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Dear Tim

**ADVICE FROM THE NORTHERN IRELAND 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. To that end, the Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee (NIFAC) has given its consideration to the following papers, due to be discussed at the upcoming meeting of the FSA Board:

- FSA Innovation Plan.
- Stow Project Phase 2 – Sustainable Funding Model Project Scope.
- Campylobacter Reduction: Update On Progress and Next Steps.

These papers were presented to the committee, by teleconference, by Rod Ainsworth – the FSA's Director of Regulatory and Legal Strategy with Chris Harvey – FSA Better Regulation Senior Advisor; Jason Feeney – the FSA's Chief Operating Officer; and Steve Wearne – FSA Director of Policy respectively and I am grateful to all of them for allowing NIFAC the opportunity to consider the content of these papers.

The Committee also received an update from the FSA in NI's head of Local Authority Policy and Delivery on the work of that team on the new Food Hygiene Rating (Northern Ireland) Act and the consultation on the Guidance and the Regulations and Orders which will support the primary legislation and I'd like to thank him for this update.

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FOOD HYGIENE RATING

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Final version as at 11 March

NIFAC held their meeting at the Innovation Centre at the Loughry campus of the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE). As part of 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.

The Innovation centre is an 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. I would like to thank Rosemary McKee, CAFRE's Head of Dairy Technology, for facilitating this visit and providing the tour and overview of the work of the college.

NIFAC's comments on the papers discussed are recorded below.

### FSA Innovation Plan

Rod Ainsworth, the FSA's Director of Regulatory and Legal Strategy and Chris Harvey, FSA Better Regulation Senior Advisor, introduced a paper on the FSA's Innovation Plan, by teleconference from the FSA's office at Aviation House in London.

This paper represents a good continuation of previous papers on the use of innovative technology and the Committee welcomed the FSA taking a leadership role in supporting the use of new technologies where this can help to improve food safety.

The paper deals primarily with how the FSA as a regulator can support innovation by food businesses but there are good examples, from Northern Ireland, where the FSA has made use of innovative technology to support businesses in providing food that is safe to eat while promoting good nutritional standards, such as the MenuCal tool.

The Committee was supportive of the two strands of the plan – supporting the use of innovation in food production and in compliance with regulation. It was questioned whether there might be room for a third strand about consumers' relationship to technology and how this impacts on the work of the FSA. As the plan is a living document, it could be considered whether work in this area should fall within the scope of this plan.

### Stow Project Phase 2 – Sustainable Funding Model Project Scope

Jason Feeney, the FSA's Chief Operating Officer, introduced an item on Phase 2 of the meat charging Project by teleconference.

The issue of how the inspection of meat should be paid for has long been on the agenda of the FSA but the Committee were pleased with the direction of travel outlined in this paper. It was suggested that work undertaken under Stow 1 has built

a trust between the FSA and industry that may otherwise have been absent and the FSA is to be congratulated on what has been achieved to date.

The Committee noted that the FSA is still seeking efficiencies, as with the review of official auxiliaries. This is to be commended as it will be important to ensure that the inspection regime is as efficient as possible.

#### Campylobacter Reduction: Update On Progress and Next Steps.

Steve Wearne, the FSA Director of Policy introduced a paper on campylobacter reduction by teleconference.

NIFAC were pleased with the momentum that has been maintained over the issue of campylobacter reduction. This is an issue that had been considered by some to be too difficult to achieve any real progress but is now being tackled by both industry and the FSA.

The statistics demonstrate a similar decline in the number of cases in Northern Ireland to those seen across the UK as a whole. It would be helpful, for any future report to the Board on this issue, if disaggregated figures for the various nations of the UK could be included.

NIFAC agreed that retailers should take some ownership in making these reductions and supported the proposition that the Chair of the FSA should write to retailers to emphasise their responsibilities to consumers. It was also mentioned that the effectiveness of the campaigns the FSA had run for consumers around the washing of raw chicken had been successful and the Committee were pleased to hear that these messages will be reinforced during the campaigns that the FSA will be running around the summer, barbecue season.

There is a question over how well we understand the epidemiology of campylobacter. A better understanding of the conditions conducive to the proliferation of the bacteria will be needed before truly effective measures can be taken to eliminate campylobacter as a significant risk to health. Overall, however, the paper shows a good news story and the FSA should be applauded for the efforts it has made.

NIFAC was concerned to hear from an observer that there were indications that the campylobacter organism may be becoming more virulent. Combined with the knowledge that the population of those who are immunocompromised will be rising, this means that our efforts on campylobacter reduction should remain a priority.

#### Update from the FSA in NI Local Authority Policy and Delivery Team

This item represented the first update of a series to run over the course of 2016 where the various teams within the FSA in NI will provide updates to the Committee about key activities and work carried out by that team. At this meeting, Michael

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Jackson, the FSA's Head of Local Authority Policy and Delivery delivered an update on the Food Hygiene Rating Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, and the consultation on the Orders and Regulations.

An incredible amount of work has gone into bringing the primary legislation through the assembly, bringing us to the point where we now have an Act. This is a great success.

NIFAC will meet in a subgroup to consider the individual questions posed by the consultation on the Regulations and Orders as well as the guidance document and will submit a consultation response based on those discussions.

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



pp. Henrietta Campbell (approved by Henrietta Campbell and signed in her absence)  
Chair, Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee.