

# Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee (NIFAC) Minutes of the Open Meeting on 10th November 2022

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## Executive Summary

Attached are the minutes of the 10th November 2022 NIFAC meeting.

Members are invited to:

1. Agree the minutes as a true record of proceedings. Contact: Michael Sewell: ([Michael.sewell@food.gov.uk](mailto:Michael.sewell@food.gov.uk))

OPEN MEETING OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND FOOD ADVISORY COMMITTEE (NIFAC) ON THURSDAY 10TH NOVEMBER AT LAKELAND DAIRIES

## Those present:

### NIFAC Members

- Anthony Harbinson
- Fiona Hanna
- Greg Irwin
- Cathal McDonnell
- Ciaran McCartan
- Lorraine Crawford
- Judith Hanvey – Boardroom Apprentice

### FSA Officials

- Maria Jennings – Director for Regulatory Compliance, People and Northern Ireland

- Andy Cole – Deputy Director for Northern Ireland
- Roberta Ferson – Head of Corporate Services and Strategic Engagement
- Firth Piracha – Head of EU Relations, Trade and Legislation
- Kathryn Baker – Head of Local Authority Policy and Delivery
- Jayne McGlaughlin – Senior Advisor – Assembly Liaison

## **Lakeland Dairies**

- Tim Acheson – General Foodservice Operations Manager

## **Apologies**

- Ellen Finlay
- Lynne McMullan
- Sharon Gilmore

## **1. Welcome and Housekeeping**

1.1 The Chair welcomed NIFAC members and FSA officials to the meeting and thanked Lakeland Dairies for hosting the Committee at their site.

1.2 The Chair noted that he had received apologies from Ellen Finlay, Lynne McMullan and Sharon Gilmore.

1.3 The Chair asked if Members had any interests to declare.

## **2. Minutes of the meeting of 28th June**

2.1 The Chair asked if there were any comments on the minutes of the NIFAC meeting which was held on 28th June 2022. No issues were raised and the Sec-retariat agreed to publish the minutes.

## **3. Presentation from Lakeland Dairies**

3.1 The Chair invited Tim Acheson, General Foodservice Operations Manager at Lakeland Dairies, to deliver his presentation to the Committee.

3.2 Tim welcomed the Committee to Lakeland Dairies and explained that Lakeland is a farmer owned and controlled dairy cooperative.

3.3 While updating the Committee about the work of Lakeland, Tim added that the group processes approximately 2 billion litres of milk annually into a range of value added dairy foodservice products and functional dairy food ingredients.

3.4 The presentation from Tim covered a number of areas including:

- Lakeland Dairies – who we are and what we do
- Current challenges
- Strategic objectives
- Preservation technologies
- International trade
- Supply chains
- Environmental credentials
- Reformulation and innovation
- Future aspirations

3.5 Following the presentation, the Committee raised a number of key points.

3.6 Members were interested in discussing the overall demand for milk and milk based products. Tim explained that dairy consumption worldwide is increasing and in some areas, demand is outstripping supply.

3.7 Tim added that Lakeland is also very conscious of plant based products and the business is not adverse to looking at such products. For example, they are currently working on a new oat milk product.

3.8 In relation to supply chains, Members asked how supply chains were holding up and how the business is able to supply right around the world, noting the complexities of supplying globally. Tim emphasised that they utilise milk preservation technologies to extend the shelf-life of some products which helps to facilitate international trade.

3.9 Tim noted that the business has been evolving and will continue to do so and accentuated that innovation is key.

3.10 Members asked about the new products that Lakeland is currently working on. Tim emphasised the work that Lakeland has done and is continuing to do in the reformulation space. For example, they are proactively working with consumers to improve the nutritional profile of their products to ensure consumers are provided with healthier options.

3.11 Tim added that this includes lower sugar and no added sugar milks for children – seeking to align product innovation with tackling childhood obesity plans.

3.12 Members discussed Lakeland's sugar reduction programme and the work they are doing to decrease the amount of sugar in their soft serve ice cream.

3.13 The Committee also noted their interest in the work Lakeland is doing in relation to their environmental credentials. Tim added that sustainability is very important to the business and there is more innovation to come in this area.

3.14 When discussing their future aspirations, Tim accentuated that one of Lakeland's key aims moving forward is to ensure that any unintended consequences of the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill on the Northern Ireland dairy sector and broader Northern Ireland economy in the short and long term are understood.

3.15 In addition, Tim added that Lakeland will be seeking to reinvigorate growth plans and will be rebalancing and refocusing following the pandemic.

3.16 The Chair and Members thanked Tim for his presentation and noted that the Committee is keen to continue engaging with Lakeland. Tim thanked the FSA for their continued support and noted that they look forward to welcoming the FSA Board.

3.17 Following the presentation, the Committee undertook a tour of the Lakeland Dairies facilities.

#### **4. Director and Chair Updates**

4.1 The Chair invited Maria Jennings, Director for Regulatory Compliance, People and Northern Ireland to present her update to the Committee.

4.2 Maria highlighted a number of the issues contained within the report, including: In Country Trade visits, progress on the Local Authority Recovery Plan and Food and You Wave 4.

4.3 In relation to the STEC Incident, the Committee asked if water quality was a concern for this bacteria. Maria confirmed that investigations were still ongoing although a number of possible foods had been identified as possible sources.

4.4 Members also asked about work in relation to Precision Breeding, noting that a series of stakeholder workshops had taken place. Maria confirmed that phase two of consumer research is now in the field with a view to being completed before the end of the year. She also added that stakeholder engagement will continue with stakeholders in both Northern Ireland and Great Britain.

4.5 The Chair then gave an update about Board-related activities. The Chair confirmed that the Board meeting in September had gone well and he had reflected the Committee's comments and considerations on each of the papers.

4.6 Furthermore, the Chair added that there were a number of key papers being considered at the Board meeting in December, including a paper on In Year Prioritisation. He confirmed that the papers would be considered by the Committee before the Board meeting.

## **5. Northern Ireland Protocol Bill**

5.1 The Chair invited Firth Piracha to deliver a presentation to the Committee on the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill.

5.2 Firth provided an overview of the key policy principles of the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill including the Dual Regulatory Regime and the Trade Boundary Model, including assurance approaches to support these.

5.3 The Committee considered the different aspects of the Bill that would have an impact for the FSA as a whole and particularly in Northern Ireland.

5.4 Firth confirmed that teams across the FSA were looking closely at the policy proposals contained within the Bill and this work would continue as the Bill continues its legislative passage through the House of Lords.

5.5 The Committee asked about engagement and Firth confirmed that the FSA is working closely with other government departments and stakeholders to inform

understanding and policy development.

5.6 Members discussed the intersect between the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill and the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill and the impact that the Bills would have on FSA resource moving forward.

5.7 The Committee voiced their support for the work that the FSA in Northern Ireland is doing in relation to both of the Bills.

## **6. Any other business**

6.1 The end of the meeting marked Maria Jennings' last in-person NIFAC meeting. The Chair and the Committee thanked Maria for the work that she has done both with and for the FSA and expressed their thanks for her support and guidance.