

Report From the Chair of the Welsh Food Advisory Committee

FSA 23-03-10 - This report from the Chair of the Welsh Food Advisory Committee (WFAC) covers the activities of the Committee for the period September 2021 to February 2023.

1. Summary

1.1 This report from the Chair of the Welsh Food Advisory Committee (WFAC) covers the activities of the Committee for the period September 2021 to February 2023.

1.2 The Board is asked to **note** the report and **comment** on the future plans.

2. Introduction

2.1 The role of WFAC is defined in the Food Standards Act 1999. It acts as an advisory body to the Food Standards Agency (FSA) '*for the purpose of giving advice or information to the Agency about matters connected with its functions, in particular matters affecting or relating to Wales.*' Some of those functions result from devolved legislation and policy relating to food and feed safety, standards, food composition and labelling.

2.2 WFAC is chaired by the Board member for Wales. Its members provide a wide range of expertise, experience and practical knowledge to the FSA. All members are recruited through open Public Appointment competition and are appointed by the current Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing in Wales.

2.3 The Committee works closely with the FSA both in Wales and beyond and supports the FSA's strategic outcomes.

2.4 This paper highlights the themes that have been considered and discussed by WFAC over the last 18 months and looks forward to its work in the next 12 months.

3. Committee Membership

3.1 The Committee has 8 members, one of whom is also the FSA Board member for Wales and WFAC Chair.

3.2 There is a wide range of expertise among the WFAC membership, including members with backgrounds in farming and agriculture; academia; industry; law, research, policy; and environmental health. This wide-ranging experience, as well as members' associated networks and insights, has been extremely useful for WFAC discussions.

3.3 In April 2021, five new Committee members were appointed and, in October 2021, Dr Philip Hollington was reappointed to the committee for a second term.

3.4 In December 2021, Jessica Evans-Williams was appointed to the committee following a vacancy arising from Rebecca Lyne-Pirkis not seeking reappointment for a second term.

3.5 One Committee member, Alan Gardner, is due to come to the end of his second term of appointment on 31 August 2023. The WFAC Secretariat are working to develop the Public Appointment exercise for a new Committee member.

3.6 The other change ahead is that I will not be seeking re-appointment as Board Member and Chair of the Welsh Food Advisory Committee when my term ends on 31 August. I will step down sadly, because I have enjoyed my Board role working as a member of an effective team, but realistically because the wide scope of the responsibilities has postponed key family objectives. The process to appoint my successor will start later this month, and I would encourage colleagues to share the advert within their networks if appropriate.

4. Committee Meetings

4.1 Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, WFAC meetings took place virtually. In October 2021, in-person themed meetings resumed.

4.2 Each of the various themes has provided the Committee with the opportunity to consider issues from a Wales-specific perspective and to deepen its understanding.

4.3 We have taken full advantage of the opportunities to hear from teams across the FSA about their work areas, while gathering many other perspectives from people directly affected.

4.4 Since September 2021, the Committee has considered the following themes:

- **Food Hypersensitivity** – In October 2021, the Committee received a series of presentations on Food Hypersensitivity, including accounts from a person living with an allergy and from a parent caring for a child with allergies. Other presentations were an overview of the FSA's Food Hypersensitivity Programme and the new Allergen Labelling Law (Natasha's Law), with an update from local authorities on the implementation of Natasha's Law and the support available for businesses.
- **FSA Strategy** – In a session with the Strategy Unit, WFAC considered the development of the FSA's new strategy, specifically from a Wales perspective. The committee welcomed the three-country approach and the consideration given to the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act, having been assured that the FSA operates in accordance with the Act in all aspects of its work.
- **Food Insecurity** – The Committee focussed its April 2022 meeting on the impacts of cost-of-living issues on consumer food choices. We received presentations from Cardiff University, Welsh Government, FareShare Cymru, Trussell Trust, local authorities and Liverpool University. We also heard from the founder of Can Cook, which is an alternative approach to addressing food poverty by teaching people how to cook from scratch and providing the ingredients for low-cost healthy meals. Discussions centred around food insecurity, food waste, and initiatives addressing food poverty.
- **Precision Breeding** – Given the fast-moving pace of the Precision Breeding (Genetic Technology) Bill and the devolved nature of policy, WFAC focussed its July 2022 meeting on Precision Breeding, with input from Professor Robin May, the FSA policy team, Welsh Government, the Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences at Aberystwyth University and the FSA Social Science team. It was especially useful to have the Welsh Government's perspective, which has given more depth to later and future discussion of relevant Board papers.
- **The Food Scene: looking ahead** – In October 2022, WFAC met in Wrexham for its first meeting away from Cardiff since 2019. The Committee took this opportunity to meet with North

