

Tim Bennett
Interim Chair
Food Standards Agency
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11 March 2016

Dear Tim

ADVICE FROM THE WELSH FOOD ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO THE BOARD OF THE FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY ON ISSUES ADDRESSED BY THE COMMITTEE: MARCH 2016

The key role of the Food Advisory Committees is to advise the Board of the Food Standards Agency. On 10 March, the Welsh Food Advisory Committee (WFAC) discussed the following issues that will be discussed by the Board:-

- FSA Innovation Plan
- Campylobacter Programme: Update on Progress and Next Steps
- Stow project Phase 2 – Sustainable Funding Model Project Scope

The Committee considered each paper that will be put to the Board next week. On behalf of the Committee, I am grateful to Rod Ainsworth, Chris Harvey, Kevin Hargin, Bill Stow and Richard Collier for joining us by videoconference to present their papers and for answering questions from members.

FSA Innovation Plan

WFAC members considered the paper which outlines several streams of work which define the FSA's approach to using and exploiting innovation and new technologies, and explains the proposed approach taken in the development of the FSA's Innovation Plan.

In welcoming the Plan, members made the following observations:-

- that it recognised that the Innovation Plan had been developed in response to a Westminster initiative (the Westminster Government Productivity Plan) and the FSA's unique position in this regard as both a Government department and a regulator;
- that it was of the view that the Innovation Plan has presented the opportunity for the FSA to provide evidence to government, more widely and to consumers the forward-looking approach that the FSA is taking to innovation and new technologies;
- that it recognised that the FSA has liaised with other government departments and influenced, in a positive way, their responses;
- that the FSA's Innovation Plan respects a clear statement of approach, welcomed by stakeholders, which will be used to support delivery of the FSA's Strategic Plan to 2020;
- that in recognition of some of the responses to the consultation in relation to the need to help and support small businesses, that it welcomed that this would be an area of particular focus in the FSA's Regulating Our Future programme of work; and
- that it felt that the early establishment of the proposed expert Committee on Innovation in the Food Chain, was very important in promoting the consumer's voice in food sector innovation, which, otherwise, ran the risk of being unduly industry driven.

The WFAC concluded its considerations by supporting the FSA's approach to innovation and new technologies.

Campylobacter Programme: Update on progress and Next Steps

Members considered the paper which provides an update on progress being made in the Campylobacter reduction campaign and outlines proposals for the next phase of work to be undertaken.

The WFAC made the following points:-

- that it welcomed the positive achievements made to date in the Campylobacter reduction campaign, and in particular, the FSA's confidence that the 10% target will be met by the industry as a whole by 2016;

- that it was important that all retailers should commit to regular and synchronous publishing of their Campylobacter data and, in this respect, it welcomed the work being undertaken to seek this undertaking;
- that it noted that it had been proposed that independent quality control of the information coming from the retailers was vital and noted further that the intention appeared to be to entrust this activity to an independent third party rather than use directly FSA and Public Health England facilities
- that it noted the FSA's intention of using publicity (essentially highlighting those retailers which are unwilling to share their data), as the means of making sure that this happened, rather than, for example, instituting further FSA led surveys or seeking some sort of enforceable legal framework;
- that it welcomed the growing list of interventions being developed and implemented in different combinations by different supply chains from farm to retail;
- that it supported proposals to focus on the contribution that smaller independent producers should make to reducing burden of foodborne illness related to Campylobacter; and

that it questioned whether progress would be more intelligibly measured by using the actual numbers of laboratory confirmed cases reported to public health authorities rather than presenting information to the public based on modelled numbers of cases.

The WFAC had discussed in particular detail the need to ensure a situation where there is a high degree of transparency, on the part of the retailers regarding the levels of Campylobacter found in chicken. In this respect, the WFAC was concerned that the data being published by industry remained robust. WFAC was reassured to learn of proposals to submit the data to an independent body for scrutiny.

Subject to the need to put in place such a mechanism of quality control to ensure the validity of data from industry, the WFAC concluded that it was content with the proposals that the Board is being asked to adopt.

Stow Project Phase 2 – Sustainable Funding Model Project Scope

Members considered the paper which set out, subject to the successful conclusion of phase 1 (meat officials controls discount reform), the scope for

phase 2 of the programme focussing on developing a sustainable funding model for meat official controls. In its considerations of the overall objective, the WFAC suggested an alternative description for the overall purpose of the project as - to develop a sustainable funding model which takes account of the following:-

- agreement on the principles which should underpin the sustainable funding model;
- consideration of the outcomes of the FSA's review of existing regulations and international best practice; and
- an assessment of technological advancements.

The WFAC discussed the terms of reference for Phase 2 of the Steering Group on Meat Charging. In terms of membership of the group, the WFAC noted, with concern, that the FSA has been unsuccessful, to date, in securing both a consumer representative member and a representative of either of the Farmers' Union of Wales, the National Farming Union Cymru or Hybu Cig Cymru (Meat Promotion Wales). In this respect, the WFAC appreciated the efforts being made to address this.

Subject to the observations above, the WFAC welcomed and appreciated the opportunity to consider the proposed scope of phase 2 and expressed its appreciation of the work that this had required, particularly on the part of the project board's independent chair. It noted the items that the Board would be asked to agree and had no difficulty overall with these.

Other Matters

In commenting on my written report, I informed members that the FSA would be consulting on advice for food businesses and local authority enforcement officers on the safe preparation and service of burgers that are served pink or less than thoroughly cooked. I informed the WFAC that this consultation was imminent and would be supplemented by an update report that would be provided, by the Chief Executive, at next week's meeting of the Board.

The WFAC was pleased to receive a report from the Director in Wales which informed members of a number of issues specifically pertaining to Wales including the recent publication of a report for the National Assembly for Wales on the review of the Appeals System of the Statutory Food Hygiene Rating Scheme in Wales, and work underway to map and model an approach to support local authorities in Wales in tackling food fraud in a way which protects consumers and complements the establishment of the National Food Crime Unit. The WFAC congratulated the FSA in Wales on the launch of a new on-line

interactive website developed to support the promotion of good for hygiene practices and healthier eating in primary school aged children across Wales. The WFAC also commented favourably on the recent improvements made to the FSA's website enabling consumers to report more easily a food related problem.

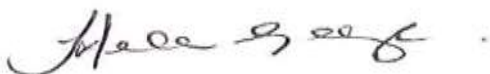
The WFAC enquired about the current position in relation to the FSA's recommendation in 2014 for the mandatory fortification of bread or flour with folic acid, to reduce the risk of neural tube defects in foetuses. Members were aware of recent progress being made with this in Scotland. Recognising that, in Wales, this policy area is now the responsibility of the Welsh Government, I, nevertheless, in view of the personal interest of certain WFAC members, undertook to seek an update from Welsh Government and to report that back to the Committee for their information.

You will be aware that the Board will receive the final report for the FSA Triennial Review of its six Scientific Advisory Committees (SACs) as this report will need clearance from the Cabinet Office Minister prior to its publication. If the report is published before next week's open Board meeting, I will circulate it to WFAC members and provide an oral update as necessary.

The Committee's discussions on the above issues were in open session and, in line with the views of the WFAC regarding the openness and transparency of its advice to the Board, it is my intention that this advice will be published.

I am copying this letter to the Board Secretariat and to the Chief Executive.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Roland Salmon', followed by a period.

pp Dr Roland Salmon (authorised by and signed in his absence)