

**Meeting of the Northern  
Ireland Food Advisory  
Committee on Tuesday  
20<sup>th</sup> April 2021 via  
Microsoft Teams.**

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## **Agenda**

1. 2.30pm Welcome to new Members and Introduction to SMT
2. 3.05pm Minutes of the Meeting of 12 January 2021
3. 3.10pm Chair and Directors' updates
4. 3.25pm Comfort Break
5. 3.30pm Open meeting begins
6. 3.30pm Emily Miles, Chief Executive, FSA
7. 3.40pm Lucy King & Beth Armstrong, FSA Social Science Team  
Food and You Survey results
8. 4.00pm Questions
9. 4.20pm Michele Shirlow, Chief Executive, Food NI
10. 4.40pm Questions
11. 5.00pm AOB
12. 5.05pm Close

**PAPER FOR DISCUSSION  
MINUTES OF OPEN MEETING ON 12 JANUARY 2021**

**Executive Summary**

Attached are the minutes of the 12 January 2021 NIFAC meeting.

Members are invited to:

- Agree minutes as a true record of proceedings.

**FSA in Northern Ireland**

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## **OPEN MEETING OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND FOOD ADVISORY COMMITTEE (NIFAC) ON 12 JANUARY 2021, 10 AM VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS**

### **Those present:**

#### **NIFAC Members**

- Colm McKenna – Chairman
- Aodhan O'Donnell
- Lorraine Crawford
- Fiona Hanna
- Greg Irwin
- Phelim O'Neill
- Sara McCracken

#### **Apologies**

- Liz Mitchell

#### **FSA Executive**

- Maria Jennings – Director for Regulatory Compliance, People and NI
- Sharon Gilmore – Head of Standards and Dietary Health
- Roberta Ferson – Head of EU Exit, Legal and Private Office.
- Jayne McGlaughlin – Senior Policy Advisor
- Fionnuala Close – Dietary Health Lead
- Naomi Davidson – Senior Scientific Advisor
- Kathleen Mooney – Senior Scientific Advisor
- Colleen Mulrine – Senior Policy Advisor
- Emily Chan – Senior Scientific Advisor
- Robyn McNeilly – NIFAC Secretariat

#### **Guest Speakers**

- Fionnuala Close – FSA in NI
- Maebh Austin & Clare O'Neill – Fare Share
- Dr Hannah Lambie-Munford – University of Sheffield

### **1. Welcome and Introductions**

The Chair welcomed all NIFAC members, observers and presenters to the meeting.

Apologies from Liz Mitchell who was unable to attend the meeting.

Apologies from James Elliott, Department for Communities who was unfortunately unwell and unable to present.

No declaration of interests

Meeting to be recorded for minuting purposes.

## **2. Minutes of the meeting of 21 October 2020**

The Chair asked if there were any comments on the minutes of NIFAC's meeting on 21 October 2020. No issues were raised.

## **3. Food Poverty**

The Chair introduced the theme of the meeting and welcomed the speakers.

The Chair invited Fionnuala Close to deliver her presentation which covered:

- The All-Island Food Poverty Network
- Food Poverty Indicator Subgroup
- Food Poverty Data from NI Health Survey
- Household Food Security
- Food and You – Household Food Security in NI
- What data is available in 2020
- Household Food Insecurity by Demographics
- Reporting Use of Emergency Food Providers
- What we know to date
- Future Data

The Chair thanked Fionnuala for her presentation and invited Members to ask questions.

There then followed a question and answer session based on Fionnuala's presentation.

- Members agreed that Fionnuala's presentation was very informative.
- Members were keen to know if there was comparable data for the Republic of Ireland.
- Fionnuala advised that NISRA (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency) has revised its approach to reviewing data and now mirrors the Republic of Ireland. They are now directly comparable and follow some similar trends. This is also the case for the Healthy Food Basket Survey.
- Members felt that continuing to compile data over a 12 month period was the best approach.
- Members were keen to understand the factors around the high level of food insecurity reported in the younger age group.

