

Chief Executive's Report to the Board

FSA 26-03-03 - Report by Katie Pettifer

Regulation for Growth updates

1. Last March, the FSA made four commitments as part of the UK Government's [Regulation Action Plan](#). Our commitments – to implement new approaches to food standards and food hygiene regulation; take on the role of competent authority for recycled plastics in Great Britain; support six inward trade audits; and to publish the UK's first safety guidance for cell-cultivated products – have now been delivered. We continue to work closely with other government departments and regulators to ensure the regulatory landscape is functioning effectively, transparently and proportionately.
2. In January, this year I attended the Regulators Council, hosted by the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, at which we discussed how regulators and Government can work in partnership to provide strong regulatory frameworks that facilitate growth. Like several of the other safety regulators present, I raised the need for legislative time for reforms, and I described our sandbox and Innovation Research Programme (below) as an example of how much impact ring-fenced funded for innovation initiatives can have.
3. In January I also [gave evidence](#) to the House of Lords Industry and Regulators Committee's inquiry into the relationship between regulators and economic growth. I emphasised that doing our core job well, maintaining trust in our food safety and standards among consumers and trading partners, was the most effective way for the FSA to support growth. I also noted that neither government nor industry is seeking greater risk-taking on food safety. However, what we can do through our various reforms is to improve the way in which we assess whether food safety standards are met, to make sure our approach is proportionate and risk-based, and that we make it as easy as possible for businesses to do the right thing.

Innovation Research Programme

4. The UK Government has enabled the FSA and FSS to build capability and capacity to support the development of innovative products such as precision fermented foods, by providing funding in 25/26 for our Market Authorisation Innovation Research Programme. That programme has delivered several products over the last few months to help businesses, consumers and wider stakeholders to better understand emerging food technologies and how they are regulated. These products were launched by the FSA and FSS at an 'Innovation Showcase' on 13 March.

- We have published new information for consumers on [precision fermentation](#), explaining what the technology is, how it is used in food, and how we regulate it. Precision Fermentation is a modern form of the traditional fermentation process where microbes make specific food ingredients. We have also published a [report on consumer insights](#)

setting out public awareness and expectations of innovative food technologies, and to identify what people want to know before they consider eating food created by these technologies. The report shows that public awareness of innovative foods remains generally low, however, trust in the UK's food safety system provides an important foundation for acceptance of these technologies.

- We have published information for applicants [placing innovative foods on the market in Great Britain \(GB\)](#) to make it easier for them to understand how their innovations will be regulated and to clarify boundaries between regulatory different regimes. This guidance will help prevent applicants from selecting the wrong regime which can lead to delays. A [novel foods authorisation process flowchart](#) and [explanatory note](#) has also been published. These outline the FSA/FSS process for the market authorisation of novel foods in GB, providing accessible intuitive information to help businesses understand application requirements.
- We have also published [supplementary scientific guidance](#) to help companies prepare robust novel food safety dossiers, by clarifying how assessors interpret key principles and highlighting common shortcomings that can cause delays. This is complemented by new [regulatory guidance](#) setting out when rules on Products of Animal Origin may apply, to make the requirements for manufacturing precision fermentation products clearer. The new guidance sits alongside the [Precision Fermentation Business Support Service](#), which provides timely practical advice on preparing good quality applications.
- A list of [FAQs](#) and a regulatory [definition of precision fermentation](#) will also help businesses understand how their products are categorised and what guidance is relevant to them.

5. The Innovation Research Programme has also conducted horizon scanning to help us understand how future technologies will shape the food system and how these should be regulated. A new [thematic report](#) which includes [emerging UK food innovations](#) provides a forward look over the next five to 15 years. Among these innovations are controlled climate agriculture, edible insects, gas fermentation and new-to-nature proteins. The report also outlines common regulatory themes relevant to these new technologies. To complement this, we will be publishing a report looking at how artificial intelligence (AI) developments may affect food safety and accelerate the use of biotechnology in food. This work will collectively help us address new challenges in protecting consumers from food safety risks.

UK-EU SPS Agreement

6. On 9th March, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs made a [written statement](#) to Parliament on progress towards the UK-EU Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Agreement, setting out her ambition for businesses to be able to benefit from the deal in mid-2027. The Government published [advice to businesses](#) on preparing for an Agreement, including a list of legislation considered to be in scope. Defra launched a 6-week [Call for Information](#) to help ensure that businesses can prepare fully for the proposed changes. This announcement is the first milestone in a plan to support businesses to get ready for an SPS Agreement over the coming months.

7. Following this announcement, the FSA has followed up with further communications to our own stakeholders including local authorities and trade associations. We have [published online guidance](#) for applicants to our Market Authorisation Service. We have also issued around 600 letters to all GB market authorisation holders and businesses who have market authorisation

applications in our system, drawing their attention to the announcement and explaining the potential implications of an SPS Agreement based on dynamic alignment.

8. Dynamic alignment with EU law would mean that an EU market authorisation would be required to place a regulated food or feed product on the market in Great Britain (subject to any exceptions being agreed during the negotiations with the EU). EU authorisations already apply in Northern Ireland. Existing GB authorisations would cease to apply. Given the proposed timescales for an Agreement, a substantial number of applications in the GB Market Authorisation Service are unlikely to progress to the point of ministerial decision before the Agreement is in place. We have agreed with the Board and with relevant ministers a set of prioritisation principles which we have applied to the current caseload, and we have communicated to applicants what this means for their applications. Further information is available in the December 2025 [Board paper](#) and [minutes](#).

