
REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND FOOD ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Report by Dr Henrietta Campbell, Chairman of the Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee (NIFAC).

1 SUMMARY

1.1 This report from the NIFAC Chair reports on the activity of the Committee in Northern Ireland for the period **September 2014 to May 2016**.

1.2 The Board is invited to:

- **Note:** progress made during this period.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 NIFAC acts as an advisory body to the Food Standards Agency. It is chaired by the Northern Ireland Board member and its role is to advise the FSA on food safety and standards issues, with particular emphasis to Northern Ireland. NIFAC members provide a wide range of expertise, experience and practical knowledge to the FSA. The Committee works closely with the Food Standards Agency both in Northern Ireland and beyond and supports the FSA's values of:

- putting the consumer first;
- openness and transparency;
- science and evidence-based;
- acting independently; and
- enforcing food law fairly.

2.2 NIFAC acts as an advisory body to the Agency. Its role is to:

- Offer information and advice on issues relating to the protection of public health in Northern Ireland in relation to food, taking into account the advice of the independent advisory committees working in the food and feed safety and standards, and diet and nutrition areas, focussing in particular on Northern Ireland circumstances.
- Consider the FSA Board's proposals for activities from a Northern Ireland perspective and offer advice on particular Northern Ireland food safety and standards priorities.

Membership of the Committee

2.3 The Committee has 8 members, 1 of whom is also an FSA Board member and acts as Chair of the Committee. The list of Committee members is shown at Annexe A.

2.4 The operating budget expenditure for 2013/14 and the estimated budget

expenditure for 2014/15 are shown in Annexe B.

2.5 The dates of meetings are shown in Annexe C.

3 STRATEGIC AIMS

3.1 NIFAC is committed to working in an open and transparent way by:

- holding public meetings;
- listening to the views of Northern Ireland stakeholders;
- supporting the FSA at public events and stakeholder meetings;
- maintaining an efficient process for agenda planning involving the early identification of subjects with Northern Ireland-specific interests; and
- producing thorough and well considered advice which it may publish independently.

4 DISCUSSION

Retrospective review – September 2014 to May 2016

4.1 Since the Board's last visit to Belfast in September 2014, NIFAC has considered and agreed advice and comments on the areas listed in the table below:

NIFAC Open Meeting	Agenda Items
3 September 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FSA Nutrition Annual Update: Scotland and Northern Ireland. • Steering Group on Meat Charging: Meat Official Controls Discount Reform. • Future Strategy for FSA Science. • GACS Annual Report.
28 October 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update on Strengthening FSA Capability, Systems and Relationships following the Horsemeat Incident. • Strategy 2015-20. • Campylobacter Conference. • Our Approach to "Risky" Foods.
21 January 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulatory Strategy. • Burgers Served Rare In Food Service Outlets – An Application Of The Framework For Our Approach To "Risky" Foods. • Update on Strengthening FSA Capability, Systems and Relationships following the Horsemeat Incident.
9 March 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FHRS Update. • National Diet and Nutrition Survey. • UK Food Surveillance System.

8 July 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging with Consumers. • Update on FSA Review of Controls for Raw Drinking Milk. • Update on Reducing Campylobacter. • FSA Group Plan: Northern Ireland Annexe.
2 September 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress Update on Development of the National Food Crime Unit and Other Key Recommendations of the Post Horsemeat Reviews. • Development of the framework for controls relating to foods where risks per serving are significant, and its further application to burgers served rare in catering outlets. • Update on European Commission's Amendments to the TSE Regulations. • Stow Project - phase 2.
11 November 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FSA Science, Evidence and Information Strategy 2015-20 Delivery Plan. • Annual Report and Forward Look from the General Advisory Committee on Science. • Adulteration of Food – Thresholds for Action and for Reporting.
20 January 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Data Driven FSA. • UK Local Authority Food Law Enforcement Annual Report 2014/15. • Delivering the Food Standards Agency's Regulatory Strategy.
9 March 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FSA Innovation Plan • Stow Project Phase 2 – Sustainable Funding Model Project Scope. • Campylobacter Reduction: Update On Progress and Next Steps.
11 May 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Food Crime Unit. • Consumer Protection Team, Local Update. • Our Food Futures. • Regulating our Future.

