure that we are able to continue to deliver our statutory requirements and Northern Ireland specific priorities.

3.3 Since July 2024, the UK Government has reset and strengthened our relations with European partners by working with the EU to identify areas where we can strengthen co-operation for mutual benefit across a range of areas, including a potential sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) agreement. The UK Government is seeking to cut costs and bureaucracy to the fullest extent possible for agri goods moving between both Great Britain (GB) and the EU and GB and Northern Ireland. The UK Government has also been clear that an agreement must deliver tangible benefits for businesses and consumers in Northern Ireland. The FSA is working across Government to carefully consider and understand the public health implications of an SPS agreement with the EU. Any future arrangement of this type must protect consumers' interests in relation to food safety and standards in the UK. The UK and EU will continue to apply existing

controls while the UK Government negotiates an agreement.

3.4 In relation to Northern Ireland specific engagement in this period, the FSA Chair, Professor Susan Jebb, met with the Minister of Health for Northern Ireland, Mike Nesbitt MLA, at the end of May. The Chair and Minister had a constructive and wide-ranging discussion touching on several areas where the Department of Health and the FSA can continue to collaborate and touched on dietary health and Market Authorisation reform. I have had the opportunity to meet with counterparts in both the Department of Health and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in relation to a number of issues, including the Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework and associated action plan. I was also delighted to be in Northern Ireland at the end of April for a Directorate-wide meeting which took place in Belfast City Hall. This was an excellent opportunity for teams to come together and to showcase Northern Ireland to my wider Directorate.

3.5 The FSA Annual Report on Food Standards Our Food 2024: An Annual Review of Food Standards Across the UK was laid in the four legislatures of the UK, including the Northern Ireland Assembly, and [published](#) on 19th June. The Northern Ireland launch event took place in Parliament Buildings, Stormont, on Monday 23rd June which I attended alongside the FSA Chair, Professor Susan Jebb. We were pleased to be joined by the Minister of Health, Mike Nesbitt MLA, and the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Andrew Muir MLA, who both provided remarks on the day. The event was extremely positive and provided members of the FSA team with an important opportunity to engage with MLAs and stakeholders across a variety of sectors and industries. We are also hosting launch events in Westminster and Cardiff at the start of July.

4. Update from the Director for Northern Ireland

4.1 **Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee** – On 8th May, the Northern Ireland Assembly Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee considered information and evidence on the proposed EU Regulation on New Genomic Techniques. This came in two parts – information and evidence. The FSA's Chief Scientific Adviser, Professor Robin May, delivered a well-received briefing on the science behind the proposal. In the open committee session, Sharon Gilmore appeared alongside an official from the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) to provide evidence on the potential impacts of the EU proposal. Prior to the evidence session, the FSA provided detailed written evidence, and written responses to questions. The session was positive, with questions focusing around trade and stakeholder engagement.

4.2 **Point of Entry builds and designations** – Work is ongoing for the four permanent inspection facilities at Northern Ireland Points of Entry (POE), with all sites expected to be operational by 28 July. The FSA is working to ensure POE comply with EU specifications to allow the formal designation of each site, as required by the Windsor Framework. The EU is fully engaged in the progress and arrangements are in place to ensure contingency facilities remain operational in the interim ahead of site readiness for occupation. Go Live preparations continue across Competent Authorities and this work is critical to ensure a smooth operational transition to the new facilities, and to protect public health and biosecurity.

4.3 **Bread and Flour** – The Bread and Flour Regulations have recently been amended across the four UK nations. To supplement these changes, new guidance has been developed for food businesses and enforcement authorities, with the aim of aiding implementation of the legal changes and helping to ensure business compliance with the legislation. The guidance has been created by the FSA in Northern Ireland and Wales, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) in England, and Food Standards Scotland. The guidance was also developed in conjunction with the Department of Health in Northern Ireland, Welsh Government,

4.4 Service Level Agreement (SLA) – The SLA between the FSA and DAERA for the delivery of official controls and associated activities by the Department relating to meat, milk, egg and primary production hygiene in establishments registered by, or holding certain approvals from the FSA has been signed off after a 3 yearly deep dive. SLA delivery is monitored by KPIs, verification visits, quarterly review meetings and bi-annual governance meetings.

