

FSA Board backs new annual report into ‘the state of the nation’s plate’

An annual report on food standards will be launched in 2022.

The report, to be written jointly with Food Standards Scotland (FSS), will provide an opportunity for the FSA and FSS to set out ‘the state of the nation’s plate’, using a wide range of evidence to examine whether food standards in the UK are being maintained, are falling, or improving. It will cover issues of particular or developing interest to consumers.

FSA Chair Professor Susan Jebb expressed her hope that it becomes a “go-to report for anyone wanting to get a sense of food standards in the UK”.

Another major item on the agenda was an update on the FSA’s programme to modernise the way its inspectors carry out ‘official controls’ in meat plants and other primary production establishments, following a [recent public consultation](#).

Board members emphasised the need to be sensitive to how the changes would affect smaller abattoirs as well as large ones; and the need to work closely with frontline staff, such as meat hygiene inspectors, in designing changes. They also welcomed the proactive engagement with consumer groups to explain and discuss the proposed changes and to seek their views.

The Chair noted that evidence from pilot projects was an important part of the development process and she hoped that findings from this work would be shared. The Chair reiterated that the changes, including greater use of technology, were primarily designed to enhance our ability to keep food safe.

The Board also received an update on genome editing (GE), ahead of the government’s response to a Defra consultation on the regulation of genetic technologies. Members agreed that change was needed in this regulatory sphere and that gene edited foods should be authorised by the food safety regulator. Board members emphasised the importance for the FSA, Defra and others to explain the science and to understand public opinion, to ensure trust in food remains strong.

Chair Susan Jebb said:

“It is up to us at the FSA to provide an excellent evidence base to inform people about GE technologies and represent their interests.”

Elsewhere in the agenda, FSA Chief Executive Emily Miles provided an update following the government’s [announcement](#) on import controls, published a day earlier. Members heard that while the delay to introducing pre-notification of EU imports until 1 January 2022 did leave a gap in the FSA surveillance toolkit, existing mitigations on data analysis and strategic surveillance helped to some extent, and overall the risk to consumers from EU food and feed remained low.

The Board also welcomed the publication of the National Food Strategy and its recommendations for the FSA, but cautioned that some of those recommendations would require legislative powers and resources which the FSA did not currently have. The Chair concluded that the forthcoming [food White Paper from Defra](#) was a real opportunity and the FSA wanted to be involved in that conversation as the government department that “always puts food first”.

A recording of the meeting, along with the full agenda and papers, are available on the [Board pages of our website](#).

Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the FSA Board will be on 8 December 2021.