

Chief Executive's Report to the Board

FSA 23/12/03

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1. Our Food 2022

1.1 On 23 October 2023, the FSA and Food Standards Scotland (FSS) laid our second joint annual review on food standards in all four legislatures.

1.2 [Our Food 2022](#) concluded that food standards in the UK remained stable in 2022, despite pressures including inflation, labour shortages and the war in Ukraine. However, the report warns of major capacity and capability challenges in local authority and Official Veterinarian (OV) resourcing. The FSA also called for the new imports Target Operating Model to be introduced without further delay.

The report highlights:

- a 14% decline in food hygiene posts in England, Wales and Northern Ireland over the last decade, with over 13% of available posts vacant;
- a 45% decline in allocated food standards officer posts between 2011/22 and 2021/22;
- a 27% decline in trained professionals joining the veterinary profession between 2019 and 2022; and
- a 20% rise in the number of households reporting food insecurity, with one in 10 households experiencing very low food security.

1.3 The report's publication was marked with briefing events in Westminster and Holyrood, with a further event in the Senedd on 29 November.

1.4 The report was covered by mainstream media outlets including The Evening Standard, Daily Mail, The Independent and the Press Association. It also featured in various trade press including The Grocer, New Food Magazine, Food Safety Magazine, The Caterer and Farmers Guardian.

2. FHRS

2.1 This November we marked the 10th anniversary of the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme legislation in Wales, which requires businesses to display their food hygiene rating sticker in a prominent place, such as the front door, entrance, or window. Wales was the first country to introduce a mandatory scheme in 2013 and we continue to work in collaboration with local authorities to deliver it. Evidence from Wales suggests that mandatory display increases the

incentives for businesses to improve and maintain compliance. In the 10 years since mandatory display was introduced, the number of top-rated businesses in Wales has risen from 53% to 73% with 97% of businesses in Wales having a rating of '3' or above.

3. Food fraud update

3.1 Since my last report in September, I issued a stakeholder message setting out our conclusions from the Food Fraud Working Group where industry representatives have worked with us to help identify where we can strengthen the food system to protect against criminal activity. The FSA working group was set up in April following our work investigating potential misrepresentation of foreign tinned meat as British and concluded its work in September. As a result of its work, we have now done the following:

- Established a new freephone FSA whistleblower hotline to make it easier to report suspected food fraud. All working group members will support and advertise this hotline in the food industry in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The FSA will provide them with communications materials in a variety of languages.
- strengthened the function that third-party assurance programmes serve in providing regulators with information. We will now be collaborating closely with a far wider range of assurance schemes that have consented to sharing crucial data with us in order to assist prevent food fraud, building on our experience of sharing information with programmes like Red Tractor. They will provide us with the specifics of food manufacturers that have been removed from their schemes.
- improved the format of intelligence-based notifications to businesses so that they are better understood and easier to act upon, while maintaining the integrity of any ongoing criminal investigations.

4. Precision Breeding

4.1 The Precision Breeding Consultation was launched on 8 November 2023 on the FSA website and will be open for responses for two months, closing on 8 January 2024. The launch was supported by a dedicated [news story](#) on the FSA website and updates to local authorities. We have seen encouraging levels of engagement with the consultation so far, including online coverage with food industry press outlets. The consultation seeks views from all interested parties on our proposals for a new regulatory framework in England for the pre-market authorisation of Precision Bred Organisms for food/feed and enforcement.

4.2 The Government response will be published within 12 weeks of the consultation closing and prior to secondary legislation being finalised and laid.

5. DNP classification

5.1 On 1 October 2023, the highly toxic chemical 2,4 dinitrophenol (DNP) which is known to be responsible for 34 deaths in the UK since 2007 was classified as a poison under the Poisons Act 1972. The FSA has worked with the Home Office and other government departments to secure this change in legislation in order to try and prevent further deaths. The National Food Crime Unit continues to work with the police who now have responsibility for enforcing DNP offences. The FSA is no longer, therefore, the lead organisation for investigating the sale of DNP.

6. Cell-cultivated products

6.1 A number of industry stakeholders have asked about the FSA's regulatory approach for cell-cultivated products (CCPs) and the methodology by which EU legislation would be applied to evaluate them. To provide clarity to the industry, the Novel Foods team worked with Foods Standards Scotland (FSS) to create business guidance that outlines how companies can apply for authorisation, the difference between novel foods and Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) regulations, and how companies can conduct tasting trials. This has now been [published](#) on the FSA and FSS's website.

