

## MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE WELSH FOOD ADVISORY COMMITTEE HELD ON 4 FEBRUARY 2021 VIA TEAMS

### Present:

#### Welsh Food Advisory Committee (WFAC) Members Attending:

Mr Peter Price, Chair  
Dr Norma Barry  
Mr Alan Gardner  
Dr Philip Hollington  
Mr Ronnie Alexander  
Mr David Peace  
Mrs Beca Lyne-Pirkis

#### Food Standards Agency (FSA) Officials Attending:

Mr Nathan Barnhouse- Director of Wales  
Ms Julie Pierce – Director of Openness, Digital, Data, Science and Wales  
Mr Owen Lewis - Head of Regulatory Policy and Local Authority Partnerships  
Mr Keith Rowlands- Imports and Exports Delivery Manager  
Mrs Helen George - Head of Business Support and Communications  
Ms Lucy Boruk - Business Manager

### Others:

Mr John Richards- Hybu Cig Cymru - Meat Promotion Wales  
Mr Keith Smyton- Welsh Government

### Observers:

Mr Matthew Frankcom – Chair of Safe Sustainable Authentic Food Wales (SSAFW)  
Mrs Caroline Kitson – Senior Communications Manager (FSA).

## 1. Introductions

1.1 The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting and noted that all Committee members were present, so there were no apologies.

1.2 The Chair introduced the meeting informing that there would be the usual business session followed by a series of presentations under a theme of '*Changes in the Welsh Food Landscape – EU Exit, Covid-19 and other causes*'.

## 2. Declarations of Interest

2.1 Beca Lyne-Pirkis advised that she has recently been appointed to the British Dietetic Association Wales Board (BDA). **Action: Secretariat to update declarations page on the website**

### **3. Minutes of the Last Meeting (Paper FSA 21/02/01)**

3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2020 were agreed as a true record.

3.2 It was noted that all actions from the meeting had been addressed. **Action: Secretariat to translate the minutes and post to the website**

### **4. Presentation from John Richards- Industry Development and Relations Manager- Hybu Cig Cymru (HCC) - Meat Promotion Wales**

4.1 Mr Richards' presentation focussed on Hybu Cig Cymru's (HCC) perception of changes in the Welsh food landscape post EU Exit and COVID-19 especially on the development, promotion and marketing of Welsh red meat (lamb, beef and pork). Mr Richards reported that post transition areas of concern included: the requirement for wet signatures, difficulties in interpretation of regulations, multi loads and multi country drop offs (groupage) and the potential for haulage costs to increase. It was noted that exports are occurring, but delays are apparent.

4.2 The market of sheep was discussed, a 1/3 of sheep meat produced in the UK is exported of which 95% goes to the EU. A reduction in the amount of sheep meat exported in 2020 seemed largely as a result of COVID -19. Consumer demands were discussed, and it was noted that, in 2020, consumers spent £652m on lamb – up by 10.8% on the previous year. This was amplified by a growth in the independent butcher sector. It was noted that HCC has supported this growth through increased marketing and social media campaigning. The market of beef was also discussed. It was noted that around 15% of Welsh beef is exported. It was reported that consumer demands changed due to COVID-19 (attributed to the increased demand for mince at the start of the first lockdown period). Promotional work undertaken was done by retailers and levy bodies to target sales of premium beef cuts. It was noted that the 'eat out to help out' scheme did increase out of home sales. The WFAC was informed that, overall, the supply of beef remains relatively constant.

4.3 Information on HCC's recently launched the 'Welsh Way' campaign focusing on 3 sustainability pillars was provided. Further information can be found at <https://meatpromotion.wales/en/about/what-we-do/marketing/red-meat-the-welsh-way>. The WFAC expressed an interest in the promotional work undertaken by HCC that is suitable for all affordability ranges.

4.4 The Chair thanked Mr Richards for his presentation.

### **5. Presentation from Keith Smyton- Head of Food Division- Welsh Government**

5.1 The presentation focused on the food and drink sector and provided first impressions about new UK – EU border impact. In relation to the UK food supply chain, Mr Smyton said that UK food supply-chains have functioned well and that COVID -19 absence rates remain stable. He reported on Government action to support the food supply including the Expedited Return Scheme. A Welsh

Government perspective was provided on immediate issues at EU / UK border as monitored since 1 January 2021. An overview of the UK food supply macro picture detailed the recent retailer trends in product availability, supplier fulfilment and stock in hand. Information on the new complexities for food exports concerning border and customs arrangements was provided.

5.2 A number of immediate concerns in relation to food exports into the EU were identified. These included: the complexity of non-tariff barriers, the new administration required, the reduction of consolidated transport (groupage), the mixed experience of EU Border Custom Post practice and the shortage of skilled customs agents. The WFAC was informed that UK operational freight traffic has now reached 75-80% on direct ferry routes to the EU and from Wales around 55-70% of normal levels. Looking at first impressions of implications of the UK's exit from the EU, Mr Smyton highlighted the following:-

- Business Survivability: the potential that some food and drink businesses will fail should they not differentiate;
- The export trade will stabilise, but the future pattern of this trade may change over time (with knock on effect to supply-chains);
- Greater trading challenges will also create import substitution opportunities;
- There are emerging opportunities for consolidators / aggregators;
- Significant changes to Welsh ports to deal with trade flows from Irish Sea routes i.e. BCP facilities; and
- Key emphasis on food safety, traceability and integrity.

5.3 Mr Smyton concluded the presentation by reporting on the efforts of Welsh Government in stakeholder engagement and signposting businesses to informative newsletters, expert portals and technical webinars to provide clarity and guidance.

