

# Industry Stakeholder Meeting Monday 21<sup>st</sup> March 2005

## Attendees

### Industry Representatives

Paul Archer – Dairy UK NI  
Michael Bell – NI Food and Drink Association  
Alan Gibson – Moy Park  
Bryan Gray – NI Independent Retail Trade Association  
Mike Johnston – Dairy Council UK NI  
Cherrie Kenny – Livestock and Meat Commission  
Dennis Law – NI Seafood Ltd  
Colin McDonald – NI Grain Trade Association  
Rosemary McMullan – United Dairy Farmers Ltd  
Harry Marquess – NI Master Butchers Association  
Cecil Mathers – NI Meat Exporters Association  
Keith Smyton – Pork and Bacon Forum

### FSANI Officials

Morris McAllister - Chairman  
Gerry McCurdy  
Greg Irwin  
Maria Jennings  
Jim Ross  
Andrea Marnoch  
Ruth Watson - Secretariat

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Chairman opened the meeting by welcoming everyone to the Food Standards Agency NI and initiated a round-the-table introduction. He then went on to explain that the Forum has been set up to provide a mechanism for the principal industry organisations to raise matters of broad concern with the Agency on an informal basis. The meetings also enable stakeholders to look ahead with the Agency to help identify emerging issues as early as possible.
- 1.2 The Chairman then addressed the minutes of the last meeting. Gerry McCurdy updated delegates on the subject of beef labelling, previously raised under item 3 of the last agenda. A meeting took place between DARD and the District Councils aiming to raise the profile of Third Country Imports legislation. DARD have undertaken to provide more in-depth training to the enforcement officials from the District Councils who enforce the beef regulations. A recent visit from

the Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) has further raised the profile of enforcement. Mr McCurdy also noted that there are guidelines for the industry addressing these regulations. The Chairman acknowledged and sympathised with the confusion experienced by the industry regarding roles and responsibilities, but pointed out that queries relating to the regulations should be directed towards DARD, who have central responsibility. The Chairman advised that industry representatives may find it helpful to discuss with DARD the preparation of a document detailing their role with regards to the new EU Hygiene Regulations.

## **2. Key Developments since the last meeting**

The Chairman updated the industry representatives on the key developments since the last meeting.

### **2.1 The Strategic Plan for 2005 – 2010.**

This has now been approved by the Board and can be found on the FSA website, [www.food.gov.uk](http://www.food.gov.uk). The Agency's key priorities for the next five years are:

- Food Safety
- Eating for Health
- Consumer Choice
- The FSA's role as a Government Department

Hard copies have been ordered for the FSANI office, and the Chairman offered to issue copies to those who expressed interest in receiving one.

**Action** – Secretariat to issue Strategic Plan to delegates who requested copies

### **2.2 The Independent Review of the Agency**

Baroness Barbara Dean had been commissioned by the Board to conduct an Independent Review of the Agency last year. The aim of the review was to measure how far the Agency has delivered on its promises and to what extent it has lived up to its core values. Baroness Dean was asked to make recommendations on any areas of weakness in delivery of the Agency's consumer protection role or in any other aspects of its performance. The review was carried out by a small team, and consisted of 110 interviews across the UK,

with additional participation via the website. All interviewees showed a great willingness to engage. The interviews were conducted with a free-format approach for all stakeholders, who could raise issues from the Agency's early years up to recent times. The key issues identified in the report were those voiced by a number of stakeholders. Baroness Dean has made 22 recommendations relating to the core values, devolution, and specific issues raised by stakeholders. The overall impression was favourable – the majority of stakeholders agreeing that the Agency has done well, and there is widespread confidence that the Agency can meet future challenges. The Board has accepted all 22 recommendations, and the Report can be found on the FSA website along with the Agency's response.

### **2.3 The Recruitment of new NIFAC members**

The terms of office for four out of the nine Advisory Committee members expire at the end of July 2005. The recruitment process for new members is well advanced, with interviews being held tomorrow. We hope to see the newly appointed members in office by August to avoid any gaps in membership. The FSANI will announce the successful candidates following the Minister's approval.