4.2 The following are examples of how the Committee's advice and comments on some of the items considered over this period have effectively contributed to FSA policy:

FSA Science Strategy

4.3 NIFAC have input into the process for the development of the Future Strategy for FSA Science as well as commenting on the FSA Science, Evidence and Information Strategy 2015-20 Delivery Plan. The Strategy was discussed in September 2014 and the delivery plan at the open meeting of November 2015.

4.4 In discussing the Future Strategy for FSA Science, NIFAC were delighted to see the early signs of a forward looking and energetic approach to the

development of a science strategy and emphasised the importance of working in partnership with academia to share knowledge. On the Delivery Plan, NIFAC urged that the emphasis on consumer engagement could be strengthened by referencing how the FSA intends to engage with consumers as this is a highly valued feature of the FSA's work in this area.

'Risky' Foods

- 4.5 The FSA's approach to 'Risky' foods has been discussed at several intervals throughout the period. In October 2014, NIFAC welcomed a sustained, analytical look at how risk is defined, observing that where such a methodology is used in tandem with the science strategy, one should help to inform the other.
- 4.6 In January 2015, NIFAC considered the Board's paper on Burgers Served Rare In Food Service Outlets. NIFAC acknowledged the generally good hygiene practices of many of the establishments offering burgers cooked rare but urged engagement with consumers to ensure the message is communicated that there are significant differences in risk between rare minced beef products and contingent pieces of beef served rare. In September 2015, NIFAC discussed the development of the framework for controls relating to foods where risks per serving are significant, and its further application to burgers served rare in catering outlets. NIFAC noted the consumer research suggesting that informed consumer choice does influence decision making on eating rare burgers, corroborating NIFAC's support for consumer engagement on the issue.

Regulatory Strategy

- 4.7 NIFAC have twice addressed the FSA's Regulatory Strategy over the period. Firstly, in January 2015 where a paper on Developing The Future Regulatory Strategy was discussed and again in January 2016 with a paper on Delivering the Food Standards Agency's Regulatory Strategy.
- 4.8 On the development of the strategy, NIFAC welcomed the collaborative approach with consumers, while cautioning about the maintenance of the science and evidence base for decision making. They also welcomed the move to risk based assessment, provided the FSA can justify the regime used to inspect premises given earned recognition in the event of an incident.
- 4.9 In addressing the delivery of the regulatory strategy NIFAC also welcomed the assurances that there would be further consumer engagement as well as the focus on outcomes rather than process.

FSA Strategic Plan and the Northern Ireland Group Plan

- 4.10 NIFAC have input into the development of the Strategic plan 2015-2020 and various points throughout the period. In March 2015, NIFAC gave their consideration to a Board paper on the Strategic Plan 2015-2020. The Committee welcomed and supported the paper, which was subsequently

agreed by the FSA Board, suggesting areas that should be included within a Northern Ireland Annex.

- 4.11 On 6 May 2015, NIFAC attended a workshop to develop the FSA in NI Strategic Plan. Members facilitated round table discussions at the event as well as contributing their own questions and comments arising from the presentations delivered at the workshop.
- 4.12 Following this event, NIFAC discussed the resulting Annex at their Open meeting of 7 July 2015. Members were impressed with the scale and range of activities that the FSA in NI had committed to undertake over the coming years and urged concerted consideration of how best to source reliable information from stakeholder engagement given the varied dynamic of the relationship that the FSA has with many of its stakeholders.