7. Ultra Processed Food

7.1 Since my last report in September, there have been continued references to 'ultra processed food' (UPF) across UK media and UPF has also been a topic of discussion in parliament.

7.2 We have now established a small group of officials to monitor developments in this area, in the context of the FSA's remit to approve food additives. We will take proportionate action on additives should it be warranted by the evidence. As reported in our [Annual FSA Science update](#), we intend to develop proposals on UPF focusing on the scientific questions that we need to answer to inform FSA and wider work.

8. RIFE Report

8.1 The Radioactivity in Food and the Environment (RIFE) report was published on 2 November. This annual report brings together all the results of monitoring of radioactivity in food and the environment by the RIFE partners, namely us, Food Standards Scotland, the Environment Agency, Natural Resources Wales, Northern Ireland Environment Agency and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency.

8.2 The main aim of the RIFE programme is to monitor the environment and the diet of people living or working near nuclear and selected non-nuclear sites. From this monitoring, we estimate the amount of radioactivity the public is exposed to. Radioactivity in the environment, from the nuclear industry and from past testing of nuclear weapons, accounted for less than 0.2% of the exposure to the UK, the vast majority being from natural with a contribution from medical sources. This demonstrates that industry is staying below the legal limit of 1 millisievert (mSv) per year, which has been stable for a number of years.

9. Windsor Framework

9.1 Phase I of the Windsor Framework went live on 1 October, with the new arrangements for goods moving into Northern Ireland now operational. This included the launch of the new NI Retail Movement Scheme (NIRMS), often referred to as the 'green lane,' for movement of pre-packed retail goods from GB to NI. Our priority has been to ensure NI consumers benefit from the same level of robust public health protection as the rest of the UK, whilst facilitating the smooth movement of goods to consumers in NI. We are pleased to report that implementation of the Windsor Framework has had no adverse impact on food safety.

10. CPTPP

10.1 On 16 July 2023, the UK joined the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), a trade agreement between 11 countries: Australia, Brunei,

Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Singapore, Peru and Vietnam. The UK is the first non-founding member to join the bloc. The Secretary of State for Business and Trade (DBT) commissioned the FSA and FSS on Monday 17 July to advise on the impact of CPTPP on statutory protections for human health. Our advice covers food safety and nutrition statutory protections and takes into account stakeholder views submitted in response to our open call for evidence. The FSA and FSS joint advice was sent to DBT on 30 November and will be laid before Parliament in due course alongside a broader UK Government assessment, at which point our advice will also be openly published on the FSA and FSS websites.

11. Inward missions and international engagement

11.1 A South Korean inward mission took place between 11 and 18 October. The visit focused on Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) regionalisation and therefore entailed visits to a poultry farm, a hatchery, a slaughterhouse/cutting plant, and a cold store.

11.2 The South Korean delegates assessed our traceability systems across the food chain – (including how HPAI cases are handled and notified and the surveillance program in place in the event of an outbreak). The delegates also sought to understand the comparison of procedures of certification and traceability between NI and GB. We await the final report from the South Korean delegates and look forward to addressing any concerns they might have.

11.3 An EU inward mission took place between in October and November. The visit focused on (a) the overall functioning of the UK's system of official controls on residues and contaminants in animals and animal products - namely, bovine animals, poultry, milk, eggs and honey and (b) the UK's approved residue control plans.

11.4 During the visit, the FSA's sampling program was assessed by the auditors and judged to be generally free of conflicts of interests. All sampling was observed to be unannounced and unexpected which was in line with EU requirements. The auditors commended our food chain information and traceability of products of animal origin together with our staff training and expertise. We look forward to receiving their final report and address any concerns that are raised.

11.5 On 11 November, the UK hosted the annual Trade Specialised Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures under the EU/UK Trade and Co-operation Agreement. The FSA presented an agenda item requesting technical discussions on improving co-operation and information sharing on food safety incidents. Technical discussions are expected to be held early in the new year.

