

**Meeting of the Northern  
Ireland Food Advisory  
Committee on Wednesday  
23<sup>rd</sup> June 2021 via  
Microsoft Teams.**

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## Agenda

1	10:00	Welcome and Housekeeping
2	10:05	Minutes of the meeting on Tuesday 20 April
3	10:10	Chair's Update and Director's Report
4	10:30	Personal story from allergen sufferer
5	10:50	Questions
6	11:00	Overview of Food Hypersensitivity Programme & Pre-Packaged for Direct Sales readiness and familiarisation in NI.
7	11:30	Questions
8	11:50	Break
9	12pm	District Council – Local Enforcement Case Studies
10	12:40	Questions
11	1pm	AOB Close

**PAPER FOR DISCUSSION  
MINUTES OF OPEN MEETING ON 20 APRIL 2021**

**Executive Summary**

Attached are the minutes of the 20 April 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 20 APRIL 2021, 3.30PM VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS**

### **Those present:**

#### **NIFAC Members**

- Colm McKenna – Chairman
- Ellen Finlay
- Fiona Hanna
- Greg Irwin
- Cathal McDonnell
- Lynne McMullan

#### **Apologies**

- Lorraine Crawford

#### **FSA Executive**

- Maria Jennings – Director for Regulatory Compliance, People and NI
- Sharon Gilmore – Head of Standards and Dietary Health
- Roberta Ferson – Head of EU Relations, Assembly Liaison & Legal
- Kathryn Baker – Head of Food Safety Policy & Delivery
- Jayne McGlaughlin – Senior Policy Advisor
- Robyn McNeilly – NIFAC Secretariat
- Aiobheann Dunne – Dietary Health Advisor
- Emily Miles – Chief Executive

#### **Guest Speakers**

- Lucy King & Beth Armstrong – Social Science Team FSA
- Michele Shirlow – Chief Executive Food NI

- **Welcome and Introductions**

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

Apologies from Lorraine Crawford who was unable to attend the meeting.

- **Minutes of the meeting of 21 October 2020**

The Chair asked if there were any comments on the minutes of NIFAC's meeting on 12 January 2021. No issues were raised.

- The Chair welcomed Emily Miles, Chief Executive to the meeting.

Emily Miles welcomed the new Committee Members and thanked NIFAC for its hard work and valuable contribution to date.

#### **4. Food and You**

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

4.2 The Chair invited Beth Armstrong & Lucy King to deliver their presentation which covered:

- What does the Food and You 2 tell us about consumers in Northern Ireland?
- Background and Methodology
- Wave 1 Key Findings
- Food We Can Trust
- Concerns About Food
- Food Security
- Food Shopping
- Eating at Home
- How we use the data
- Next Steps

4.3 The Chair thanked Beth and Lucy for their informative presentation and invited members to ask questions.

4.4 There then followed a question and answer session based on The Food and You Survey presentation.

- Members highlighted in the findings that 28% of people surveyed had concerns around food production methods and were keen to find out more about this.
- Lucy explained that the figure was taken from an "open text box response" and that this allowed participants to write as little or as much as they wanted. The main concerns were contamination and factory processes. She went on to advise the Committee that it was an interesting process considering the differences in prompted and spontaneous responses.
- NIFAC asked if there were any plans to use the data in nutritional standards of school meals

- Members were advised that similar information has been shared with the Food & Schools Forum in the past.
- The Committee highlighted how useful the data captured would be for specialist teachers in Northern Ireland and in particular for coursework purposes and to gather a Northern Ireland specific evidence base.
- Beth advised members that all data captured can be found on the FSA website and is a great resource to share.
- NIFAC asked if the 18 item USDA measurement had been considered when gathering evidence to incorporate children and young people in a household to gather food insecurity data.
- Lucy advised that the team decided to continue to use a 10-item measure as often the quality of data received is reduced significantly when a survey contains too many questions. In this survey the focus is adult food security, however there are some elements of data that can be broken down to highlight the number of children in the household and if they take school meals.
- The Committee asked if there are reasons behind why participants answer the way they do in surveys.
- Lucy advised that the team had put a lot of thought into this area and that possible options available to follow up on more detailed questions would be to hold focus groups or interview participants to gain a better insight.
- The Committee welcomed the statistic that 92% of respondents had confidence in farmers yet found it contradictory that 51% of those had concerns around hormones and antibiotics used in food.
- Lucy advised that often responses are a perception rather than an understanding. For example, respondents may not know enough about a certain topic to make an informed decision. Often, they may think it sounds like something they should be concerned about and that is enough for them to answer in a certain way. It is never easy to understand consumers and very often they hold conflicting views without realising.

