

Annual Report from the Chairman of the Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee

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Introduction

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 on Northern Ireland. NIFAC members provide a wide range of expertise, experience and practical knowledge to the FSA. All members are recruited through open Public Appointment style competition and are appointed by the Minister for Health in the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Committee works closely with the Food Standards Agency both in Northern Ireland and beyond and supports the FSA's strategic outcomes:
 - Food is safe.
 - Food is what it says it is.
 - Consumers can make informed choices about what to eat.
 - Consumers have access to an affordable healthy diet, now and in the future.
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:

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. There is a wide range of expertise among the membership of NIFAC from members with backgrounds in farming and agriculture; social science; consumer engagement and representation; the meat industry and agri-food journalism; public health; nutrition policy; communicable disease control and epidemiology; and public and media relations. This experience is brought to the benefit of NIFAC discussions.

4. The operating budget expenditure for 2016/17 and the estimated budget expenditure for 2017/18 are shown in Annexe B.
5. The dates of meetings are shown in Annexe C.

Strategic Aims

6. 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.

Retrospective review – May 2016 to September 2017:

7. Since the Board’s last visit to Belfast in May 2016, NIFAC has considered and agreed advice and comments on the areas listed in the table below:

| NIFAC Open Meeting | Agenda Items |
|---------------------------|--|
| 6 July 16 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update on development of a framework for assessment of foods which may present an increased likelihood of harm & An update on burgers served less than thoroughly cooked in food service outlets. • Antimicrobial resistance. • Update from the FSA in NI Operational Policy and Delivery Team. • Incidents and Resilience Annual Report 2015/16. • Eatwell Plate Refresh. |
| 12 September 16 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animal Welfare. • Regulating Our Future Programme Update. • Program for Government. • The Consumer Interest in the Food System. • Update from FSA in NI Standards and Dietary Health. |
| 16 November 16 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Of The National Food Crime Unit. • FSA Science: Retrospective Update And Prospective Priorities. • Food And Feed Surveillance. • Developing Proportionate Controls For Risky Foods. • FSA in NI Communications. |

| | |
|------------|---|
| 8 March 17 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regulating Our Future Update.• Stow Phase 2 Project.• Food Allergy and Intolerance Programme.• Dietary Health Update. |
| 14 June 17 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chemical Contaminants Principles.• Developing Our Approach to Identifying Risks and Issues Across the Food System.• Food and You a consumer trends survey on food-safety behaviour. |

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

Rare Burgers and 'Risky' Foods.

9. The FSA's approach to 'Risky' foods has been discussed at several intervals throughout the period as well as previously. In July 2016 NIFAC highlighted the communications challenge presented by ensuring that consumers are apprised of the risks involved variously by preparing burgers in the home, or eating them in restaurants with or without advisory statements about their burgers and measures in place to minimise risks. The Committee also recommended consideration of the challenges posed by such food when ordered remotely, acknowledging this is currently not a common feature of establishments that cater for customers seeking burgers less than thoroughly cooked. In November 16, NIFAC welcomed the paper on Developing Proportionate Controls For Risky Foods as presenting a very good and logical analysis of a complex subject.

Regulating Our Future

10. NIFAC has also discussed Regulating Our Future, firstly in September 2016 and then again in March 2017. In September 2016, NIFAC praised the efficacy of the Hothouse events, with the first results showing promise in identifying where improvements in the regulatory system can be made and also emphasised the risks involved in ensuring resource availability for what is a significant change in model for the FSA. In March 2017, NIFAC welcomed the inclusion of this programme among the FSA's strategic priorities as the scale of the task will require substantial resource and making sure that this is available will be key.

Review Of The National Food Crime Unit

11. In November 2016, NIFAC considered the Board paper on the review of the National Food Crime unit. Although NIFAC considered it to be a very comprehensive paper and the Committee agreed with its recommendations, it was considered that there was however a lack of detail for NI. Committee members recommended looking to the collaborative model, which exists in the Republic of Ireland, as one that could be informative for how such a Unit could

operate effectively in NI and is similar to the approach to food crime taken by staff in the FSA's NI office currently.

Food Allergy and Intolerance Programme

12. In March 2017, NIFAC discussed the Food Allergy and Intolerance Programme. NIFAC members enjoyed the paper and had found many of the research findings to be very interesting but were disappointed not to see Menucal referred to in the paper as a significant tool for businesses to ensure that appropriate allergy information can be provided to consumers. S&DH Team continue to liaise with the devolved administrations regarding out of home strategies.

Chemical Contaminants Strategy

13. In June 2017, NIFAC members advised there was much to be learned from work being done in this area of chemical contaminants on the island of Ireland, such as the work of the Institute of Global Food Security. They also expressed concern about progress in this area both during and after the EU exit process. Members were concerned about the level of engagement at a regional level with both stakeholders in the devolved regions and with industry.