5.4 The Chair thanked Mr Smyton for his presentation.

## **6. Presentation from Keith Rowlands- Imports and Exports Delivery Manager- FSA in Wales**

6.1 Keith Rowlands spoke about the new rules in relation to imports of food and feed into the UK, as from 1 January 2021, with the UK now a third country to the EU. Members were informed of the new import platform for food and feed imports. The Imports of Products, Animals, Food and Feed System (IPAFFS) that replaces TRACES now includes third country imports. From 1 April 2021, it is expected that IPAFFS will include pre-notification of EU high risk food and feed followed by risk-based checks and controls on such high-risk food and feed from 1 July 2021.

6.2 Members noted the complexities of the respective government departments' responsibilities on imports and exports. Trade is reserved and DEFRA is the lead department for international trade in food. In relation to food and feed imports, Welsh Government and APHA/DEFRA are responsible for imports of products of animal origin; and APHA/DEFRA are responsible for imports of live animals, plants and organics. Members noted that FSA is responsible for the import of high-risk foods not of animal origin. Members were also informed that Welsh Government is responsible

for new border control posts in Wales. Information was provided on the FSA's role in supporting Local Authorities in Wales on imports, including the delivery of recent training in the form of:

- Imported Food and Official Controls course
- Imported Food: Legislation and Enforcement webinars
- Imported Foods: Sampling
- Imported Feed Training (e-learning course)
- Official Fish Inspectors (OFIs) training

6.3 In relation to exports, FSA support to Local Authorities in Wales has included: advice on Export Health Certificates (a DEFRA lead; funding for Certified Support Officer training; working with partners in relation to Export Health Attestations Support; support in relation to the registration of fishing vessels.

6.4 Members noted the collaborative work of the FSA with Welsh Government in relation to the siting and running of Border Control Posts in Wales.

6.5 The Chair thanked Mr Rowlands for his presentation.

## **7. Country Specific Matters Raised During Discussions**

7.1 A number of country specific matters were raised during the discussions at agenda points 3-6 above as follows:-

- Delays at ports and the impact this is having on the export of Welsh seafood in particular;
- Mussel beds in Wales not being inspected as Local Authority officials have been diverted to COVID-19 track and trace related work;
- The importance of the siting and design of new border control posts;
- The need to ensure that border control posts in Wales are adequately resourced;
- The need to ensure a consistent approach on framework agreements;
- The uncertain future of food businesses in Wales, particularly those involved in the hospitality and catering industry;
- The need for sustainable funding for Local Authorities in Wales;
- The need to ensure the availability of safe affordable food for Welsh consumers; and
- The complexity of Government Departments which have responsibilities for imports and exports.

7.2 Against the above comments, the importance of a continued collaborative approach, with the FSA working in consultation with other Government Departments, local authorities and other key stakeholders was reinforced.

## **8. Report from Chair (FSA Paper 21/02/02)**

8.1 The Chair presented his written report which summarised discussions at the Board meetings held on 2 and 8 December 2020 and also issues addressed at the last meeting of the Board's Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and the recent Board Retreat. The Chair also mentioned his attendance at the last meeting of the Safe Sustainable Authentic Food Wales (SSAFW) group.

8.2 In updating members on the recruitment process, the Chair commented that he had been impressed with the high calibre of applications.

## **9. Report from Director (FSA Paper 21/02/03)**

9.1 The Director presented his written report which informed members of the outcome of a bid to Welsh Government for additional resources, on business planning matters, on the FSA's consultation on the Food Law Code of Practice, on the appointment of a new Chair for the FSA and on matters discussed at the last meeting of SSAFW. The report also informed members on Director engagements since the last meeting and on information shared with members since the last meeting. In updating on the report, the Director commented that he had been pleased with the outcome of the FSA in Wales' bid for additional resources. The Director reported that the increased funding would now enable the FSA to recruit additional staff to undertake the new areas of responsibility which transferred to the FSA on 1 January 2021 as a result of EU-exit. Members noted that the FSA in Wales was in a period of growth both in terms of functions and people.

9.2 The Director provided an oral update on matters discussed at the last meeting of SSAFW. He reported that the meeting was well attended, with most stakeholders present, and that it had provided the opportunity for members to take stock, describing the current climate in their respective areas one month after the end of the transition period and within a continued period of COVID-19 restrictive measures. Key takeaways from the meeting were provided and the Director agreed to circulate a written report from the meeting particularly in relation to the matters raised by industry.

**Action: Secretariat to provide a written report on the SSAFW meeting**

## **10. AOB**

10.1 The Chair reminded members that the next Committee meeting on 4 March 2021 would be a business meeting where the WFAC would provide its advice on papers to be considered at the Board meeting on 9 March.

10.2 Ronnie Alexander expressed his apologies for absence for the next meeting. Noting that this would have been Ronnie's last meeting as a member of the WFAC, the Chair took the opportunity to thank him for the contribution he has made to the work of the Welsh Food Advisory Committee since his appointment in 2014.

10.3 An enquiry was raised on the current state of play on Regulatory Reform. The Director said that the programme, now known as Achieving Business Compliance,

was progressing and that a paper was due to be discussed by the Board shortly and that it would therefore also be reflected in a meeting of the WFAC.

10.4 An enquiry was made on the capacity of local authorities to undertake official food and feed control inspections. The Committee was informed that local authorities in Wales have taken a risk based proportionate approach while their resources are targeted at COVID-19 track and trace work. Members noted that while no routine proactive food inspections had taken place, all critical work had been addressed.