4.5 The Chair invited Michele Shirlow, Chief Executive of Food NI to present to the Committee.

4.6 The presentation covered the following:

- The effect of Covid-19 on the food industry
- Collaboration through the pandemic
- Innovation

- EU Transition
- Localism
- Sustainability
- Legacy of Covid 19
- Predictions for the future

4.7 The Chair thanked Michele for her presentation and invited questions from members.

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

- Members noted that Michele's presentation provided a great insight into the challenges faced by the food industry.
- NIFAC were keen to know if there was more that could be done to increase links and collaboration between businesses in Northern Ireland.
- Michelle agreed that more needs to be done in this area, but she has seen a positive change and thinks that further collaboration will grow in time.
- The Committee discussed the issue of GB to NI trade and obstacles around the NI Protocol. Michele advised that she has been in discussions with colleagues in England who don't realise that NI can trade in GB and it's growing increasingly frustrating.
- Michelle highlighted that Food NI plan to attend trade events in September to raise awareness of NI trade.
- NIFAC discussed the issue of "sustainability". Michele highlighted future plans to drive local restaurants towards winning sustainable awards. She is in talks with the Sustainable Restaurant Association in London to take this idea forward.
- Discussion turned to red meat and the carbon benefit of "grass-based" farming. Michele raised concerns that horizons are very constrained for farmers and the problem that will take some time to overcome. However, she noted that it was great to see many "from farm" products emerge onto the market.
- The Committee was keen to hear more around "innovation" in Northern Ireland's food industry
- Michele advised that Northern Ireland produce really high quality goods. There has been a reported increase in cheese production and also one of the biggest innovations has been around ready meals and home delivery of such products. Covid has given businesses the opportunity to promote goods and services on the internet.



- The Committee noted that it would welcome further discussions between FSA, AFBI and CAFRE around food innovation.
- On the topic of reducing red meat in our diet, the Committee felt it was important to have honest and open conversations with farmers, to get them on board from an early stage.

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

- 5.1 The Chair provided an update on the ongoing Board recruitment, advising the Committee that Dr Ruth Hussey would continue to act as Interim Chair until the new Chair is appointed.
- 5.2 The Chair advised the Committee that an additional closed meeting would be scheduled for May to review extraordinary Board Papers.
- 5.3 The Chair welcomed any questions around the Director's Report.
- 5.4 The Committee agreed that it was refreshing to see a return to some kind of normal engagement after what seemed a time when Covid 19 and EU Transition issues dominated meeting agendas.
- 5.5 Continued engagement with FSAI was also noted as a positive by members.
- 5.6 The Committee was keen to understand more around the audience targeted in the Allergens Awareness Campaign and if the engagement reached schools and parental groups in order to get the message out further.
- 5.7 Maria advised that a specific demographic was targeted in the campaign and the agency engaged only with older teenagers through to young adults (17 to 25-year olds). At the time of the campaign the majority of school children were being home schooled, and the time wasn't right to engage with that group.
- 5.8 The Committee asked if any thought had been given to targeting students again in September / October when they start to return to university. Members felt that this timing could be beneficial to widen engagement and campaign reach.
- 5.9 Sharon advised that the Dietary Health Team had targeted students at Freshers week in Queen's and the University of Ulster before. She was appreciative of the suggestion and advised the Committee that she would take this idea forward with her team.
- 6.0 NIFAC questioned the level of support in place for colleagues in District Councils as the restrictions start to lessen and more FBOs prepare to open up to serve food again.

