

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT TO THE BOARD

1. Our first FSA Board meeting of the year finds us working against a backdrop of challenging circumstances: the continuing impact of a global pandemic and the UK's new life outside of the European Union.
2. The end of the Transition Period on 31 December 2020 meant the start of new roles for the FSA, and a more concrete sense of how the UK internal market might work in the context of the Northern Ireland Protocol and Northern Ireland's convergence with EU food and feed law. On today's agenda the Board will be able to consider developments **that have arisen in the light of EU transition** (paper FSA 21-03-05 EU Transition Update). The preparatory work the FSA did over several years to establish new functions and processes has paid off. We are, for instance, getting alerts and intelligence about food incidents abroad without having full access to RASSF and we were able to take receipt of our own regulated products applications from 1 January as anticipated. All our projects and programmes met their January milestones. The new arrangements continue to bed in, not least because of various grace periods in relation to Northern Ireland and the need for food businesses to implement new processes, for example on exports.
3. The **UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA)** was reached in late December and governs all aspects of trade between the two parties and confirms the rules by which that trade can be conducted. A summary of the TCA is available [here](#).
4. With the commencement of the new TCA, products of animal origin (POAO) exported from GB to EU Member States, including product moved from GB to Northern Ireland, now require an **Export Health Certificate (EHC)** to comply with EU import requirements. The only exception to this is for suppliers approved as Trusted Traders, who can move POAO from GB to NI with simplified certificates up until 31 March.
5. One of the responsibilities the FSA has taken over from the EU is managing risks in the food chain. We have inherited a list of permitted **regulated products** (e.g. food and feed additives) which are in EU retained law, but we are now responsible for assessing applications and making recommendations to Ministers for new authorisations in this area. To aid this process, we have developed an online system for people to submit applications for changes to the legislation. So far, over 500 people and businesses have contacted us through the online system, and we are now filtering formal applications from a large number of general enquiries. Over 100 applications are in the process of being validated, of which many are CBD (cannabidiol)-related applications.
6. From June and at future Board meetings, the Board will receive updates on issues going through the risk analysis process and a note of any regulated products that have been submitted to Ministers for approval, and information on Ministerial risk management decisions. As most issues are technical or routine, the Board will address the more significant, novel, high-profile or complex cases as formal agenda items. The operation of the overall risk analysis

regime will also be subject to a formal annual review by the FSA Board.

7. The FSA recently issued a reminder to the **CBD** industry to submit novel food applications for their products. As a proportionate approach, and in order to bring the sector into compliance with legislation, we announced last February that applications should be sent to the FSA and be validated by 31 March 2021. We have said that only those products for which we have received validated applications can remain on the market in England and Wales until a decision has been made on whether it is possible to grant them authorisation.
8. Many applications have already been received, but we know there are more to come. For those applications that are validated, their products will be listed on our website to show those for which we have received some information, and which are proceeding through our authorisation process. From April, this list of products will help inform enforcement authorities when they encounter CBD extracts and consider enforcement action.
9. The FSA has completed an eight-week consultation exercise in two phases on the revised **Food Law Code of Practice**, Food Law Practice Guidance and implementation of the Competency Framework, for England and Northern Ireland. This included a series of stakeholder events beginning in October and a written public consultation from 13 November to 10 December 2020. Consultation on changes to the Code in Wales is underway and ends on 25 March 2021.
10. The key changes being made to the Codes relate to modernising the qualification requirements and defining competency requirements by activity, rather than role, as they are now. These changes are critical to addressing the urgent need for Local Authorities, Port Health Authorities and District Councils to recruit, train and deploy extra officers so that they can deal with the increase in imported and exported food controls. They will also help address reductions in resources resulting from staff absences and staff being redeployed during the COVID-19 pandemic.
11. The Codes are now with the respective Ministers in England and Northern Ireland for approval. The England Code will be laid before Parliament and the Northern Ireland Code before the Assembly. We hope they will both be published by the end of March 2021.
12. This is the first in a series of reviews of the Codes over the next few years, to reform the regulatory delivery model, and deliver on the various aspects of the FSA's modernisation programme.
13. I wanted to give an update on our approach to the **direct supply of meat from abattoirs during Qurbani 2021**. Qurbani is the sacrifice of a livestock animal during the Muslim festival of Eid al Adha which is commemorated annually. Producers may sell meat directly to consumers and this includes the undertaking of Qurbani. Only those animals that have been slaughtered during the four-day Qurbani period can qualify as meeting the religious requirements of the sacrifice and this means that there are significant practical and technical

challenges in achieving the timelines to meet both religious expectations and the legal requirements relating to the chilling of carcasses during the festival of Eid al Adha.