## **3 FSANI Restructuring**

The Chairman explained that FSANI is undergoing restructuring. He tabled the new structure chart and talked the delegates through the changes to the organisation. There will be a corporate services team plus 5 policy teams::

- Consumer Choice
- General Food Hygiene
- Audit
- Primary Production
- Meat Hygiene

The new structure, which will be effective from 4<sup>th</sup> April 2005 ensures full integration of professional and administrative staff, ensuring that the Agency in Northern Ireland is well placed to deliver the new Strategic plan and is configured to interface better with the key industry and other stakeholders. A short

discussion followed on FSANI's relationships with the industry, and the Chairman undertook to discuss how the Northern Ireland industry views could be more efficiently represented.

**Action – Chairman to consult industry on representation.**

#### **4 Diet and Nutrition Update**

**4.1** Andrea Marnoch gave a general overview of some of the key areas of diet and nutrition work the Agency is currently involved in, as well as highlighting a number of planned activities over the next 12 months.

**4.2** She briefly outlined the wider policy background in Northern Ireland and the increasing emphasis on diet and nutrition as a public health issue. This is reflected in the Agency's Strategic Plan for 2005 – 2010, as well as in a number of Northern Ireland initiatives:

- The Food and Nutrition Strategy
- The Childhood Obesity Task Force (Fit Futures)
- The Nutritional Standards Steering Group, led by the Department of Education

**4.3** Andrea went on to explain that much of the Agency's work in the last 18 months has been shaped by the Promotion of Foods to Children Action Plan, which was agreed by the Board in July 2004, following extensive consultation across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Action Plan was informed by the findings of the Hastings Review in 2003, which showed that promotional activity has an impact on children's food preferences, purchasing behaviour and consumption. Recommendations have included – but are not limited to – the following:

- The development of a healthy drinks vending toolkit
- Planned consultation on target food specifications for school meal suppliers based on the Scottish 'Hungry for Success' model
- The piloting of front of pack signposting labelling information

**4.4** In addition, Phase II of the salt campaign is planned for September this year, with Sid the Slug featuring again. This time the message is about informing consumers on how to read nutrition labels and convert sodium levels into salt, which many people misunderstand. Evaluation from Phase I of the campaign shows that people are more aware of the health implications associated with excessive salt intake.

**4.5** Andrea then went on to discuss the current signposting consultation, the results of which will form the next phase of consumer research in May this year. For details on this please see the website:  
<http://www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/Consultations/ukwideconsults/signpostconsultmar05>

**4.6** The Director thanked Andrea for the comprehensive brief, and invited delegates to comment and discuss. The representative from Dairy UK enquired if the food service would be subject to signposting guidelines as well as the retail sector. The Director explained that while specific details regarding the issue have not been decided, the food service would be involved in the future.

**4.7** The Master Butcher's Association expressed concern over the use of certain colours in signposting – something which could lead to consumers cutting particular foods out of their diets completely, leading to an unbalanced diet. The Chairman noted the concern and expressed a willingness to hear stakeholders' views on the topic.

**4.8** Mr McAllister noted that while the signposting proposals are currently voluntary, in nature non-compliance from the food industry may eventually result in compulsory measures, as voiced by the EU Commissioner, Mr Kyprianou.

## **5 Invitees' Topics and General Issues**

### **FSA Policy**

**5.1** Alan Gibson of Moy Park raised the question of over the Agency's approach to

contaminated food incidents. The Chairman first explained that all actions taken by the Agency are science-based. Furthermore, while there are differences between contaminants that *may* cause risk; contaminants that *are* of risk, and contaminants that are prohibited by law. The Agency must respect the legislation. This can be seen in the recent case of Sudan 1 contamination – the public health risk from the incident was low but Sudan 1 is an illegal substance, so the large product-recall was necessary. The Deputy Director acknowledged that traceability within the industry could play a major role in tackling such issues, as well as cementing relationships with Local Authorities and HM Customs and Excise. The Chairman added that Baroness Dean’s Independent Review of the Agency examined this issue, and the Agency will look at their policies to ensure proportionate responses to such incidents.