11.6 In November, I travelled to the Netherlands with Laura Blair, FSA's Head of International, Trade and Devolution to visit the Port of Rotterdam. We were hosted by the Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (NVWA) and were joined by the heads of food agencies from Scotland, Ireland and Belgium. This visit provided us with an opportunity to exchange knowledge regarding import and export controls and guaranteeing the safety of imported food while upholding the trust of our important trading partners in UK food.

11.7 In October, Rick Mumford (Deputy Chief Scientific Advisor & Deputy Director of Science & Research) represented the FSA at the annual Singapore International Agri-Food Week (SIAW) organised by the Singapore Food Agency (SFA). He attended the invitation-only Regulators Forum, presenting an overview of the FSA's regulated products work and then was part of a discussion panel at the Novel Foods Regulation Roundtable, with over 300 delegates.

12. Monitoring consumer attitudes and behaviour

12.1 In October we published the first set of results from our [Consumer Insights Tracker](#) survey which is conducted with 2,000 adults each month. [Latest findings](#) (collected in October 2023) indicate that 25% of those surveyed are worried about their household being able to afford food in the next month, unchanged from August and September. When asked how concerned they felt about a number of food-related topics, the most common topics respondents were concerned about were 'food prices' (89%), 'food poverty and food inequality' (75%) and 'ultra-processed, or over-processing of, food' (74%).

12.2 We have published our [first annual trend report](#) for our flagship [Food and You 2](#) survey. This report explores changes in consumer attitudes and behaviours in relation to food between 2020 and 2023.

13. Vets

13.1 The FSA has established the Veterinary Resourcing Programme following an update to the [Board in June 2023](#) on the current risks to veterinary supply and the work we have been doing with the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS), our current Service Delivery Partner and across government to mitigate these.

13.2 The programme aims to maintain and secure Official Veterinarian (OV) resources to deliver Official Controls in abattoirs in England and Wales from 2025, whilst creating greater political visibility and public awareness of the systemic shortage of vets in the UK and globally.

13.3 We are making good progress in reducing our reliance on the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS's) Temporary Registration scheme, which allows qualified veterinarians to practice under supervision in meat plants whilst they undertake technical and English language training. This scheme is available to the FSA until December 2024 and the percentage of Temporary Registered Novice OVs (TRNOVs) continues to reduce, down from 33% in June 2023 to 21% in October 2023.

13.4 However, the announcement by the [Home Secretary on 5 December 2023 on plans to cut net migration](#) and the rise to the minimum salary threshold for overseas workers could pose a potential impact on our ability to attract both OVs and MHIs from overseas. We are therefore urgently working across government to further assess the impact of these changes and the extent of the risk it poses to the programme.

13.5 I am delighted that on 16 November the FSA became the inaugural winner of the British Vets Association's (BVA) brand-new Wellbeing Award for Best Non-Clinical Veterinary Workplace for our exceptional standards in care and wellbeing for our team.

14. Engagements

14.1 Since my last report to the Board in September, I have held regular meetings with FSS CEO and several counterparts in other Whitehall departments.

14.2 I joined a panel for Food Integrity Global in London, moderated by Chris Elliott, Professor, Queen's University Belfast. I also attended an event for the Leadership College for Government.

14.3 I attended a Ladies Lunch at the Farmers Club, The Food Integrity Global Awards and a breakfast at the Butchers' Hall hosted by the Smithfield's Market Tenants Association.

14.4 Julie Pierce, Director of Information and Science and I met representatives from Altruistiq.

14.5 I visited two farms and an egg packing facility on a visit hosted by the British Egg Industry Council.

14.6 In November, I attended the biannual meeting with the British Retail Consortium's Technical Leaders group. I also joined Field Operations colleagues at the Regional Engagement and Development event in Peterborough.

14.7 I joined the Chair at the launches of the annual review on food standards at the House of Commons and at the Senedd. I also joined her at a reception at the House of Lords on Transforming Food Production and at a meeting with the NFU President and Director General.

14.8 Also in November, I attended a US Embassy dinner.

14.9 I met Lord David Currie, Chair of the Advertising Standards Authority, and Marie Mohan, CEO of Common Purpose.

14.10 I met Tony Juniper, the Chair of Natural England, and attended Defra's F4 meeting with representatives from the Food and Drink Federation, National Farmers Union, UK Hospitality and the British Retail Consortium.

14.11 Last Friday I was expecting to meet Professor Timothy Lang.

14.12 Finally, last week I joined the judging panel at the Women in Westminster Awards.