4.5 Lough Neagh sampling – Sampling for the 2024/25 season has now been completed, and results are being reviewed against internal quality control procedures by one of the laboratories. FSA advice confirming that fish from the Lough is safe to eat (based on sampling in 2023) is already available online for food businesses commercially harvesting fish from the Lough and members of the public using the Lough for recreational fishing. The latest results will be used to inform the risk assessment for consumption of fish from the Lough and whether the current FSA advice requires updating. Sampling of eels commenced in May 2025 and the sampling plan for 2025/26 is currently being finalised. Mid Ulster District Council, the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute and the Lough Neagh Fisherman's Co-operative have all agreed to continue to collaborate with the FSA on next year's sampling programme. Meetings of the Interagency Blue Green Algae monitoring group have commenced for 2025/26.

4.6 National Reference Laboratories (NRLs) – Under EU Official Controls Regulations, NRLs must be designated in areas corresponding to EU Reference laboratories (EU-RLs). Under Windsor Framework arrangements, Northern Ireland NRLs must be based in an EU member state and cannot be based within Northern Ireland or GB. NRLs carry out an essential role in providing advice and support on methods for official testing to Official Labs. Following a lengthy re-procurement process in 2024, we have successfully awarded 15 out of 16 new Northern Ireland NRL contracts in EU-based labs, with the new contracts starting on 1st April 2025. The gap that remains is in a newly required area and the team is engaged with EU-RL on next steps.

4.7 Food Standards Delivery Model – Over the last year, the team has worked at pace with the 11 district councils to implement the new Food Standards Delivery Model which will enable district council officers to provide more targeted and proportionate support for businesses. Updates to district councils' Management Information Systems have been completed and all 11 district councils are now live on the system.

4.8 Nutritional Standards in Health and Social Care – In May, we hosted the annual in-person meeting of the HSC Nutritional Standards Steering Group. In addition to the regular attendees, we invited the Nutritional Standards coordinators, catering managers and dietetic managers from each of the Trusts to provide updates on their progress with implementation and share any ongoing challenges. The Nutritional Standards coordinators advised that compliance was in the range of 60-70% in staff/visitor restaurants and cafés and that 100% of products in vending machines are now compliant. Further work is underway to explore where compliance rates could be improved and as part of this, the nutritional standards co-ordinators continue to work collaboratively to support implementation. We are working on an audit tool to be used across all Trusts to ensure non-compliance issues can be identified, and support can be offered to achieve compliance.

4.9 Charity Laptop Donations – This year, we expanded our laptop donation programme to support local charities in Northern Ireland with a focus on sustainability, social value and digital inclusion. In partnership with Computers 4 Charity and Business in the Community, the FSA donated 81 refurbished laptops and 40 mobile phones to 9 charities across Northern Ireland. This will assist local charities in supporting digital delivery and improve access to services. The programme, which began in 2022, is part of the FSA's continued commitment to achieving zero waste to landfill and creating long-term social value by supporting charities with free IT equipment.

4.10 **Balmoral Show** – The Balmoral Show took place between 14th – 17th May. This year our stand featured a ‘Picnics’ theme, integrating messaging across dietary health, food hygiene and the 4Cs (cooking, cleaning, chilling, cross-contamination). The theme was strategically timed before summer when outdoor eating increases. On the Wednesday, I delivered a speech about our work in Northern Ireland at an event with the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs where the Northern Food Strategy Framework Action Plan was launched. The team had great engagement opportunities throughout the week, with several key stakeholders and members of the public visiting the stand. Our social media content supported our presence at the show, featuring a competition post to boost engagement on our Facebook page. This resulted in 38k page views in May, 650 interactions and +60 new followers (300% increase on April). We also held a competition quiz on the stand which encouraged visitors to answer three food safety questions. This resulted in 550 entries, a 15% increase on the previous year, demonstrating strong engagement with consumers.

4.11 **Engagement** – As well as the Balmoral Show, the team has undertaken a number of different engagements with stakeholders since the last Report. This has included meeting with the safefood’s Senior Management Team, the new Chief Executive of the Food Safety Authority of Ireland and the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland. I also attended an event hosted by Trade NI in the House of Commons where speakers included the First and deputy First Minister, the Secretary of State for Business and Trade and Claire Hanna MP.

5. Consultations

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

6. Forward Look

- 23rd June – Launch of the Annual Report on Food Standards and Celebration of the FSA at 25
- 24th June – Pancake Reformulation Event at CAFRE
- 17th September – FSA Board meeting in Belfast