- Fionnuala advised this is an area she is keen to investigate further. The age group bracket has broadened to incorporate the 16 to 35 year olds. There are many factors that can be attributed, such as less disposable income, job insecurity and caring for a younger family.
- The Committee considered some of the evidence that appeared to show a down trend in food poverty and questioned if families are managing their expenditure better due to the reduction in other household utility bills.
- Fionnuala noted that although research showed that food poverty seemed to show a downward trend, food bank usage has increased significantly. Family and community dynamics have changed, support networks are not as they once were. She hoped that using findings from the Healthy Food Basket survey would enable the FSA to uncover the bigger picture.
- Members discussed the benefits of government departments working together in a joined up approach to food poverty. Findings could then be shared with other parts of the UK.
- Fionnuala informed the Committee that the All Island Food Poverty Network has been strengthened as a partnership since the pandemic. The departments involved have continued to build strong relationships and support the work of others in the network. The FSA has also provided funding for one the partners. The network continues to grow and there have been several new additions to the partnership.

3.5 The Chair invited Meabh Austin and Clare O'Neill from FareShare to present to the Committee.

3.6 The presentation covered the following:

- How FareShare has adapted in response to Covid-19
- The work of FareShare
- Internal Challenges of Covid-19
- External Challenges of Covid -19
- Partnerships
- Impacts in Northern Ireland in 2020

3.7 The Chair thanked Meabh and Clare for the presentation and invited questions from Members.

3.8 The Committee agreed that the presentation was very informative and raised awareness of the organisation's great work, especially during these challenging times.

3.9 Members asked if the Northern Ireland protocol had impacted the organisation's food supply, especially over the last few weeks.

- 4.0 Maeabh advised NIFAC that FareShare's food supply had not been affected by EU Exit. Possibly due to funding received from the Department for Communities last year. This funding allowed the organisation to purchase food rather than receive donations and was over a staggered time frame. The funding was agreed to help mitigate the impacts of both Covid -19 and EU Exit.
- 4.1 The Committee discussed the environmental impact of reducing food waste.
- 4.2 Maeabh explained that FareShare aims to reduce both food poverty and food waste by encouraging the food industry that food disposable should be to the benefit of social good.
- 4.3 The Chair invited Dr Hannah Lambie-Mumford from University of Sheffield to present to the Committee.
- 4.4 The presentation covered the following:
- Response to household food insecurity in the UK following Covid -19
  - Food vulnerability in the UK during Covid -19
  - Project aims and methodology
  - National systems mapping methods
  - Comparison of prevalence of food insecurity during Covid -19 to 2018 Food & You data
  - Responses to access barriers to food available
  - Overview – response to household food access
  - Free School Replacement in Northern Ireland
  - Emergency finance provision
  - Emergency food provision
- 4.5 The Chair thanked Hannah and invited questions for the Committee.
- 4.6 The Committee found the presentation very informative and will welcome reading the more detailed report.
- 4.7 Members queried if data collected allowed a break down into countries as they felt there would be stark differences.
- 4.8 Hannah advised that no regional or local authorities were not involved in policy making but there are plans in place to carry out regional case studies that will highlight country specifics.
- 4.9 Members asked Hannah if she was concerned about how food boxes were being portrayed in the media, highlighting the content of the boxes and delivery by sub contractors.
- 5.0 Hannah explained that Wales, Scotland and England are all part of the same sub-contracted scheme and that Northern Ireland was the only country with a stand-alone Government intervention. There have been many concerns



raised by various stakeholders about the content of boxes and the nutritional benefits. Hannah explained that is a difficult situation to be in as it's such a fast-paced environment. There is scrutiny around the procurement of the food boxes being carried out by the National Audit Office.

## **6.0 Chair and Director's Update**

- 6.1 The Chair provided an update on the ongoing Board recruitment, advising the Committee that Dr Ruth Hussey would be acting as Interim Chair from end of January when Heather Hancock leaves her post. DHSC continue to manage the recruitment campaign and it is hoped that a new Chair of the Board will be in place by April. Board Member recruitment is also ongoing.
- 6.2 The Chair advised the Committee that recommendations to appoint 4 new NIFAC members were being drafted to the Minister. It is hoped to have 3 members appointed to the Committee by 1<sup>st</sup> April and the 4<sup>th</sup> member by 1<sup>st</sup> August.
- 6.3 Maria advised that she has been appointed to the Board of Council for Homeless NI.
- 6.4 The Committee questioned how Belfast staff were coping dealing with the relentless pressures of EU Exit.
- 6.5 Maria advised that she has been amazed by staff, explaining that the run up to the Transition was manic and yet staff continued to show great resilience and commitment to their roles.
- 6.6 Members were keen to understand the demands of the work around Border Controls and staff capacity in these roles.
- 6.7 Maria advised that in the first weeks of the Transition it became clear that GB companies weren't as prepared as they could have been and have not been using the systems correctly to enable the checks to be carried out efficiently. In addition there have been glitches in the computer systems which have added additional pressures. Requirements at the ports have been going as well as can be expected and as traffic ramps up over the next few weeks we may see additional issues arising.
- 6.8 Maria highlighted that council staff employed to carry out checks have been in post from December and FSA has been involved in rolling out training capability with the new staff.
- 6.9 The Committee wanted to further understand arrangements around the RASFF system.
- 7.0 Maria explained that it was hoped a wider agreement would solve issues with access to the system and databases however this UK/EU agreement did not transpire. In the interim, FSA has pushed extremely hard to put an administrative system in place for Northern Ireland. This is an administrative