Cereulide contamination in baby formula

9. Since my [last report](#), the FSA has responded to a non-routine incident involving the contamination of cereulide toxin (*Bacillus cereus*) in infant and follow-on formula. This was a wide-ranging issue affecting over 60 countries, generally involving products manufactured outside the UK. The contamination was potentially linked to arachidonic acid (ARA) oil, a commonly used base ingredient in formula products, although investigations are ongoing to establish the root cause. We have worked closely with the manufacturers and retailers, and with the UK Health Security Agency, Department of Health and Social Care, FSS, Food Safety Authority of Ireland, and other health protection bodies to ensure affected products are removed from sale and to ask parents to check whether they still have affected batches in their cupboards. We have also reassured parents through consumer alerts and news updates that the risk to infants is low and have shared NHS advice, including guidance on changing formula brands if necessary.

10. We conducted a rapid survey with parents/guardians of children aged 0-2 years in the UK to gauge levels of awareness of contamination issues with infant formula, actions taken and trust in information sources. Our survey found that 89% of respondents reported being aware of the issue, with 59% fully aware. The FSA/FSS was amongst the top three most trusted sources of information about infant formula/follow-on formula (83% very or fairly trustworthy, 53% very trustworthy), alongside the NHS website (86% very or fairly trustworthy, 62% very trustworthy) and Healthcare professionals (85% very or fairly trustworthy, 56% very trustworthy).

Evolving our incident response and preparing for future disruption

11. Following the *E. coli* STEC and *Listeria monocytogenes* outbreaks in 2024, the FSA have sought to improve communications with industry during complex food supply chain incidents. We have been working closely with the Institute for Grocery Distribution (IGD) on a set of working principles to improve data sharing and facilitating a more coordinated response across stakeholders. We will be trialling the new approach in the months ahead.

12. On incidents and resilience more generally, we are continuing work internally and with Government partners to improve our prevention and response frameworks and improve our preparedness for serious food system disruption. We are also working across Government and with industry through our Food Industry Liaison Group (FILG), to monitor for any potential food safety issues that might arise as a result of the conflict in the Middle East.

Research on raw pet food

13. Last month we published the findings of a raw pet food [survey](#), which involved testing 380 raw dog and cat food products bought between March 2023 and February 2024 from online and retail stores. The laboratory testing carried out by the UK Health Security Agency looked for microbiological and antimicrobial resistance (AMR) contamination.

14. The survey found that:

- 35% contained harmful bacteria including Salmonella, Campylobacter and E. coli that can cause illness in people
- 29% failed to meet UK legal safety standards
- 20% of all samples was found to contain E. coli with resistance to penicillin and other antibiotics.
- No resistance to carbapenem antibiotics was detected (carbapenems are known as a 'last resort' antibiotic used in human treatment).

15. These findings have provided valuable evidence on the potential risks associated with these types of products. Where issues were identified, the FSA worked with local authorities to address them. We have also used the publication to reinforce that following simple hygiene practices when storing, defrosting, handling and preparing these products can reduce the risk of illness to pet owners and their families. There has been a positive reaction to our communications on the findings of the survey and the public health messaging that accompanied it.

Engagement

16. I have started this year with my usual programme of engagements with counterparts across government, the devolved administrations, industry, and the third sector.

17. In addition to the Regulators' Council referenced above, I have met with safety regulator counterparts via the informal CEOs of Safety Regulators network. Across government, I have had regular meetings with senior officials at the Department for Business and Trade, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department of Health and Social Care, UK Health Security Agency, the Environment Agency, and the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency. I have also engaged in regular Cross-Whitehall discussions on the UK-EU SPS Agreement.

18. As usual, I have met regularly with my counterpart Geoff Ogle at FSS, and Geoff and I went to Dublin in January for a trilateral meeting with the Chief Executive of the Food Safety Authority of Ireland, Greg Dempsey.

19. I have met with a range of Welsh Government stakeholders, including with Andrew Goodall (Permanent Secretary), Tracey Burke (Director General for Local Government, Housing, Climate Change, and Rural Affairs), Jacqueline Totterdell (Chief Executive of NHS Wales and Director General for Health, Social Care and Early Years) and Tracey Cooper (Chief Executive, Public Health Wales).

20. In February, I took part in a panel discussion at the 2026 Chartered Institute of Environmental Health's 'Year Ahead' conference, organised in partnership with the Chartered

Trading Standards Institute. The panel explored the relationship between regulation and successful economic growth. With over 500 attendees at the conference, it was an opportunity to speak both environmental health and trading standards professionals about the importance of an effective and trusted regulatory regime, and to discuss our proposed future of food regulation programme.

21. Over the past few months I have met various third sector stakeholders, including representatives from Bite Back, the Food Foundation and WRAP, and several consumer organisations via our quarterly Consumer Stakeholder Forum.

22. I have also met with a broad range of industry representatives. This has included my bi-annual meeting with representatives from the meat industry, as well as meetings with the Chief Executives of the Food and Drink Federation, Dairy UK, the Provision Trades Federation, and the Institute for Grocery Distribution. I attended the annual City Food Lecture as a guest of sponsor ABP, and I met representatives from Diageo to discuss our Market Authorisation Service. Earlier this month, I also spoke at the Institute for Grocery Distribution's Technical Leaders' Forum which convened technical directors from a broad range of major retailers and manufacturers.