

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT: APRIL 2009

Early Adoption of Calorie Labelling by Catering Sector

1. The content of my February report outlined the first steps that the Agency had taken towards ensuring that consumers have access to more consistent nutrition information when eating out. The work has progressed and on 6 April we announced the names of 18 companies that have agreed to early provision of calorie labelling at point of choice in some, or all, of their outlets. The information has already started to appear. We anticipate that there will be more than 450 outlets across the country displaying the information by June.
2. A diverse range of companies is involved – the list includes workplace caterers, sit down and quick-service restaurants, theme parks and leisure attractions, pub restaurants, cafes and sandwich chains. Discussions continue with companies that are considering calorie labelling but have yet to make a final decision and others that have contacted the Agency following the April announcement.
3. Our announcement received extensive coverage including Radio 4's Today programme, BBC Breakfast TV, BBC News Channel, ITV, Channel 4 and Radio 1 news bulletins, as well as around 20 regional BBC radio stations. In print coverage appeared in the Daily Star, The Sun, Daily Telegraph, The Guardian, The Independent, Daily Mail, Daily Express, Metro and several Scottish national papers. Coverage is likely to continue online and in regional newspapers and trade magazines.
4. The next steps are to discuss practical issues surrounding the roll out of the calorie labelling with those companies. Our stakeholder advisory group (which includes representatives from industry, health and consumer groups and enforcement) is providing advice and input into research that will look at both consumers experience and the practical implications of calorie labelling. Consultation on formal recommendations on provision of calorie information in catering is expected in the autumn.

Dioxins in Irish Pork and Beef: Update

5. On 19 March the EU approved the NI Emergency Support Measure covering the voluntary cull and disposal of affected cattle, disposal of eligible meat, and a hardship scheme for affected farmers and meat processors.
6. The cull and disposal of all implicated animals, together with the disposal of beef and pork meat, took three weeks to complete from 21 March to 10 April. Animals were slaughtered and rendered. The meat and bone meal and tallow from the rendering process were then destroyed by incineration.
7. Approximately 4,400 animals from the 8 affected farms were culled. A number of animals were excluded from the cull on the following basis:
 - Animals that were at no time present on contaminated farms and did not come into contact with contaminated animals, and were kept at locations such as out-farms which did not receive contaminated feed.
 - Calves born into dairy herds and for which potential exposure was limited to a short period of milk from affected cows.
 - Cohorts of cattle present on affected farms but which did not receive contaminated feed and did not come into contact with contaminated animals. These animals were only de-restricted after full dioxin/PCB testing of pooled samples taken by live biopsy were shown to be compliant and congener profiles contained no evidence of exposure to contaminated feed.
 - Casualty animals slaughtered during the period of restriction and which in any event would not enter the food chain.
 - These exclusions have been agreed with the European Commission.
8. Approximately 400 tonnes of implicated beef and pork products was disposed of as part of the scheme. All of the remaining of contaminated feed, approximately 90 tonnes including mixtures containing contaminated feed, has been returned to the premises of origin in the Republic of Ireland.#
9. The Solicitor for three of the farmers has withdrawn their application for leave to bring proceedings for Judicial Review in respect of the actions taken by DARD and FSA in this incident.

10. FSANI has been informed by colleagues in DHSSPS that the planned DHSSPS review will include issues of concern that the Executive has raised through DFP. Amended Terms of Reference for the review will be circulated in due course. It is likely that the review will take place during April.
11. I will update the Board on progress in completing and publishing the independent review of the Agency's handling of the incident at our meeting.

Government Statement on Regulatory Budgets

12. On Thursday 2 April Lord Mandelson, the Secretary of State for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform, laid a Written Ministerial Statement in Parliament to announce that the Government will not be pursuing the regulatory budgets initiative on which it consulted, and the FSA Board commented, last year.
13. Lord Mandelson's statement says that, in the current economic climate, the Government will be looking carefully at all regulation which imposes a burden on business. The Government will wish to avoid new regulation which increases burdens on business except where there is a clear case for action. I would expect that to include regulatory interventions required to tackle urgent or serious risks to consumer health. A new sub committee of the National Economic Council will scrutinise planned regulation. The Government has not announced how the sub committee will work, the scope of the sub committee, or membership.
14. The Government will also be establishing an external Regulatory Policy Committee to provide independent scrutiny of impact assessments. Again there are, as yet, no details of how this Committee will work.

'Safer Food, Better Business' Special Grant Scheme

15. Local authorities in England have recently been invited to apply for a further round of grants to help them support small caterers and retailers to use Safer food, better business (SFBB). The grant scheme aims to achieve improved food safety management and increased legal compliance.
16. This year's programme will focus on three key priority areas:
 - Preparation for the 2012 Olympics
 - Moving to the new six-tier National "Scores on Doors" Scheme
 - Sustainability of SFBB implementation

17. This year, we are keen to fund project proposals from local authorities within areas that will be directly involved in events associated with the 2012 Olympics. We are also aiming to support those local authorities and businesses expecting higher visitor numbers linked to the games.
18. The Agency is also particularly keen to support those local authorities that wish to move to the new six tier national "Scores on doors" scheme once launched. It is intended that grant funding is used to assist those businesses at most risk of attaining a poor "score" due to inadequate food safety management.
19. The third priority area relates to sustainability of SFBB implementation. As centrally provided funding for SFBB will be decreasing, there is a need for a greater focus on sustainability for the future. We are therefore looking for innovative proposals, involving new funding sources and partnership working with key intermediaries for small food businesses.
20. This year's grant scheme builds on the extensive SFBB programme to date. Since its launch in 2005, the Agency has met requests for well over 450,000 copies of SFBB. In addition, the Agency has supported 113 SFBB projects, involving over 300 local authorities and other stakeholders such as colleges, community and business support organisations. Grant funding of around £10m has provided face to face support to over 55,000 food businesses. Training on coaching SFBB into businesses and the evaluation of its implementation has also been provided to over 1,400 environmental health practitioners.
21. The SFBB programme will be evaluated next year when progress towards the Agency's Strategic Plan target for compliance with food safety management will continue to be tracked. The aim will be to use new compliance data from local authorities that will be available as part of the new local authority enforcement monitoring system.