work around as NI does not have access to all information on the system, only relevant information and intelligence. The process is working well so far.

- 7.1 Members expressed their gratitude to FSA colleagues for their hard work and dedication over last few months.

## **8.0 Any Other Business**

- 8.1 No further business was raised, and the meeting was closed.

## **PAPER FOR INFORMATION**

### **UPDATE FROM DIRECTOR FOR REGULATORY COMPLIANCE, PEOPLE AND NI TO NIFAC 12 JANUARY 2021**

#### **Executive Summary**

Attached is the FSA in NI Director's update to the Committee for January 2021.

- No action by members is necessary.

#### **FSA in Northern Ireland**

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## **Food Is Safe**

### **Update on CBD extracts**

On 10<sup>th</sup> March, the FSA provided District Councils with an update on the status of CBD extracts in Northern Ireland. This update formed part of a wider update for enforcement authorities, industry and consumers across England, Wales and NI.

The FSA provided clarification that, in Northern Ireland, CBD extract products are considered novel under EU Food Law and require authorisation in line with Regulation (EU) 2015/2283, before being placed on the market. It is the European Commission's authorisation process that applies in Northern Ireland. Therefore, unauthorised CBD extracts will be subject to reasonable, proportionate, and risk-based enforcement by District Councils in Northern Ireland, whilst having regard to the Food Law Code of Practice.

In England and Wales, the FSA will publish a list of all products which are linked to validated applications, and enforcement agencies may consider this when undertaking enforcement.

The FSA will continue to engage with District Councils in Northern Ireland on CBD extracts and will work in partnership to help move towards market compliance, including supporting businesses seeking authorisation.

### **Legislation**

The Health Committee considered the proposed Addition of Vitamins, Minerals and Other Substances (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 and was content with the proposal. These Regulations will extend the enforcement provisions contained in The Addition of Vitamins, Minerals and Other Substances Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007 so that the existing provisions relating to offences and penalties apply to all failures to comply with the relevant provisions of Regulation (EC) No 1925/2006 on the addition of vitamins and minerals and of certain other substances to foods.

As this Statutory Rule provides for the enforcement of EU law in Northern Ireland, it is being made with reference to the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 and must be affirmed by a resolution of the Assembly before it can become law. The FSA is working to ensure this can happen as soon as is practicable.

On 19 April, the FSA plans to launch a stakeholder consultation on the proposed Food and Feed Hygiene and Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021. This Statutory Rule will make technical amendments to provide for the execution and enforcement, in Northern Ireland of several pieces of EU legislation relating to official controls and other official activities performed to ensure the application of food and feed law. It will also correct a minor drafting error in the Fishery Products (Official Controls Charges) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007. The Rule will revoke provisions, which are no longer necessary due to legislation made by the EU, to the Food Hygiene Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 in relation to requirements placed on Northern Ireland food businesses on the

form and application of health and identification marks for products of animal origin. This SR must also be affirmed by a resolution of the Assembly.

The FSA is updating internal procedures and building capacity and capability to make legislation.

### **Publication of Food Law Code of Practice, Practice Guidance and Competency Framework**

The statutory Food Law Code of Practice for Northern Ireland outlines how the requirements of Regulation (EU) 2017/625 apply to Competent Authorities (District Councils (DCs)) and describes the approach to be taken to ensure the efficient and effective co-ordination of official food controls and other official activities. The Practice Guidance complements the Code and provides general advice on the approach to enforcement. Separate but parallel documents are issued in each of the UK countries. The Code requires regular review and revision to ensure that it reflects current policy and legislative requirements so that DCs delivery of official food controls and other official activities remain effective, consistent, and proportionate.