- 6.1 Maria advised that FSA has been working with district councils and have drafted a Recovery Road Map. The plan will be brought to the FSA Board at the end of May, so NIFAC will have an opportunity to discuss the plan and provide feedback before it goes to the Board.
- 6.2 Maria discussed the planned office expansion, which will create 12 new positions in the Belfast Office. The expansion will see the complement of staff increasing to over 70. Phase 1 is underway with plans to look at Phase 2. This is very exciting news for the office and will offer current staff promotion opportunities.

## **7.0 Any Other Business**

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

## **PAPER FOR INFORMATION**

### **UPDATE FROM DIRECTOR FOR REGULATORY COMPLIANCE, PEOPLE AND NI TO NIFAC 23 JUNE 2021**

#### **Executive Summary**

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

- No action by members is necessary.

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

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

### **NI Food security Report**

The FSA published a report on ['Food Security in Northern Ireland'](#) on 24<sup>th</sup> May using wave one data of the recent Food and You 2 Survey. This report looked at food security levels in NI and outlined changes in NI eating habits in the last year.

Findings demonstrated that approximately one in six respondents of the Food and You 2 Survey in NI reported being food insecure (i.e. experienced low or very low food security) and food insecurity levels in NI (15%) were comparable with that in England (16%) and in Wales (17%). Those experiencing food insecurity were more likely to have changed their eating habits for financial reasons, including buying items on special offer (70%), buying food from different places (52%) and buying cheaper alternatives (50%). The report was shared with other government departments in NI along with members of the All Island Food Poverty Network and local academics.

### **Cost of a Health Food Basket Research**

Following publication of the food security report, the FSA and Safefood jointly published a report on the [cost of a healthy food basket in NI](#) for 2020 on 3<sup>rd</sup> June. The report presented the cost of a minimum essential food basket for four household types in NI and the proportion of household income that may need to be spent on attaining this minimum standard. This publication is the fourth report, building on the data published in 2014, 2016 and 2018.

The report found that some families on a low income need to spend between a quarter (24%) and almost a half (46%) of their take home income to afford a basic food basket that is acceptable and meets nutritional needs. The report was launched in conjunction with [videos](#) produced by the Consumer Council which explore the difficulties people can face in accessing a healthy affordable diet on a limited budget. The report and videos received daily and regional print and broadcast coverage, high engagement on social media and positive responses from stakeholders.

### **National Diet and Nutrition Survey**

The National Diet and Nutrition Survey (NDNS) year 9-11 [report](#) (2016/17 to 2018/19) was published by Public Health England on 11 December 2020. The National Diet and Nutrition Survey Rolling Programme (NDNS RP) is a continuous cross-sectional survey, designed to assess the diet, nutrient intake and nutritional status of the general population aged 1.5 years and over living in private households in the UK. The core NDNS RP is jointly funded by Public Health England and the FSA. Results are used by government to monitor progress toward diet and nutrition objectives of UK Health Departments and to develop policy interventions.

### **Carlingford Lough consultation**

On Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> May, a stakeholder event was held by the FSA to engage with a range of organisations including food businesses, District Councils, the Loughs

Agency, FSAI and AFBI to seek comments on the proposal of the revised shellfish official control biotoxin monitoring in Carlingford Lough. Currently, the revised biotoxin monitoring has been implemented in six of the seven shellfish production areas in NI. Following a PowerPoint presentation on the background to the proposal, the current biotoxin programme in Carlingford Lough, proposed new representative monitoring points for the Lough and the impacts of the proposal views from stakeholders were sought. A number of areas for consideration were raised which are now being considered alongside the three formal written responses to the consultation which closed on 2 June.

## **Empowering Consumers**

### **Healthier Catering Guides**

Following the publication of a range of [healthier catering guides](#) for different types of businesses, the team delivered a social media campaign in partnership with district councils to promote the guides. Recent FSA [research](#) revealed that consumers find it more difficult to choose healthier food when eating out with 83% finding it more difficult to make healthier choices in takeaways. This created an opportunity to promote [the healthier catering guide for chip shops](#), through a targeted initiative.

