

Scottish Food Advisory Committee
St Magnus House, Aberdeen
25 January 2006
10:00 - 13:00

Open Session

Present

Committee Members:

Graeme Millar CBE, Chair
Anne Campbell
Willie Davidson
Charlotte Maltin
David Cameron
John Cowden
Catherine Brady
Moyra Burns
Brian Ratcliffe

FSAS Officials:

Dr George Paterson, Director, FSAS
Lydia Wilkie, Assistant Director, FSAS
Jim Thomson, Assistant Director, FSAS
Jane Ferries, Secretariat, FSAS
Susan Pryde, Head of Food Standards, Diet & Nutrition, FSAS

1 Chairman's Introduction and welcome

1. The Chair welcomed members and observers to the open meeting of the Scottish Food Advisory Committee (SFAC). The Committee was pleased to be back in Aberdeen.
2. The role of the Scottish Food Advisory Committee is to provide advice to the Food Standards Agency on all food safety and standards matters, which have a specific Scottish perspective. The Agency in turn has to fully consider the Committee's views when determining its actions and the policy advice it gives to Ministers. Most food issues are devolved to Scottish Ministers and changes are implemented by the Scottish Parliament. This Committee is an essential element to the Agency to ensure that devolution is fully taken into account.
3. Members of the Committee were invited to declare any conflicts of interest or items of AOB.

4. Charlotte Maltin declared an interest as an employee of **Quality Meat Scotland (QMS)**. The Chair decided it would not be appropriate for Charlotte to take part in discussions surrounding Agenda Item 5 – Country of Origin of Beef in the Food Service Sector. There were no items of AOB raised.
5. There were apologies from Phil Thomas.
6. The Chair formally acknowledged the retirement of Michael Gibson (former Chair of SFAC and FSA Scottish Board member) and congratulated him on being awarded his CBE for work with food safety.

2. Minutes and Matters Arising From the Previous Minutes

7. The Chair directed the Committee to the minutes from the previous meeting.
8. Some members of the Committee raised issues with the development of the CookSafe manual for the retail sector and asked the Agency if they felt that further manuals for sectors other than retail would be considered.
9. The Agency informed the Committee they were currently developing a guide for the retail sector which would be based on 'Safer Food Better Business' It is hoped that this would be used in conjunction with other tools already available.

ACTION: SFAC to be updated on the production of the retail CookSafe manual and the possibility of developing further manuals for other sectors.

3. FSA's Signposting Consultation

4.

10. The Chair invited Susan Pryde, Head of Food Standards & Diet & Nutrition, FSAS to the table. She gave a brief presentation on how the FSA signposting consultation pack was developed covering the following:-
 - The need for a Voluntary Front of Pack Signpost Labelling Scheme
 - Nature of the proposed scheme
 - Agency consumer research
 - Nutritional criteria
 - Consumer research & Stakeholder meetings
11. Members of SFAC presented their findings from the FSAS signposting stakeholder meeting which was held in Perth on 17 January 2006. They informed the Committee of comments from stakeholders which were:-

- A consensus that some form of signposting was necessary.
 - Consumers needed to be fully educated on how the signposting system would work.
 - European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) should have input to the banding criteria.
 - Industry needed to be on board for this scheme to work.
 - Possibility of measurement of Non Milk Extrinsic Sugars (NMES).
 - The luxury food market should be signposted differently or be excluded from the scheme because of the potential impact on these businesses.
 - Healthy products would benefit more from this scheme.
 - Concerns over the monitoring of the scheme.
 - Concerns with label placement especially if a product is spherical.
 - Lack of space on products for the label.
 - Concerns over colour coding and costs involved with this type of scheme.
 - Concerns that the current scheme does not explain energy content.
 - Multiple Traffic Light (MTL) would only be useful with like for like products.
 - Concerns with the nature of the consultation.
 - Concerns with the models offered and felt that a hybrid option would be the way forward.
 - The impact this labelling system may have EU exports/imports with industry.
12. The Chair invited members of the audience for any observations they wished to make to the Committee in advance of them developing their advice to the Agency.
 13. Bruce Walker, National Farmers Unit Scotland (NFUS) asked the Agency who would be testing the products to establish the levels for salt, fat and sugar content are correct.
 14. The Agency informed the observers and SFAC that Local Authorities were currently at liberty to test food and compare their results to what is declared on the label and this would not change with the signposting scheme.
 15. Hugh Galbraith (Aberdeen University) asked the Agency if quantitative data of fat, sugar and salt would be available on the label as well as the high, medium and low banding.