The revised Northern Ireland Food Law Code of Practice and Practice Guidance were [published](#) on 16 March 2021. They replace the previous Code and Practice Guidance issued in 2016. The key changes in this revision of the Code were critical to addressing the urgent need for district councils to be able to recruit, train and deploy additional officers so that they can deal with the increase in imported and exported food controls as a result of implementation of the Northern Ireland Protocol and help address reductions in resources resulting from redeployment of staff and staff absences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The consultation on the proposed changes closed on 10 December 2020 and we considered all of the feedback received, which included responses from the 11 NI DCs, one Expert Group (EHNI), one professional awarding body (CIEH) and one respondent acting in a private capacity. A summary of stakeholder's responses to the consultation and the FSA's response has also been [published](#).

The key changes in this revision to the Code include:

- a. modernisation of the qualification requirements by extending the list of 'suitable' qualifications to enable DCs to fully recognise the potential of a

- wider cohort of professionals to undertake food control activities providing they can demonstrate they are competent
- b. replacing the existing competency requirements with the Competency Framework that defines competency by activity rather than by role
- c. providing flexibility to allow DCs to legitimately depart from their intervention programmes upon advice from the FSA in certain circumstances
- d. the necessary editorial revisions brought about by the Official Controls Regulation (EU) 2017/625, which came into effect in December 2019, and EU exit implications
- e. a revised structure and format to improve readability and promote consistency in the interpretation and implementation

To support the District Councils with the qualification amendments and the implementation of the [Competency Framework](#), we have:

- a. provided a template Competency Assessment Record and a template Summary of Officer Competency Table, for the DCs to use if they wish,
- b. mapped the food hygiene and food standards qualifications we anticipate being most commonly held by newly appointed officers against the Competency Framework, so it is clear how they align,
- c. are providing training in April 2021 on the Competency Framework for those Officers assessing competency,
- d. provided in the Code, a transition period for assessment against the Competency Framework for officers authorised prior to 1 March 2021 and whose authorisation is not extended to new activities.

## **Gathering and Using Science, Evidence and Information**

### **Publication of Wave 6 of the Eating Well Choosing Better Tracker Survey**

The Dietary Health team has published a [report](#) on Wave 6 of the Eating Well Choosing Better Tracker survey. The survey collects information on NI consumers' perceptions of healthy eating, healthier options and reformulation; consumer use of traffic light labels; consumer knowledge and understanding of the recommended daily calorie intake and consumer awareness of the FSA's healthy eating campaigns.

To help disseminate key findings to the Northern Ireland food industry, the FSA also developed infographics for the retail/manufacturing and out of home sectors. The survey findings will be used by the FSA to inform future policy development and will be shared with relevant stakeholders and industry representatives as an evidence base to continue engaging the NI food industry with food product improvement.

### **Research on the cost of a minimum essential food basket**

The FSA and safefood are working in partnership on a report presenting the cost of a minimum essential food basket for four household types in NI, adjusted to reflect food costs in 2020. This report builds on the data published thus far for 2014, 2016 and 2018. The research demonstrates the average weekly cost of healthy food, and the level of household income that may need to be spent on attaining this minimum standard. The report is due to be published in May 2021. As part of the launch of the

report, the FSA and safefood have partnered with the Consumer Council to produce short videos clips that demonstrate the lived experience of food poverty.

### **Food and You 2 survey**

The first wave of FSA's new flagship survey 'Food and You 2' was published on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2021. Over 9,000 adults across England (5,140), Wales (2,100) and Northern Ireland (2,079) took part in wave 1 between July and October 2020. Respondents were asked about their food safety practices in the home; shopping habits; food security; concerns about food; and confidence in the FSA as well as other actors in the food supply chain. The report is based on combined data for England, Wales and NI and here is a link to the [full report](#). The Dietary Health team are reviewing the NI data and hope to publish a NI specific report on household food security in the next couple of months.

### **FHRS**

The FHRS and Strategic Surveillance teams have been working on a digital solution to inform and support future FHRS display regulations for online businesses. The solution uses an image feature detection and an image similarity algorithm to detect whether an FHRS rating is displayed on the food business website and validates if it is the correct rating. The work will help inform the development of mandatory display legislation by providing an overview of current practice and potential obstacles. The tool could aid Food Hygiene regulators and inspectors by reducing the time spent on manually examining the websites of food businesses for compliance.