Wales stakeholders around this forward-looking theme. We received presentations from Wrexham local authority on Primary Authority Partnerships, Rowan Foods on challenges facing food businesses, Farmers Union of Wales on challenges facing the agricultural sector, Bangor University Biocomposites Centre on their research into alternative food packaging materials and Advanced Research Centre (AMRC) Cymru on using aerospace engineering techniques to improve food manufacturing and packaging, including increasing the amount of food packaging recycled in Wales. Notable was the attendance of many stakeholders as observers.

- **FSA Operations** – The latest themed meeting held in February 2023 was focussed on the FSA’s meat hygiene operations. After gathering ideas for future themed meeting topics, the Committee examined in depth those operations. The following morning, we visited the Kepak meat processing plant in Merthyr Tydfil, seeing everything from the arrival of cows and sheep to the packaging of meat. With 850 employees, Kepak-St Merryn plays a major part in the local economy. The visit gave us a very clear picture of what meat inspection involves.

4.5 WFAC has also continued to meet virtually in business meetings to consider papers ahead of each Board meeting. This has allowed members to consider the published Board papers and provide a devolved perspective, enabling the Chair to feedback WFAC views and comments during Board meetings.

5. Forward Look

5.1 The Committee is currently developing a forward work programme for 2023. It has identified Aberystwyth as an option for a future themed meeting. The Future Food Centre and other research there offer an opportunity to look into the future through presentations and visits. Relevant research includes a) precision breeding; b) cultured meat; c) a large bacterial fermentation unit valorising food and agricultural waste streams to food, feed and/or high value chemicals; d) an ‘incubator hub’ for start-ups and SMEs in the food sector called AberInnovation; e) a seed store with one of the largest ex-situ collections in the world of forage grass, clover, and oat germplasm; and f) bees, their diseases and honey production.

5.2 Other areas which WFAC is planning to consider in depth over the coming year are more closely related to current issues, including local authority inspections, the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill, and the Borders Target Operating Model.

5.3 The agendas for WFAC meetings will continue to take the issues being discussed by the Board into consideration, with particular attention to any areas that may have a particular impact or relevance to Wales.

5.4 The Committee will also consider any priorities set by Welsh Government, and where appropriate, consider such themes relevant to the FSA in Wales.

5.5 As part of the forward work programme, the Committee also intends to increase stakeholder engagement and, where possible, seek opportunities to meet with stakeholders across the remit of the FSA in Wales.

5.6 This will include hosting meetings and visits across Wales to bolster the visibility of WFAC. The Committee intends to hold a meeting outside of the FSA offices at least once per annum.

5.7 WFAC also looks forward to engaging with the Board during the coming year.

5.8 The Committee is cognisant of the [Board Effectiveness Review](#) and associated Working Group responses to the recommendations. WFAC will work alongside the Chair and Directors responsible for Wales and Northern Ireland to understand how the value of the Food Advisory Committees can be further enhanced and utilised.

6. Conclusions

6.1 WFAC has considered a wide variety of themes over the last 18 months and has appreciated the input from colleagues both within in the FSA and those externally.

6.2 The Board is asked to **note** the activities of WFAC and **comment** on the current forward look plans.