Creation of Food Fraud Advisory Unit

22. The Agency has recently created a new Food Fraud Advisory Unit of 16 members recognised as having extensive experience in investigating food fraud. The Unit will provide a source of advice to local authorities investigating illegal activity throughout the food or feed chain.
23. The members represent different enforcement backgrounds, including environmental health, trading standards and port health and bring a wide range of skills and experience. Local authorities (LAs) carrying out investigations into food fraud, which would include any illegal activity relating to food and feed, can draw on the Unit's expertise, including telephone advice or attendance at meetings. However,

responsibility for leading the investigation will always remain with the authority requesting support.

24. LAs can request the Unit's assistance by telephoning and/or emailing the designated point of contact within the Agency's Food Safety: Implementation and Delivery Division.
25. As well as providing advisory support to local authorities, the Unit will also be involved in raising awareness of the range of resources available to help tackle food fraud. These include the Agency's national Food Fraud Database; a potential source of criminal intelligence for authority's investigating food fraud, and the 'Fighting Fund', a financial resource available to support local authority investigations.
26. The Unit will build on and take over the work of the Illegal Meat Task Force (IMTF), following five years of significant success in supporting illegal meat investigations. The wider remit of the new Unit, which retains some of the membership of the IMTF, addresses the need for a more diverse investigative resource.
27. More information on all of these initiatives together with a full list of members of the Unit can be found on the Agency's website at www.food.gov.uk/foodfraud
28. The success of this work relies heavily on the input of local authorities, industry and consumers to let the Agency know if they are aware of suspected food fraud.
29. An article outlining the work of the FFAU appeared in the April 2009 edition of "FSA News".

Joint Kirklees Council / FSA Investigation: Food Business Operator Charged

30. An ongoing investigation by Kirklees Council, assisted by the Food Standards Agency, into the operation of an unapproved cutting plant in Dewsbury, has resulted in a Mr Yakub Moosa Yusuf, Mr Ibrahim Yusuf, Mr Nabil Allibou and Direct Halal Meat and Poultry Ltd being charged.
31. The alleged offences relate to: breaching a 2004 order prohibiting Mr Yusuf, a former West Yorkshire abattoir operator (Shelf & Ossett Abattoirs), from being concerned in the management of a food business; operating an unapproved meat premises; placing meat that has not been health-marked on the market; and numerous hygiene offences.
32. Mr Yakub Moosa Yusuf, (date of birth 11/11/54) of 36 Warley Drive, Bradford, failed to appear at a hearing at Leeds Crown Court on 11 March 2009 and a Bench Warrant was issued for his arrest.

33. Officials in the Agency's legal investigations team have worked closely with Kirklees Council throughout the investigation. Both parties have invested a great deal of time and effort to progress the investigation towards a successful conclusion.
34. Kirklees Council were successful in securing funding from the Agency's "Fighting Fund" (a financial resource available to support local authority investigations). The funding has helped Kirklees Council dedicate the appropriate resources to the investigation.
35. This co-ordinated approach has demonstrated the benefits of a joint Agency/local authority approach in this high profile area of food law enforcement.

Training for Local Authority Enforcement Officers 2008/2009

36. The Agency has for a number of years provided training for local authority food law enforcement officers. During 2008/2009, the number of training courses provided and officers trained far exceeded previous years.
37. Under the statutory Food Law Code of Practice (paragraph 1.2.4) issued by the Food Standards Agency, local authority food law enforcement officers are required to undergo at least 10 hours of update (refresher) training per year based on the principles of Continuous Professional Development. It is recognised that the responsibility for providing appropriate training for their officers is the responsibility of local authorities, but most commercial training courses are expensive and as such are unattractive to many local authorities. Consequently, the FSA provides a programme of high quality training for local authority food law enforcement officers. Last year the Agency provided a budget of £250,000 towards this training programme. Training courses are made available to local authority officers at a very low cost and in some cases they are completely free of charge.
38. A Steering Group advises on the type of training required. Key stakeholders including Local Authorities Co-ordinators of Regulatory Services (LACORS), the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) and the Trading Standards Institute (TSI) are represented on the Group. The Steering Group agrees where appropriate, course development teams set up by the Agency; considers recommendations from course development teams; receives reports on the evaluation of pilot courses; considers alternative methods of delivering training e.g. e-learning, videos, distance learning; and maintains liaison between England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland concerning training initiatives.

39. During the year 2008/2009 a total of 81 training courses were held at different locations around England at which 1,712 local authority enforcement officers were trained. I am pleased to announce that this is yet again a new record. Last year, which was also a record, we ran 50 courses at which a total of 1,105 officers were trained. Although a number of the successful and popular existing courses were run, five new courses were developed, upon which excellent feedback has been received. In addition to these training courses, an e-learning (on-line) allergy training resource was made available via the Agency's Website and an e-learning vacuum packing course has also been developed which it is hoped will 'go live' within the next few weeks.

40. In addition, the Agency also provides training on imported food. For the period 2008/2011, a contract has been agreed with provision for at least 84 training courses. The contractor has also been tasked to develop interactive, internet accessed distance learning training. The total cost of the contract for the 3 years is £240,000.

Tim J Smith
Chief Executive