### **Labs**

National Reference Laboratories (NRLs)

The Northern Ireland Protocol (NIP) requires that NRLs, for Northern Ireland, post-transition, are located within EU Member States (MS). They are not permitted to be located within the UK. The FSA, as the central competent authority responsible for the designation of NRLs for food and feed, launched an NRL tender exercise on 14 December 20, which was open for five weeks (closed noon on 29 Jan 21). We had five 'bundles' each made up of a number of lots i.e. chemical six x lots, GMO one x lot, Micro five x lots, Parasites two x lots and Shellfish/ LBM two x lots.

We only received three bids in total for three of the lots for this initial exercise. This limited response to the NI NRL tender was brought to the attention of the Commission. Following discussions with procurement, further work was carried out to determine if there were other EU laboratories with capability and willingness to bid. We also sent a request to the EU commission for them to promote the invitation to tender with the EU MS NRLs. We then proceeded to extend the tender exercise (from 25 Feb 21 to noon on 12 Mar 21). This exercise generated eight additional bids. Clarifications are ongoing in relation to all of the bids received to date to determine their suitability for the respective tenders being awarded.

We have five x lots which have received no bids and we may also have some lots where the applicants are unsuccessful. Once assessments are complete, we intend to carry out a gap analysis and conduct direct engagement with eligible laboratories

in an effort to fill the voids. Should the direct engagement approach be unsuccessful then we will need to consider further engagement with the Commission via Defra. Official Control Laboratories (OCLs)

The FSA must designate OCLs for the analyses, tests and diagnoses carried out on Official Control food and feed samples. It is the opinion of the EU Commission that OCLs for NI can be based in NI or an EU MS but not in GB. Prior to 1 Jan 21 a number for tests were carried out in GB based laboratories, mainly chemical tests on food and feed by the District council and DAERA contracted chemical testing provider. To date, eight OCLs have been designated/redesignated for NI, which includes NI and EU based laboratories. Labs designated by the EU MS where they are based are not available for all types of testing. A further four labs have been identified to be potentially designated. If these are successful, the FSA will have designated OCLs to cover the majority of testing areas commonly required. The main outstanding designated gap is pesticides and a number of gaps in specialist testing areas, which are rarely tested (e.g. radionuclides). We are continuing to work to source suitable OCLs for these outstanding tests.

## **Competent Authority Training**

### **Better Training for Safer Food**

Post EU Exit, the Better Training for Safer Food (BTSF) Commission **training initiative**, covering food and feed law, animal health and welfare, plant health rules and rules on plant protection products, continues to be available to competent authorities in NI dealing with official controls. DAERA is the single national contact point for NI and will therefore receive notifications of all training programmes directly from the Commission. DAERA has agreed to disseminate all training notifications to FSA in NI from which point they will be further disseminated to district councils and staff in FSA in NI. The Local Authority and Policy Delivery Team in NI are currently collaborating with DAERA to agree and formalise procedures to manage & coordinate these new arrangements.

### **Competent Authority Training Programme for 2021/2022**

The [FSA's competent authority training programme for 2021/2022](#) has been issued to Northern Ireland Food Managers Group (NIFMG) and will be discussed at the NIFMG meeting on 15 April. The paper outlines several already existing online training programmes as well as planned remote training sessions. The training programmes have been developed and/or sourced to meet the training needs identified by district council sub-groups and FSA policy teams.

The Local Authority and Policy Delivery Team are collaborating with imported food colleagues in GB to revise and update the FSA e-learning imported food courses for local authorities to reflect the different arrangements in GB and NI following the end of the Transition Period. The plan is that two versions of the courses (GB and NI version) will be available on the FSA website.

### **Imported Food Resource Pack**

FSA is currently revising its Imported Food Resource Pack and will issue this to all district councils in NI shortly. The revisions will update the Pack to take account of the Official Control Regulations and NI's position following the end of the Transition



Period. The Pack will assist both officers who work at Border Control Points and inland in their role as 'second line of defence' for imported food.