### **Health Standards of Imported Meat**

- 5.2** Harry Marquess from the NI Master Butchers association enquired into what precautionary measures are taken against the presence of radiation in beef from Third Party Countries. The Deputy Director explained that there is a national sampling plan which included testing for evidence of irradiation. The EC’s Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) also carry out checks in Non-EU Countries to assess compliance with EU standards. Mr Marquess suggested that irradiated beef originating from Brazil had entered the country without being tested – the Deputy Director urged him to provide the Agency with more information. The Chairman undertook to pass details of the sampling plan on to Mr Marquess.

**Action** – Chairman to pass details of the sampling plan to Mr Marquess.

### **Labelling of Local Produce**

- 5.3** Keith Smyton of the Pork and Bacon Forum raised the issue of the labelling of local produce. Mr Smyton was concerned that some retailers are not altogether honest in the labelling of their products. Maria Jennings undertook to discuss this with him at a later date.

**Action** – Maria Jennings to discuss product labelling with Mr Smyton at an early date.

### **Boning out of beef**

- 5.4** Mr Marquess expressed concern over hearsay that when the OTM rule expires, it will be necessary for the vertebral column from all beef over 12 months to be removed. The Deputy Director stated that the enforcement of this issue would fall either to DARD or local enforcement bodies depending on certain circumstances. He also acknowledged that research was needed in this area, something which EFSA are addressing.

### **Communication from the FSA to stakeholders**

- 5.5** Paul Archer of Dairy UK NI offered the opinion that in light of the recent Sudan 1 incident, the FSA should investigate alternative methods of communicating with stakeholders in the event of a major food crisis. The Agency's main vehicle of communication is currently the website. It had been noticed that as the profile of the Sudan 1 incident increased, the website became jammed, preventing people from obtaining information. The Deputy Director encouraged stakeholders to approach Local Authorities for information during food incidents, and to subscribe to FSANI's text message alert system. The Chairman accepted that the Sudan 1 issue has presented the Agency with valuable lessons to learn, and confirmed that a report on the handling of the incident would be published in due course.

## **6 Six Monthly Forward Look**

The Chairman updated stakeholders on forthcoming events for FSANI.

### **6.1 Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee (NIFAC) Events**

The next open meeting of NIFAC will take place on 6<sup>th</sup> April in the FSANI offices. The Committee will discuss Accredited Food Quality Management Systems, and Traceability.

NIFAC are also holding an outreach meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> May in Londonderry, entitled 'Making Healthy Food Choices in a Modern World'. This is the first of its kind, and is aimed at every-day consumers.

The Advisory Committee will also hold an open meeting on the following morning in Londonderry, and will address the Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre

(NI) report on food poisoning.

## **6.2 The Appointment of the new Chairman to the FSA**

Sir John Krebs, Chairman of the FSA Board has resigned and will leave the FSA in April. He will shortly take up a new appointment in Christ's College in Oxford. Interviews have been held for his successor, and the Agency is expected to announce the new Chair in the near future.

## **6.3 Meeting of the FSA Board in Belfast**

The October open Board meeting will be held in Belfast. Details of time and venue will be announced in due course.

## **7 Concluding Comments and Close**

Mr McAllister sought comments on the meeting. All present considered it to have been a very useful exercise and looked forward to the next meeting. Mr McAllister thanked everyone for their participation and confirmed that the next meeting will be held in six months' time.

**Ruth Watson**

**01/04/2005**

## Appendix 1 – Table of Action Points

	<b>Action</b>	<b>To be actioned by</b>
1	To issue Strategic Plan to interested delegates	Secretariat
2	To consult industry stakeholders on representation.	Chairman
3	To pass details of the import sampling plan to Mr Marquess.	Chairman
4	To discuss product labelling with Mr Smyton.	Maria Jennings