Update on European Commission's Amendments to the TSE Regulations

- 4.13 Previously, in 2011, when the Board considered a proposal to relax certain provisions of the feed ban, NIFAC noted that consumer confidence was not with the proposals and urged that their concerns should not be dismissed. NIFAC recommended consumer engagement, rather than simply consumer information to address the issue.
- 4.14 When the subject returned to the Board in September 2015 in light of the European Commission's amendments to the TSE Regulations, NIFAC considered the paper ahead of the Board meeting and noted that the FSA, through citizens' fora, has made substantial efforts to engage with consumers over the issue and were reassured that the general feedback from these events showed that there is a trust that the FSA will be able to act swiftly in the event of the discovery of TSE in livestock.

Visits to Fane Valley and CAFRE

- 4.15 NIFAC have engaged with key FSA Stakeholders over the period with visits to Fane Valley's Omagh feed mill in November 2015, organised by Fane Valley and representatives of the Northern Ireland Grain Trade Association (NIGTA) and also to the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise's (CAFRE's) new innovation centre at their Loughry Campus in March 2016.
- 4.16 Fane Valley is one of the largest feed manufacturers in Northern Ireland, producing dairy, beef, sheep, pig and poultry feeds. NIFAC members were given a tour of the mill and on-site laboratory facilities as well as hearing about Fane Valley's Quality Systems and the 'Food Fortress' scheme developed in partnership with the Queen's University Institute for Global Food Security.
- 4.17 CAFRE's Innovation centre is an extremely impressive facility, providing support and advice to students, entrepreneurs and businesses to innovate and formulate products, giving access to a range of equipment and technologies for the formulation, preparation, testing and packaging of food to prepare it for the market. During the visit, NIFAC received a presentation on the work of the

College and the Innovation Centre as well as a tour of the facilities and a demonstration of the sensory testing of products carried out at the college.

Joint meeting with the Food Safety Consultative Council

- 4.18 NIFAC's meeting on the 27th May was held as a joint session with the Food Safety Consultative Council (FSCC), an advisory body to the Food Safety Authority of Ireland. This was a useful and highly informative meeting and was an opportunity to share information about the background and roles of each committee and the strategic priorities of each organisation. This collaboration will be of mutual benefit, allowing for the sharing of information and experience around mutual issues as well as engendering a collaborative approach to issues that arise across the UK's only land border.

Nutrition

- 4.19 Over the period, NIFAC have engaged in various activities in support of the FSA in NI's responsibility for dietary health. At their meeting in September 2014, NIFAC received a presentation giving an update on the work being done around nutrition by the FSA in Northern Ireland and Scotland where the FSA retained responsibility for dietary health within their remit. In this discussion, NIFAC expressed a view that the FSA Strategy 2015 – 2020 should continue to support nutrition and recognise that the FSA in NI is the lead in working with the food industry to encourage reduction of levels of saturated fat, salt, sugar and calories in food products. This work has since found support through its inclusion within the Northern Ireland Annex to the Group Plan.
- 4.20 On 24 September 2015, NIFAC members facilitated the discussions with the delegates at the Launch of MenuCal (an online tool to help businesses calculate the calorie and allergen content of their food), at the Better Choice Better Business conference held at the Stormont Hotel, Belfast. The conference was hosted jointly with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and hosted over 130 attendees from a wide range of key stakeholders representing the food industry, the environmental health community and health professionals. Members lead discussions around the content of the presentations delivered at the event, submitting questions on behalf of their respective tables and generating further discussions amongst those present. The event was one of the largest in recent years and feedback has been exceptionally positive.
- 4.21 On 9 March 2015, NIFAC received an update on the findings of the National Diet and Nutrition Survey. This was the first time a collated four year report was made available for the Northern Ireland population. NIFAC noted that the outcomes of the survey showed some worrying trends when compared with the results for the rest of the UK, emphasising the importance of this work remaining a priority of the FSA in NI and giving impetus to work being done to improve dietary health. NIFAC Also noted that however poor the results, outcomes can be even worse for those on lower incomes, giving added weight to the importance of the work carried out by the FSA in NI around food poverty.