### **The Safe Catering Guide**

The FSA's food safety management guide (the Safe Catering Guide) used by caterers and retailers in Northern Ireland is undergoing review to make the downloadable document fully accessible in line with the FSA's commitment to making it's website fully accessible in accordance with the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018. The review also provides an opportunity to update the pack to include an additional section on allergen cross contamination and new EU requirements that will be coming into effect April 2021 regarding food safety culture and food redistribution. Publication of the revised pack is scheduled for Sept 2021.

### **Fish and Shellfish Updates**

#### **Carlingford Lough Biotoxin Risk Assessment Consultation**

The consultation is in relation to a proposal by the FSA to rationalise the number of official control monitoring points for biotoxin and phytoplankton monitoring in Carlingford Lough and introduce Representative Monitoring Points and Associated Harvesting Areas.

The 6-week consultation is due to commence on 21 April and FSA in NI are seeking comments from industry, enforcement authorities and other interested stakeholders on the proposed rationalisation. The Local Authority and Policy Delivery Team in NI intend to engage with stakeholders and interested parties in May 21 to discuss the new proposals.

Since January 2020, FSA has implemented this risk-based monitoring regime across a number of NI shellfish production areas in a phased approach; currently the revised biotoxin monitoring has been implemented in six of the seven shellfish production areas in NI. Due to Covid-19 we were unable to progress implementation of the revised risk based monitoring regime in Carlingford Lough within the original planned timescale (Autumn 2020).

#### **Cross Border Meeting**

On 13 April members of the Local Authority and Policy Delivery (LAPD) team participated in a cross-border meeting with Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) and Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA). LAPD provided updates including the Carlingford Lough biotoxin risk assessment, the FSA 2021 shellfish classifications for NI as well as the forthcoming sanitary survey review of both Lough Foyle and Carlingford Lough; two water bodies located within NI and ROI. FSA NI will be the lead co-ordinator for the desktop sanitary surveys of Foyle and Carlingford scheduled for 2021.

#### **Sanitary Surveys**

Killough harbour sanitary survey review has been published on FSA website and Strangford Lough sanitary survey review will be published on the website week commencing 19 April. The next reviews that are due to take place over the coming months are Carlingford Lough and Lough Foyle. This is part of a three year contract

with Aquafact to undertake seven sanitary survey reviews across the seven shellfish production areas in NI.

### **DAERA Webinar- Moving Fish and Fishery products**

On 31 March, members of the LAPD team attended a webinar with DAERA Fisheries Transition Team alongside the Port Health Authorities to assist hauliers with queries on fish catch certificates and the process needed to achieve a successful import through a NI Point of Entry.

## **Empowering Consumers**

### **MenuCal**

The FSA's [MenuCal tool](#) continues to be an important resource, enabling food businesses to calculate the energy information of menu items and support the FSA and District Council's [Calorie Wise scheme](#). There are now 52 businesses across NI with the Calorie Wise Gold award. The number of MenuCal users and recipes inputted into the tool has continued to grow with over 1,750 users now registered with the platform and 14,897 recipes inputted in total. Over the last year there has been a 21% increase in the total number of registered users and 2,915 recipes inputted to the tool.

It is positive to note that the number of new users has continued to rise each month throughout the COVID19 pandemic. The number of returning sessions also shows there was regular use of MenuCal throughout the year as users return to their accounts to add new recipes or make amendments to existing recipes.

A number of updates have also been applied to the tool to improve functionality and an Accessibility audit was completed in March 2021 with remediation actions currently being taken to improve the service usability for all users.

### **Participation in Consumer Week**

The Dietary Health team arranged for the FSA's Head of Social Science to present information on the Covid-19 tracker at the Consumer Council's first ever NI Consumer Week (22<sup>nd</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> March 2021). During this week a series of online events for consumers and businesses was held with special guests and consumer experts discussing how the consumer landscape in NI has changed over the past 12 months following COVID-19 and EU Exit.

### **Eatwell Guide - Social Media Engagement**

The Dietary Health team and the Communications team are working together to develop a range of messaging and assets based on the [Eatwell Guide](#) to promote healthy eating and nutrition. Recent social media posts on the Eatwell Guide resources and Salt Awareness Week have received positive engagement from a

range of stakeholders. Messaging will be shared throughout the year on various FSA social media channels.