Nutrition

14. Northern Ireland has a unique position in the FSA as the only jurisdiction where the organisation has a remit for nutrition. NIFAC assisted with administration of the FSA in NI's Sugar Reduction Industry Event held on 27th June in Mossley Mill, Newtownabbey. There was an exceptional line up of experts in the field of sugar reduction and reformulation in attendance with case studies and industry experts presenting the latest evidence and joining a panel for an 'ask the expert' Q&A session, which I hosted. The event included Networking breaks a range of exhibitors displaying products and services.

Engagement with stakeholders

15. As well as the engagement with consumers and stakeholders that NIFAC has carried out through attendance at the Sugar Reduction Industry Event, NIFAC has also held several of its meetings to coincide with visits to stakeholder organisations across Northern Ireland.

Dale Farm

16. In March 2017, NIFAC visited Dale Farm's Dunman Creamery where Dale Farm produce their Dromona Cheddar products. This was a useful and informative visit, giving Committee members an insight into the processes within a large scale cheese production facility and key factors which can impact the industry as well as the issues in the wider economic environment likely to affect the sector.

Institute for Global Food Security

17. In April 2017, NIFAC held a strategic meeting at Queen's University following presentations on the work of the Institute for Global Food Security (IGFS) from

IGFS Director Nigel Scollan and on Queen's Distance Learning Programme from Dr Susanne Boyd and Stephane Durand. This was followed by a tour of the IGFS Labs. This was a very enlightening visit. The presentations emphasised the urgency around food security, giving a stark image of the predicted challenges of the next 50 years. The tour, conducted by Terry McGrath, a Research Fellow with the School of Biological Sciences, demonstrated the huge technological leaps being made at Queen's in testing and ensuring product authenticity and I have written to them to express the Committee's appreciation for their efforts to accommodate NIFAC's visit and to help inform members of the work of the institute.

Lough Neagh Eel Fisherman's Cooperative

18. Our September meeting, which is yet to take place at time of writing, is being held at the offices of the Lough Neagh Eel Fisherman's Cooperative in Toome and will follow a tour of the fishery's processes and facilities and presentations on the operation of the eel fishery and anticipated future challenges for this economically significant sector. Details of this visit are included in the report from this NIFAC meeting, which is also in in these papers.

Forward work plan

19. 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.

20. 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.

NIFAC Membership

New appointments to NIFAC

Since May 2016, there have been two new appointments to NIFAC:



Sara McCracken is the Head of Marketing, Research and Communication for the Controlled Schools' Support Council.

A member of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations and an accredited PR practitioner, Mrs. McCracken has many years experience of managing communications for a variety of organisations.

She has previously held a senior management role at the British Medical Association with responsibility for public affairs and communications, and overseen communications, including social media, for

the Green Party.

Mrs McCracken has also worked in the agri-rural and voluntary sectors, and is currently Vice Chair of the Poultry Committee and Rabbit Subcommittee as a Council Member for the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society (RUAS).



Fiona Hanna is a Chartered Accountant and Principle of her own accountancy practice. She is a Board member of the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute, the Ulster Farmers' Union and the Mourne, Gullion and Lecale Rural Development Partnership.

She is also involved in the management of the family arable farming business (owned by her

husband). The farm is a member of the Northern Ireland Farm Quality Assured Cereals Scheme.

Since May 2016 NIFAC has lost two members. Mr. David Lindsay and Dr. Brian Smyth. Both were highly effective contributors to discussions, greatly esteemed by their NIFAC colleagues and valued members of the Committee and I thank them for the contribution they have made to ensuring NIFAC's effectiveness in scrutinising FSA policy.

The current membership of the Committee is as follows:

1. Mr Colm McKenna – Chair of NIFAC and Board member for Northern Ireland (Term of appointment ends 31 August 2019)

2. Mr Aodhan O'Donnell
(Second Term of appointment ends 31 July 2020)

3. Mr Phelim O'Neill
(Second Term of appointment ends 31 July 2020)

4. Mr. Colin Reid
(Second term of appointment ends 16 February 2018)

5. Dr. Elizabeth Mitchell
(First term of appointment ends 31 July 2018)

6. Dr. Christine Kennedy
(Second term of appointment ends 31 July 2018)

7. Sara McCracken
(First term of appointment ends 31 July 2020)

8. Fiona Hanna
(First term of appointment ends 31 July 2020)

Finances

| | Expenditure £ (thousands) | |
|--|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| | 2016/17 | 2017/2018 |
| Members' Remuneration | 28.6 | 29.2 |
| NIFAC Secretariat Staff Costs | 25.2 | 25.3 |
| 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) | 0.0 | 2.9 |
| Travel and subsistence costs | Included in Members' Remuneration | |
| NIFAC appointment process costs | 2.0 | 0.6 |
| TOTAL COSTS | 55.8 | 58 |

Meeting Dates and Locations

2017

- 13 September – Lough Neagh Eel Fisherman’s Cooperative, Toome
- 25 October – NIFAC retreat. Venue TBC.
- 29 November – TBC