

FSA BOARD WORKSHOP ON FOOD LABELLING: 5 DECEMBER 2006**Issue**

1. This Paper reports the proceedings of a Food Labelling Workshop, held on 5 December, for Board Members with a particular interest in the EU Food Labelling Review. The purpose of the Workshop was to learn about the key issues, concerns and ideas of a wide range of stakeholders and discuss in an informal setting how these might be addressed.

Summary

2. The morning session provided participants with a 'snapshot' of food labelling issues, with the focus on a series of presentations from key stakeholders. This was followed by a question and answer session. After lunch, separate discussion groups considered the main issues identified from the consumer; industry; and regulatory/enforcement angles. The discussions in each group were reported and then considered in plenary session.
3. Although there were no firm conclusions, the Workshop stimulated a lively discussion with very useful insights from the various participants. This will be used to help inform further thinking, and will be reflected in the Discussion Paper to the Board at its February Open Meeting. Overall, feedback from participants was very positive, indicating that the Workshop had fully met its objectives.

Detail

4. The Workshop was introduced and facilitated by Michael Wight, Head of Food Labelling, Standards and Allergy Division. It was well attended by Board Members, plus representatives from the Northern Ireland and Wales Food Advisory Committees. The speakers represented all stakeholder interests. A full list of participants is annexed.
5. Brief details of the presentations from the morning session are given below. Copies of these presentations are available from the Executive on request.
 - **Anthony Flower, Head of Food Labelling and Marketing Terms Branch**, gave an overview of food labelling from a legislator's perspective, including developments in Brussels, and the difficulties in balancing stakeholders' interests.
 - **Paul Berryman from Leatherhead Food International**, considered potential developments for future food labelling, taking into account trends in consumer demand, industry drivers and new and emerging technologies.
 - **Eva Hurt, representing the Food and Drink Federation**, looked at the key concerns of food manufacturers. These in particular include mandatory on-pack requirements, which they would like to see reduced, but with the

flexibility for other information to be provided voluntarily on the label or via alternative means.

- **Peter Wight, representing the British Retail Consortium**, provided an overview of key issues for retailers, which included the need to avoid unnecessary labelling; and to have a co-ordinated regulatory process that is flexible, avoids a prescriptive approach, will facilitate innovation and which will help ensure effective enforcement.
 - **Chris Dabner of the National Association of Master Bakers**, provided the SME angle. Key concerns included the complexity and level of current mandatory requirements; frequent uncoordinated legislative changes and the disproportionate cost of complying with these; and a relative lack of expertise and flexibility amongst small businesses to accommodate these.
 - **Sue Davies of Which?**, said that the main issue for consumers remained the need to retain the label as the most important source of information, and that the emphasis of the Review should be on improving clarity, rather than a reduction in requirements. Other concerns included alternative ways of providing information, information on food sold in catering establishments, and the importance of effective implementation and enforcement.
 - **Les Bailey of LACORS**, presented the case for enforcement authorities. Areas of particular concern included the imprecise nature of some labelling definitions; the fact that requirements are contained in numerous pieces of legislation; the challenge to ensure compliance with legislation in the face of commercial pressure; and the potential implication of legal precedence and resource issues.
6. The afternoon session provided the opportunity for delegates to consider the main issues and how these might be addressed from the different perspectives of consumers, industry and regulators/enforcers.
7. The following points emerged from the discussion groups:
- There was a need to base labelling requirements on core principles, with food safety as the key principle;
 - Whether a common labelling approach should be adopted for all food, including food sold loose, albeit in a flexible format;
 - A recognition that one-size did not fit all, but to aim for a flexible approach that includes a minimum set of core requirements that are achievable by all organisations, including SMEs;
 - The need to distinguish between what consumers say they want and what they actually need/use;
 - The importance of clarity (although no specific discussion on font-sizes/presentation);

- The importance and role of consumer education;
 - The need for legislation to be simple, consistent, and non-ambiguous to facilitate enforcement;
 - The need for labelling legislation to be future-proofed;
 - The importance of guidance/codes of practice/self-regulation;
 - Nutrition labelling should be mandatory;
 - Labelling should indicate serving sizes to facilitate healthy eating choices;
 - The need to fully explore alternative means of providing information to consumers;
 - There was a need for a consolidation of labelling rules;
 - Whether a European-wide self regulating policing scheme would work.
8. In the subsequent plenary session, the following common themes were identified:
- The need for core mandatory information, based on key principles such as 'safety' and 'clearly understandable';
 - The right of the consumer to have access to core information for all food, including those sold loose;
 - The need for clear, simple, consistent and transparent legislation;
 - The need to ensure clarity, perhaps by means of a standard panel;
 - Enforcement was seen as a key issue – could this be helped by Codes of Practice/Guidance/Self Regulation/Improvement Notices?
9. Michael Wight thanked participants for their contributions. The ideas generated had been very helpful and would help inform further thinking on food labelling issues in the context of the EU Review currently underway.

Labelling, Standards and Allergy Division

Contact:	Michael Wight	Tel: 020 7276 8483 Email: michael.wight@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk
	Anthony Flower	Tel: 020 7276 8075 Email: a.flower@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

List of Attendees

Board Members

Deirdre Hutton
Valerie Howarth
Chris Pomfret
Maureen Edmondson
Ian Reynolds
Bill Reilly
Chrissie Dunn
Nelisha Wickremasinghe

FAC Members

Jack Pearce (FAC Northern Ireland)
Barbara Livingstone (FAC Northern Ireland)
Michael Walker (FAC Northern Ireland)
Margaret Griffiths (FAC Wales)

Speakers

Tony Flower (Food Standards Agency)
Eva Hurt (Nestle/Food and Drinks Federation)
Sue Davies (Which?)
Les Bailey (Lacors)
Peter Wight (M&S/British Retail Consortium)
Chris Dabner (National Association of Master Bakers)
Paul Berryman (Leatherhead Food International)

FSA staff

Gill Fine
Michael Wight
Tony Flower
Theresa Ekong
Jane Ince
Christine Green
Hilary Neathey
Mervyn Briggs
Stephen Knight
Rachel Oelman