### **Use-by Dates Campaign March 2021**

Findings from the [Covid-19 tracker](#) and segmentation research demonstrated that some young families and those over 65s are ignoring the use-by date on food. In response the communications team developed a short burst campaign to highlight to these audiences, the importance of sticking to the [use-by date](#). This ran across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The message was delivered widely through a broadcast day on Tuesday 23 March which was fronted by FSA Chief Scientific Adviser Robin May, Narriman Looch, Head of Foodborne Disease Control Branch, and celebrity Doctor, [Dr Dawn Harper](#), who provided an additional trusted voice.

Campaign partner Mumsnet, hosted a [Q&A session](#), inviting questions on Use-by dates from the Mumsnet community, which were responded to by Robin May, Narriman Looch and Helen White from Love Food Hate Waste.

Five social media influencers whose audience demographics met the profile of our younger target audience were selected to share the message across England Wales and Northern Ireland. We used Northern Ireland based Instagram and Facebook influencer duo, 'Sisters and Sons' who shared the message creatively and directly to their 17,000+ followers. In addition to national coverage NI coverage included Belfast Telegraph, Belfast Live and NI editions of The Times, Daily Mail and The Daily Mirror.

### **'Speak Up for Allergies' campaign**

The Agency-wide campaign targeting 18-21-year olds with food allergies ran 24 February to 31 March 2021. Research shows that children and young people are at a higher risk of experiencing food allergy reactions therefore the aim of the campaign was to inform the audience about why it is important to speak to a restaurant/ takeaway to alert them to their food allergies before placing a food order.

Our insight demonstrated that while young people are confident about managing their food allergy in general, they are less likely to tell a café or restaurant about their allergy, particularly if they have eaten a meal from the same place before. Northern Ireland specific activity is highlighted below and while evaluation is pending, initial insight shows that this campaign was successful in reaching this audience and getting them to make this behavioural change.

Campaign Video: A tailored [NI video](#) was promoted across Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Snapchat to the target audience across Northern Ireland. Cool FM featured the video alongside a competition to win food vouchers which resulted in 15k views, which is excellent in comparison to views on other similar videos.

Influencer: Taking into consideration the age of target audience, we recognised that this group spend a lot of their time online and on social media. We therefore worked with Northern Ireland based influencer, Conor Hogan (AKA Belfast Food Blogger) to

promote the message on his Facebook and Instagram channels. The influencer used videos, polls, stories and grid posts to engage his audience over a 3 week timeframe.

Belfast Live: We collaborated with Belfast Live as part of a paid partnership. As well as the articles outlined below which featured on their website and across their social media, we discussed alternative creative ways to reach the audience. The campaign featured as Belfast Live's first ever Instagram reel and they also hosted an Instagram quiz which was a great way to engage and connect with the audience.

- 1) [Food allergies - the important things young people should know](#)
- 2) [Six tips to stay takeaway safe](#)
- 3) [Case study article](#) – personal story of a young woman with food allergies

Universities and Colleges: We worked with Ulster University and South Eastern Regional College to help promote the campaign to their students using their internal and external channels, such as Ulster University's dedicated [webpage](#) on #SpeakUpForAllergies.

Eimear O'Rourke – Case Study: Eimear O'Rourke, a 23-year-old Queen's University graduate with a severe nut and peanut allergy, helped us to evidence why it is important for people with allergies to talk to a restaurant or takeaway before placing an order. Eimear was able to share her own experience of serious allergic reactions and tell her story of a frightening experience on holiday.

- Eimear's vlog is now on [YouTube](#) and was shared with Belfast Live, Ulster University and South Eastern Regional College.
- Earned media coverage was also secured in Sunday Life (21 March) and BBC Radio Ulster John Toal show (27 March)

## **UK Common Frameworks**

The UK Common Frameworks have continued to be developed through agreed JMC(EN) agreed principles which include a functioning internal market and sharing of common resources. In Northern Ireland, the FSA has led on three Common Frameworks for Nutrition Labelling, Composition and Standards (NLCS), Food and Feed Safety and Hygiene (FFSH) and Food Compositional Standards and Labelling (FCSL). All policy included in the three Frameworks are included in Annex 2 of Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland.

We have worked with Constitutional and policy officials across the four nations including The Executive Office setting out governance and working arrangements among officials and Ministers in all four countries. As Northern Ireland continues to follow EU rules and the rest of UK has the opportunity to determine its own regulatory regime, it has been our priority that the Common Frameworks provide the four nations with the mechanisms to work together to effectively manage areas where different policies emerge both in the EU and UK, ensuring there is minimal undesirable impact on citizens and businesses.