16. The Agency informed the Committee and observers that quantitative data is currently available on back of pack labels, and any front of pack signposting scheme would not mean that this information would be removed.
17. The Chair directed the Committee to the draft response contained in their papers and asked that they discuss each question individually to agree a final response to the consultation, which will be submitted to the Agency. Anne Campbell would combine comments to produce the final response.
18. Members held a general discussion on question one of the FSA signposting consultation and decided that the response should reflect the following:-
 - a front of pack signposting scheme was needed
 - a combination of GDA information and traffic lights would be the best route to take for front of pack labelling
 - There was also however, strong feeling that the scheme had to be simple.
 - There were concerns over the definition of a “serving”.
 - Guideline Daily Amount (GDA) could be shown in percentages
 - It was important not to lose sight of the fact that it should be for people to improve their whole diet and not just concentrate on comparisons of specific foods
 - The importance of a baseline for monitoring and future research
 - MTL format was not generally considered to provide enough information for the consumer and there was a suggestion of a hybrid model
19. With regards to questions 2 & 3 members felt that it was important to mention in the response that retailers and manufacturers who already use their own signposting system should be persuaded to take the same route as the FSA recommended scheme, to allow quality monitoring and research for the future.
20. Some members felt that there was already a feeling within the industry sector that they would be in favour of following the FSA signposting scheme.
21. With question 4 members generally agreed that there was too big a range within the medium banding of this scheme however this would be rectified if the hybrid version as suggested earlier in the response was used.
22. There were no comments for questions 5 & 6
23. With regards to question 7, some members agreed the use of GDA was potentially confusing for consumers and an alternative should be used. There were however some feelings that using an alternative could further confuse the consumer and if an alternative was to be used it must be simple.

24. The Chair asked the Agency if they felt that consumers understood the term GDA. It was pointed out that information contained within the consultation showed consumers did not understand the full meaning of GDA and an alternative was needed.
25. Members responded to question 8 by highlighting issues they had with the range of foods that would initially be targeted with this scheme. It was felt that this scheme should target the overall diet not meal components e.g.pies. They did however, support the suggested scheme for ready-made meals. There were also concerns with retailers selling products such as pies and burgers that would not have packaging and therefore would not have a label, which could risk the industry dividing itself in half. Support was given for the signposting scheme for tinned/dried soup/snack products.
26. The Chair highlighted that it was at the consumers request that the foods suggested in the consultation were targeted.
27. There were no comments on questions 9 & 10.
28. The Chair asked observers for any further questions or points they had concerning the signposting scheme.
29. Jim Stewart (NFUS) supported the front of pack scheme and the MTL system.
30. Steven Birrell - Scottish Food & Drink Federation (SFDF) highlighted that the SFDF would not be supporting a traffic light colour coded system as they believed colours could confuse consumers and asked the Committee if they had any views on this.
31. Members of the Committee commented that colours were helpful although there was a chance that red could be seen as danger and the consumer could avoid these foods. Other concerns with colour coded systems were the cost to the manufacturer.
32. Audrey Blair – Hungry for Success development officer in Aberdeenshire, agreed the system should be simple for the consumer. She added that the simple message such as 5 portions of fruit & veg a day could be used with products such as pies by providing a recommended weekly amount.
33. Carolyn Comeford (NHS Grampian) endorsed the Committees comments that the simplest message would generate the best response from consumers.
34. Some members of the Committee were concerned with the time it may take for the public to fully understand the GDA & Recommended Daily Amount (RDA) and the Agency may risk diluting the effect of the scheme. They also

stressed that education for the consumer is crucial with this scheme otherwise the impact will be lost.

35. Members agreed with the extra comments from the discussions and that Anne Campbell would formulate the final draft response and submit to the secretariat before 8th February 2006.
36. Duncan Ross (Sound Technician) suggested an option of a maximum 10 point system for daily intake rather than dividing products into RDA & GDA's
37. Alistair Smart (NFUS) suggested that red labelling of foods should not be used in this scheme as consumers may avoid these foods.
38. Committee members stated that Mr Smart's comments highlighted the difficulties when using the colour coded system.

ACTION: - Anne Campbell to formulate agreed combined response and issue to Secretariat by 8th February 2006.

ITEM 5 Country of Origin

39. Charlotte Maltin retired from the table.
40. The Chair directed the Committee to the SEERAD consultation paper and asked the Agency to give a brief background.
41. The Agency informed the Committee this was a SEERAD consultation to which the Agency would be responding. FSAS had asked for comments from FSA in Northern Ireland, Wales and England and stressed that at present Scotland was the only UK country contemplating going down this route. The Agency was seeking Committee advice to inform the final response.
42. Members of the Committee made the following comments on the consultation:-
 - There were concerns over singling out beef .If this information was to be made available to consumers then all product information should be made available to the consumer.
 - Members were concerned that there was no obvious connection to food safety within this scheme.
 - They felt that the information was already in use and it was much more of a marketing tool.
 - They felt it should not be made compulsory.
 - Members felt there were little or no public health benefits with this scheme.
 - They felt that people might try to use it as an indicator of quality through marketing.

