FSA Board welcomes progress made on arrangements for the end of the EU Transition period

On Wednesday, 2 December 2020, Director of Policy Rebecca Sudworth, led the final update to the Board on the FSA's preparations for the end of the EU Transition Period.

Rebecca said the FSA has been continuing to focus on support for businesses, making sure stakeholders know what they need to do in key areas of FSA responsibility. She said that the FSA has also continued to work across government and all UK nations to support other areas of preparation.

FSA Deputy Director Catherine Bowles outlined the latest progress in preparing our approach to authorising new food products for sale - this new process has been tested and is ready to start on 1 January 2020. Meanwhile, incidents handling and the National Food Crime Unit are also ready to implement information sharing systems across all four nations, alongside improved health and ID marks. The outstanding challenges highlighted were around the Northern Ireland Protocol and other aspects linked to ongoing trade negotiations.

Chief Executive Emily Miles warned that despite extensive preparations there would inevitably be issues that the FSA will not have been able to prepare for, given the nature of an overnight “Big Bang” change to the UK’s entire economic model. The FSA’s agility in January would therefore be as important as its preparations have been up until now.

The discussion covered a range of issues around readiness and risk, including the challenges linked to Northern Ireland imports and exports, divergence on exports, incoming checks on high-risk food and feed, and contingency for official controls.

Chair Heather Hancock summarised:

“We recognise the demands that the situation is placing on the FSA, and the Board appreciates the effort and commitment that’s been shown. I would like to signal the Board’s confidence in our leadership team and in our staff to do their upmost to make what is going to be a challenging period as trouble free as possible.”

The Board were also updated on, and approved, work on the food allergy safety scheme and Precautionary Allergen Labelling (PAL). Members highlighted the importance of considering all available options for a scheme, including the possibility of including allergen management in the existing Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS).

This was the chair’s final Board meeting, before standing down at the end of January 2021, having been elected the master of St John’s College, Cambridge.

Heather, who joined the FSA Board in 2015, highlighted how the department has put high calibre and independent science back at its heart, put the NFCU on a proper footing, and made
advances in animal welfare and the reshaping of the regulatory regime.

The Chair particularly welcomed the way that openness and transparency had been embedded in the FSA’s post-Brexit systems, and highlighted extensive work carried out to support and protect those with food allergies and intolerance.

She said:

“\textbf{I am proud that as I leave the FSA, it is enjoying its highest and sustained levels of public trust. As Chair, I have valued and benefited from the wisdom and style the board brings to discharging our statutory purposes and the commitment, high standards and hard work of our staff has never been in doubt I would also like to pay tribute to the willingness of industry, Local Authorities and NGOs to engage and to help shape outcomes that serve consumers better.}”

A full video of the Board meeting is available to view now.

The FSA Business Committee will meet on Tuesday 8 December 2020. Full agenda and papers are available to view now on the Board meeting section of our website. You can \textbf{register to watch the meeting online}. 