The NLCS and FFSH Frameworks have received provisional JMC(EN) approval and have completed Parliamentary scrutiny. The FCSL Framework has recently received

Provisional JMC(EN) approval with scrutiny expected in early autumn. All three Frameworks are operational on an interim basis with policy governance structures across the four nations in place. Their final approval is planned for end of 2021.

## **Industry Engagement**

FSA officials are joining cross government meetings with industry on SPS certification matters. This has involved working with colleagues in DAERA in regular retail forums and more specific engagement with stakeholders in fishery sector, at both at haulier and retail level. The FSA has hosted, with colleagues in Defra, specific High-risk Food Not of Animal Origin information sessions with retailers and has offered similar sessions to interested parties in other forums.

Weekly calls are still taking place with the 3 abattoir sectors (cattle & sheep, pork and poultry) mainly to monitor Covid issues, but also to discuss any other concerns.

### **Online Webinar on “EU Exit and the Impact on NI Food Products”**

FSA officials presented at an online event on Thursday 28 January, for Northern Ireland food manufacturers entitled ‘EU Exit and the Impact on NI Food Products’. This event was hosted by The College of Agriculture Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) and summarised the changes to importing and exporting food products, marketing standards for specific products and changes to product labels arising from EU Exit. FSA officials provided expertise and information on changes to product labels, including ID marks, Country of Origin and FBO name and address. This provided 127 attendees with the latest advice and guidance to help food businesses prepare for post-transition changes.

The attendees at the event were from a wide range of companies, from small start-up businesses to large NI food manufacturers, alongside representatives from local councils and students studying food related disciplines. The live question and answer session proved popular with a plethora of queries for the expert panel seeking clarity and practical guidance. CAFRE reported positive feedback and indicated the majority of feedback rated the event as “excellent” or “good”.

### **Prepacked for Direct Sale (PPDS) Food Allergen Labelling Changes**

The FSA campaign to alert businesses to the upcoming changes in allergen legislation for pre-packed for direct sale (PPDS) food products has started and we

are phasing communications ahead of the implementation date in Oct 21, to ensure businesses, district councils and consumers are well prepared.

Officials are developing a toolkit for district councils to help them target messages to their businesses and an element of this toolkit, the Quick Guide for food businesses, was shared with district councils on 18 Feb.

We are producing a series of tailored guides on PPDS for specific industries including butchers, bakers, fast food and takeaway, catering, restaurant and café, schools, mobile sellers which we hope to share in the coming months.

A joint working group has also been set up, with district council and FSA representation. This group is planning how to best support enforcement officers and engage with Northern Ireland food businesses to ensure they are prepared for implementation in October. This will complement and supplement the wider FSA campaign work. For example, District Councils developed a standard paragraph to be added to all letters going out to relevant food businesses to update them of the changes and include links to the FSA technical guidance.

### **Hypersensitivity Symposium**

On the 23 and 24 March the FSA hosted its virtual Food Hypersensitivity Symposium. The event brought together consumers, industry and experts to discuss how we can make the UK a better place for the food hypersensitive consumers. The symposium has brought together more than 120 delegates from across industry, consumer groups, enforcement agencies and clinical settings – all interested in supporting consumers with food hypersensitivity.

Maria Jennings

**Director for Regulatory Compliance, People and NI**

## **NIFAC DISCUSSION**

### **Food and You**

#### **Executive Summary**

The theme of the meeting is Food and You, with a view to understanding more about the recently published FSA's flagship "Food and You" survey results and associated issues. Over 9,000 adults across England (5,140), Wales (2,100) and Northern Ireland (2,079) took part in wave 1 of survey, between July and October 2020. Respondents were asked about their food safety practices in the home; shopping habits; food security; concerns about food; and confidence in the FSA as well as other factors in the food supply chain. Lucy King and Beth Armstrong from FSA Social Science Team will attend the meeting to present the findings and more specifically, to discuss data relating to Northern Ireland.

Michele Shirlow, Chief Executive of Food NI will also present to the Committee. Michele will discuss the impacts of Covid 19 and EU Exit on the food industry and will highlight the potential risks that both may have on the consumer.

There will be a panel discussion following each presentation. This discussion will allow NIFAC members to ask further questions and help to inform the Committee's advice and information to the FSA on this topic.

#### **FSA in Northern Ireland**

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