14. For Qurbani 2021, we will be enhancing the approach agreed for 2020, working with industry to continue to mitigate food safety risks and ensure that Muslim consumers are protected. The potential enhancements under discussion include:
 - a. review of the chilling requirements for offals;
 - b. enhanced industry led traceability; and,
 - c. clarification of the role of butchers acting as agents for the final consumer.
15. Since Qurbani 2020, we have delivered a food business operator engagement questionnaire, and have reviewed both the questionnaire and wider feedback to inform the approach for Qurbani 2021 and beyond. We are continuing to develop a proportionate and sustainable long-term approach and are planning to consult on this later this year. This approach and the proposed enhancements to the existing mitigations will be discussed and developed through our ongoing engagement with the Partnership Working Group Sub-Group (PWG SG) on direct supply during Qurbani.
16. We have reiterated our advice on cooking frozen raw breaded chicken products. This comes as we issued further product recalls of products linked to two ongoing outbreaks of **Salmonella Enteritidis**. Given the long shelf life of these products and the fact that we continue to receive reports of disease caused by the outbreak Salmonella strains, we are reminding the public again about the importance of cooking and handling frozen breaded chicken products. It is important to always check the cooking instructions on food packaging, as different brands of the same product might have different instructions. Cooking food at the right temperature and for the correct length of time will ensure that any harmful bacteria are killed.
17. With Public Health England, and their devolved equivalents, their whole genome sequencing of the salmonella and our investigations of the food chain have established that its source is chicken from Poland, and this has been confirmed by a Rapid Outbreak Assessment published in late February by EFSA and ECDC (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control). We are working with retailers in the UK so that they are aware of the likely source of the contaminated chicken and can take steps with their supply chains. Food businesses affected have done over 40 withdrawals and 8 recalls, and we've published alerts for each recall to widen the message and ensure consumers are aware. Where there has been evidence to suggest there's been non-compliant or unsafe product action has been taken. What's needed now is action to be taken at sources, in Poland. To address this, we have also, through Defra, raised the issue with the Polish authorities and discussing with them what additional controls we can put in place.
18. Defra launched a **public consultation on genetic technologies** on 7 January 2021, which can be seen [here](#). The ten-week consultation is seeking views on

whether new genetic technologies, like genome editing, should continue to be regulated under genetic modification (GM) rules. Genome editing makes the same types of changes to plants and animals that occur naturally or through traditional breeding.

19. Currently, genome edited food and feed are regulated under GM Food and Feed legislation and need pre-market assessment and authorisation. There are no authorised genome edited food or feed products in the UK. The FSA continues to engage with Defra on the matter as we think it is important that there is clear regulatory oversight of genome edited food and feed that ensures consumer safety and provides consumer confidence in the assessment of such products.
20. The **Strategic Surveillance/Data Science Team** has continued to develop new data-driven services and improve existing ones. Since the last board update in November 2020 the FSA:
 - a. has created an automated solution to help port health authorities to easily identify feed consignments coming into the country, by scanning the ship manifests which detail the cargo on-board the ship. This solution is currently being tested with two Local Authorities and will soon be extended to other ports. The solution could also be extended to manifests containing food commodities;
 - b. is working with the Operational Transformation Programme to devise a data-driven business segmentation model to improve the efficiency of our approach to delivering official controls;
 - c. is improving the Risk Likelihood Dashboard, used by over 130 port health and Local Authorities across the country, with data from Defra's IPAFFs (Import of Products, Animals, Food and Feed System), loss of UK access to the EU's TRACES (Trade Control and Expert System). We are also continuing to collaborate with authorities to bring their sampling data onto the dashboard to improve overall intelligence of risky imported food and feed;
 - d. has created a dashboard to help FSA teams within Operational Assurance and Transformation to respond efficiently to outbreaks of notifiable diseases in animals. Users can enter the location of the outbreak into the dashboard and see all the approved business premises in the area of the outbreak, and filter further to isolate those premises they are interested in;
 - e. is improving the technical architectural robustness of our dashboards. This work will help us to extend the access to the Signal Prioritisation Dashboard to organisations outside the FSA; and,
 - f. continues to implement our artificial intelligence (AI) Ethics framework, focusing on leveraging technical toolkits to improve the explainability and fairness of our AI models, and providing assurance of key performance indicators (KPIs) in a structured and accessible manner through model factsheets.

21. Our **Speak Up For Allergies** campaign launched on 24th February and is live until the end of March. The campaign is aimed at 18-21 years old with food allergies across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Data shows that children and young adults are at a higher risk of food allergy incidents and that young people are ordering more takeaways during lockdown. Our insight shows this age group can be complacent when ordering food from restaurants they've used before. The key message is 'If you or your friends have a food allergy, speak to the restaurant every time when you order a takeaway. Even if it's a meal you've had before, because ingredients can change'. There is a wide programme of activity taking place, including working with influencers on TikTok and Instagram who are creating bespoke content to resonate with the target audience. This content has already received lots of positive consumer comments. We are also running targeted advertising across Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Youtube. We anticipate that our work with partners will allow us to achieve an additional 4 million opportunities to reach consumers. Partners include delivery platforms such as Just Eat, universities and Mumsnet.
22. Despite the current restrictions, **stakeholder engagement** has continued, and I have met a range of stakeholders since our last Board meeting.
23. I met technical directors from Leon, Burger King and McDonalds, and hope to soon be able to visit their restaurants and kitchens. I met the Chief Executive of the Office for Product Safety and Standards, the Chief Executive of the British Poultry Council, the CEO of the Food Safety Authority, Ireland, and met Frank Yiannas and others in a meeting with the U.S. Food & Drug Administration. I joined a panel at the Oxford Real Farming Conference on 12 January on small abattoirs; and I also spoke at a Meat Business Women seminar on 10 February.
24. The interim Chair and I met Jo Gideon MP on 8 January, and Health Minister Jo Churchill and Defra Minister Victoria Prentis on 2 February. I was also joined by Colin Sullivan, Maria Jennings and Julie Pierce in a meeting with Lord Rooker on 22 January. I have been engaging with Parliamentary Committees in England, Wales and NI as they take forward their scrutiny of the food safety and nutrition frameworks: I appeared in front of the Welsh EEAL Committee on 1 February and the Northern Ireland Committee for Health on 4 February. I remain in regular contact with Defra, DHSC and DIT officials.
25. The **Trade and Agriculture Commission**, which was established in July 2020 by the Secretary of State for International Trade in order to advise government on trade policies that will secure opportunities for UK farmers, published its advisory report on 2 March. The report can be seen [here](#).