The series of social messages were shared on [@FSAINI](#) Twitter over the month of June 2021, beginning on Friday 4th June 2021 and coinciding with 'National Fish and Chip Shop Day'. This included advice on #HealthierCateringTips and displaying energy information, including information on [MenuCal](#) and the [Calorie Wise Scheme](#). We engaged NI Takeaway Association in advance about the messaging and received a positive response on exploring opportunities to build these messages into engagement with members.

### **EU Transition**

The FSA has a bi-weekly slot on the newly established NI-GB Food Supply Chain Forum for all businesses within the agri-food supply chain who are moving goods between Great Britain (GB) and Northern Ireland (NI). The FSA is joining with Defra and partners in government including DAERA and HM Revenue & Customs to provide regular operational updates. It aims to create a community for open discussion on operational implementation issues, relevant policy and delivery developments between businesses and government partners across the entire agri-food supply chain.

On 10th June, FSA's update focused on High Risk Food Not of Animal Origin (HRFNAO). The presentation provided the audience with a background to HRFNAO, the import requirements to move it from GB to NI and outlined the range of resources and assistance available from the FSA to businesses.

### **EU Audit of NI Border Control Posts (BCP)**

FSA are currently preparing for an EU audit on the System of official controls on entry of animals & goods into NI and verification of compliance of BCP's in NI with EU requirements. We have been working closely with DAERA & District Councils (DCs) to ensure a coordinated response to the pre-audit questionnaire was

completed and returned to EU officials by 10 June. We are now preparing the FSA presentation for the opening meeting of the audit and collaborating with DAERA and District councils on their opening presentations to ensure our approach is coordinated and our collaborative relationships are transparent.

The EU audit will take place from 21-30<sup>th</sup> June, consisting of remote meetings and physical inspection of NI BCPs and other relevant premises, including review of previous imports/ relevant policies & procedures as well as witnessing real time inspections. FSA staff will be in attendance to represent FSA as CCA and support DCs throughout this audit.

### **NI National Reference Laboratories (NRLs)**

FSA have now issued contracts to six EU based labs for NI NRLs functions, we are continuing to work on the five bids which we received. These have been subject to more detailed scrutiny to determine value for money. Meetings have been scheduled with the relevant labs to seek further clarifications before a decision is made on whether to appoint.

We have commenced and are continuing engagement with relevant state labs in ROI regarding the potential for them to fill our remaining gaps (i.e. the four NRLs in which we did not receive any bids and any additional gaps should the other bids be unsuccessful).

### **Accreditation of NI Official Labs (OLs)**

To be designated, an OL must be accredited. Within the UK this is undertaken by the UK Accreditation Service (UKAS). Following EU Transition, the EU stated that they will not recognise UKAS accreditation for NI OLs, as it no longer meets the requirements within Regulation (EU) 2017/625 - Official Control Regulation. The FSA is working with Defra, DAERA and BEIS to resolve this and a solution of dual accreditation has been proposed (where OLs are accredited by both UKAS and an EU accreditation body).

Defra has drafted a paper setting out the legal position for dual accreditation, more detail on the practical solution and an action plan for delivery is required. The FSA has contributed to this document.

### **Revision of FSA Protocols for Classification of Live Bivalve Molluscs**

The FSA is making minor changes to protocols for the classification of Live Bivalve Mollusc Harvesting Areas in response to revised consideration of the handling of anomalous results. Following EU Exit, GB exports of Live Bivalve Molluscs (LBM) from Class B harvesting areas supplied for depuration in EU Member States are no longer permitted. This has had a significant impact on the shellfish industry in GB and has been the subject of significant media coverage. FSA protocols for investigation and consideration of anomalous results from Class A harvesting areas will be supplemented to include two additional criteria when considering whether a result is to be treated as anomalous and therefore set aside. This will allow FSA to exclude uncharacteristically high results (those more than three standard deviations

above the mean contamination levels) and take a proportionate response to occasional results slightly above the threshold for Class A harvesting areas where monitoring data otherwise shows that the area is on-track to remain within the Class A criteria. This change is within scope of the current legislation, will continue to provide appropriate levels of public health protection and ensure approaches for considering monitoring data and awarding classifications are proportionate and pragmatic.