- Members had doubts on how the consumer would gain from this scheme.
- They felt there were practical issues in being able to provide this information.
- They had concerns over how this scheme would be monitored and enforced as there were no food safety implications To justify scarce reallocating LA resources

43. The Chair opened the debate to observers.
44. Members of NFUS voiced strong disappointment with many of the comments made by the Committee and felt that more support was needed from them to help the Scottish rural economy. From a food safety point of view, they highlighted all the regulations and assurance scheme requirements that primary producers adhere to in Scotland and in their view this scheme should be supported to promote Scottish beef. There was a feeling that EU imports were putting the Scottish rural economy at risk.
45. The Chair informed observers of the Agency lines connected with Animal Origin Imports. (See Annex A)
46. Members of the Committee sympathised with the comments from observers however, they highlighted that they were looking at this document from a food safety point of view and this scheme was hard to support with this in mind. Some members also felt that when looking at the document as a whole, that parts were weak.
47. The Chair indicated his views that there could be concerns raised by consumers that they were being misled. He added that this paper did not highlight effectively how SEERAD wished to bring this scheme into focus i.e. is it from a sustainability point of view, support to the Scottish agriculture industry etc. He then asked the Committee if there was support for a voluntary scheme.
48. Committee members continued to indicate concern over the scheme as a whole (including a possible voluntary scheme) and highlighted that they could not see the direct benefit to the consumer in relation to the Agency's remit over food.
49. Members of NFUS stressed that the livestock industry in Scotland was diminishing and that the scheme was not for the protection of their industry but for the protection and information of the consumer. They felt that a clear labelling policy on all foods was needed to control food scares should they arise. They also felt that consumers were being hoodwinked and this scheme, in their opinion, would help to prevent that. They recognised that there was a

need to approach the Trading Standards but they also sought the support of the Committee.

50. Committee members also indicated that as this scheme would only apply to beef that had not been processed, this could also discourage consumption of beef products.
51. The Agency asked for clarity on the consensus view of the Committee.
52. Members felt they could not comment adequately on the consultation, as it was not a food safety or quality issue.
53. The Chair declared an interest as Chairman of the Scottish Consumer Council (SCC) and suggested that there was indeed a consumer benefit to this scheme through provision of information.
54. Committee members (with the exception of the Chair) agreed that there was no strong argument from SEERAD to point to Agency support for this scheme. There was also no clarity amongst the Committee as to how this scheme could make this any safer or better for the consumer.
55. The Chair re-emphasised his view that there was evidence from consumers that they were concerned about misrepresentation of products and it was on the basis of this information that he supported this scheme, as another way of protecting consumers.
56. The Agency thanked the Committee for a stimulating discussion and highlighted that the breadth of SFACs views would be considered along with views from other Agency offices.

6 PUBLIC SESSION

57. Steven Birrel – SFDF Congratulated the Committee on an informative meeting and asked if SFAC would be taking the opportunity to take part in further food Industry visits as they did in 2005.
58. The Chair informed the Committee that the SFAC Secretariat would contact SFDF once the new members of SFAC were in place in March 2006.
59. Alistair Stewart (NFUS) had concerns with the changes to food standards with regards to slaughtering practices and asked if there was a possibility to discuss any issues with FSAS.
60. The Chair informed the observers that a meeting with FSAS would be arranged at a later date

7 AOB

61. The Chair informed Committee members and observers that this would be the last open meeting for Willie Davidson, Anne Campbell and Phil Thomas. He

thanked them for shaping and contributing to the Scottish debate during their time in office and offered them best wishes for the future on behalf of the Committee.

62. The Chair announced the new members of SFAC and the new Scottish Board member. Jim Arbuckle, Catherine Benton and Amanda O'Donoghue will join SFAC in March 2006 and Professor Bill Reilly will join the FSA Board in February 2006.
63. The Agency asked the Committee to give consideration to the Folic Information paper and offered to arrange further briefing for members from colleagues in FSA HQ and Scottish Executive, if required.
64. Moyra Burns, Brian Ratcliffe and Charlotte Maltin all showed interest in forming a small sub group to discuss this subject and present the information at the SFAC retreat in March 2006.
65. The Chair informed members that this would be the first opportunity SFAC would have to comment on FSA Board policy at an early stage.
66. The Chair thanked observers and Committee members and closed the meeting at 13:10

Products of Animal Origin Imports – Lines to take

- Food of animal origin imported into the EU must have been produced up to the level of EU food law. Equivalence is also necessary in terms of animal health and welfare.
- Only a third country (a country outwith the EU) that appears on a list established by the EU can import into the EU.
- In most cases only products from establishments that appear on a list approved by the Community can export to the EU.
- The Commission's Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) carry out inspections of third countries to ensure consumer protection.
- Products of animal origin must be presented at a Community Border Inspection Post before entry. Health Certification required for most products.