5 NEW APPOINTMENTS TO NIFAC

5.1 Since September 2014, there have been two new appointments to NIFAC:

Elizabeth Mitchell

5.2 As a medical practitioner, Dr Mitchell's career in public health spans over 30 years and has covered all three domains of public health. She has worked at a senior level in the public sector for 24 of those years including as the nominated contact in DHSSPS for the Food Standards Agency as Deputy Chief Medical Officer (Public Health), DHSSPS. Since January 2014, she has been on secondment to the Institute of Public Health in Ireland (IPH) as a Consultant in Public Health Medicine.

5.3 She has a long-standing interest in food and health. Her involvement over the years has ranged from food safety to nutrition policy and, most recently, to tackling the challenge of food poverty. She has expertise in the field of communicable disease control and epidemiology, with a particular interest in foodborne disease. Currently, Dr Mitchell is a member of the Belfast Food Network (BFN) Advisory Committee and convener/chair of the BFN food poverty and health working group.

Brian Smyth

5.4 Dr Brian Smyth was Director and Consultant Epidemiologist of the Health Protection Agency Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre in Northern Ireland from 1999 to 2009. For 20 years he authored a monthly health protection epidemiological bulletin describing local trends. Being a part of that organisation has enabled him to gain an insight into the national interface between the HPA, Defra and the FSA.

5.5 He worked as a consultant in health protection by the Public Health Agency until he retired in May 2014. He had been a member of the Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee from 1 August 2010 to 31 July 2015 before successfully reapplying. His contribution to the Committee over the course of his tenure continues to be invaluable.

6 FORWARD WORK PLAN

6.1 The agendas for NIFAC's meetings will continue to be reflective of issues being discussed by the Board with attention to any possible areas which may have a special relevance to Northern Ireland. As Chair of NIFAC, the Board member for Northern Ireland will provide reports of the Committee's discussions on these topics at the subsequent Board meetings.

6.2 Additionally, NIFAC will continue to self-task in areas deemed to be of particular relevance within Northern Ireland. These issues will be discussed alongside those inspired by the Board's agenda and, where appropriate, advice

and comments on these items will also be included in the Chair's regular reports to the Board.

ANNEXE A

NIFAC Membership

Since September 2014 NIFAC has lost one member. Dr Sydney Neill sadly passed away on 7 November 2014 after a period of illness. He was 66.

Sydney had been a valued member of the Committee bringing great experience and reasoned, methodical analysis to NIFAC's scrutiny of FSA policy during his time as a member and is sadly missed by all who knew him.

The current membership of the Committee is as follows:

1. **Dr. Henrietta Campbell** – Chair of NIFAC and Board member for Northern Ireland (Term of appointment ends 31 August 2016)
2. **Mr. David Lindsay**
(Second Term of appointment ends 31 July 2016)
3. **Mr Aodhan O'Donnell**
(First Term of appointment ends 31 July 2017)
4. **Mr Phelim O'Neill**
(First Term of appointment ends 31 July 2017)
5. **Dr. Brian Smyth**
(First term of appointment ends 31 July 2017)
6. **Mr. Colin Reid**
(Second term of appointment ends 16 February 2018)
7. **Dr. Elizabeth Mitchell**
(First term of appointment ends 31 July 2018)
8. **Dr. Christine Kennedy**
(Second Term of appointment ends 31 July 2018)

ANNEXE B

Finances

	Expenditure £ (thousands)	
	2014/2015	2015/2016
Members' Remuneration	34.2	29.9
NIFAC Secretariat Staff Costs	24.5	24.5
Conference costs – includes: -NIFAC sub group costs -Advertising meeting costs -Conference/Event costs -NIFAC meeting costs (accommodation, room hire, sound technician and equipment hire costs)	0.1	2.2
Travel and subsistence costs	Included in Members' Remuneration	
NIFAC appointment process costs	2.2	3
TOTAL COSTS	61	59.6

ANNEXE C

Meeting Dates and Locations

2016

- 11 May
- 6 July
- 14 September
- 16 November