### **COVID-19 Recovery Roadmap for Local Authority (LA) Delivery of Official Food Law Controls and Related Activities**

A LA recovery plan, covering the period from 1 July 2021 to 2023/24 has now been developed to ensure that LA resources are targeted where they add greatest value in providing safeguards for public health and consumer protection in relation to food. The plan also aims to ensure the more routine operation of the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme which will help maintain consumer confidence in the scheme.

We shared and discussed the plan with LAs through our established engagement mechanisms and also at the more strategic level through two MHCLG led cross-Government groups – the COVID-19 Compliance Working Group and the Regulatory Services Review Task & Finish Group. LA colleagues were generally positive about the plan and appreciated that we recognise the circumstances they are in. It was considered that, for most LAs in the plan should be deliverable but for some it may be challenging.

Ministers have been informed of the plan and we will be issuing communications to LAs, including a separate communication to Chief Executives emphasising the importance of returning resource to food safety teams. We will monitor LA delivery against the plan and, where we have concerns, we will engage with individual LAs and consider what support or help we might provide.

### **Legislation**

The FSA stakeholder consultation on the proposed Food and Feed Hygiene and Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 closed on 24 May 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. Two responses to the consultation were received and were in support of the proposals.

On 10 June, the Northern Ireland Assembly Health Committee was briefed on the proposed Statutory Rule. The Committee agreed that it was content with the

proposal, which must now be affirmed by a resolution of the Assembly before it can become law.

## **Industry Engagement**

### **FSA NI Industry Bulletin – EU exit update**

This update is now available to subscribe to via food.gov. The content of the May edition focused on promotion of new supply chain forum and amplifying wider government signposts including Trader Showcase site. The edition secured a 40% open and 70% click through rate from recipients.

### **Bakery Reformulation webinar**

The FSA in NI hosted a bakery reformulation webinar on Thursday 13 May and welcomed 55 delegates from the manufacturing, retail, catering, and education sectors. The objective of the webinar was to engage and motivate the bakery sector in Northern Ireland to think positively about reformulation and communicate the wide range of support available. Speakers included two local bakeries who worked successfully with the FSA to reformulate bakery products, an ingredient supplier who outlined the advice and support they can provide to bakeries and Invest NI who discussed the funding opportunities available.

The results from the webinar are extremely encouraging with 100% of the audience (to which the question was applicable to) indicating that following the webinar, they would consider reformulating their products to make them healthier. Post webinar, all delegates were sent a leaflet on reformulation support available for the bakery sector in Northern Ireland. This leaflet included links to relevant guidance, information on the next steps they can take to begin their reformulation journey, and the contact details for the businesses and colleges who can help them on this journey.

Maria Jennings

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



## **NIFAC DISCUSSION**

### **Food Hypersensitivity**

#### **Executive Summary**

Food hypersensitivity is a priority for the FSA because it is a significant food-related health issue in the UK, with a severe and enduring impact for people with a food hypersensitivity and their families and carers.

In the UK, it is estimated that 1-2% of adults and 5-8% of children have a food allergy. That means that in Northern Ireland, around 28,000 adults and 30,000 children may have a food allergy and 14,000 may have coeliac disease.

The aim of the meeting is to understand more about the issues faced by allergen sufferers. It will consider the work the FSA is doing around the Food Hypersensitivity Programme and the changes to legislative allergen labelling requirements in Pre-packed for Direct Sale, due for implementation in October 2021. It will also highlight joint working between the FSA and district councils to ensure the enforcement of food information regulations.

There will be a panel discussion following each presentation listed in the agenda. 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.

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