

Welsh Food Advisory Committee Director's Report – October 2024

Report by Anjali Juneja, Director for UK & International Affairs and FSA in Wales Senior Leadership team.

1. Summary

1.1 This report provides a summary of subjects introduced by the Chief Executive at the last Board meeting, held on 18 September 2024, a summary of senior engagement across the UK and International Affairs (UKIA) Directorate; and an overview of developments and matters of interest to WFAC relating to Wales.

1.2 Members of the committee are invited to:

- **note** the update
- **invite** the Directors to expand on any issues for further discussion

2. Chief Executive's Report to the Board

2.1 This is the latest [Chief Executive's Report](#) presented to the September Board meeting.

3. Overview from the Director of UK and International Affairs (UKIA)

3.1 Since my last update the government has shared its ambition to tackle trade barriers through seeking to negotiate a veterinary/SPS agreement to help boost businesses, jobs and UK-EU trade. The FSA will work to ensure any future arrangements protect consumer interests in relation to food safety and standards across the UK. In addition, the UK Government has stated it remains committed to implementing the Windsor Framework and protecting the UK internal market, and the FSA continues to work to deliver all relevant requirements and to support the good faith implementation of the Windsor Framework.????

3.2 National Level Regulation continues to be a priority for the organisation and further to the Board decision in September on next steps, the team continue to engage with the central team to ensure a clear understanding of the programme of work and the engagement plan in respect of Wales. This will be part of the discussion at this October WFAC meeting.?

3.3 The Spending Review process is also part of wider organisation work at this time. In Wales, I have met with Welsh Government officials to discuss the FSA budget and approach during the Welsh Government budget setting process, and we continue to highlight the increasing pressure on our resource. Consistent with the other administrations, the expectation is for a very challenging budget setting process next financial year.?

3.3 In international news, back in July, the FSA participated in a meeting of the Strategic Food Safety Dialogue – an informal forum of food regulators from the UK, European Commission, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand that meet once per year but progress work in subgroups throughout the year. At this year's meeting there was agreement by the group to take forward

joint work on topics including veterinary resource and retention, food fraud, crisis response, and electronic certification. The group will next meet in summer 2025.??

3.4 Also, in July, UK fish establishments were audited by South Korea. Auditors were extremely complimentary of the UK competent authorities' organisation and delivery of this inward inspection, including the input of the FSA and the local authorities, especially because it was the first of its kind to the UK.? All four establishments audited (who export cooked whelks to South Korea) 'passed' their inspections which means market access is maintained for these establishments.? UK exports of seafood products to South Korea were worth £8.7m in 2023. The FSA's role is critical as we secure LA input, support the establishments before and during the inspections and present to the auditing authorities our Official Control regime.

3.5 In recent weeks I have supported our Chair in meetings with Baroness Hayman, Under-Secretary of State at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and Sarah Murphy MS, Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing with responsibility for the FSA in Wales.

3.6 Finally, I'm delighted to announce the appointment of our new Director of Wales, Sian Bowsley, who will be taking up the post on a temporary basis.?Sian joins us from the Windsor Framework Task Force in the Cabinet Office where she has worked since April 2022 as the SPS and agri-food lead. In that role she was one of the lead negotiators on the Windsor Framework SPS Regulation and has since then worked closely with the FSA, Defra and DAERA to ensure it is implemented in a way that balances EU expectation, business burden and the functioning of the UK internal market. Sian also leads on all SPS and agri-food regulatory divergence in relation to Northern Ireland. Prior to joining the Task Force, she worked in Defra on no deal exit planning; the Australia and New Zealand FTAs; and Covid food supply. Before joining the Civil Service, Sian worked as a lobbyist for the National Farmers Union in England and Brussels.?

4. Update from the Director for FSA in Wales

4.1 Since the last update in July, we have seen some further changes to the political landscape in Wales with Eluned Morgan MS appointed Prif Weinidog and Sarah Murphy MS taking up the role of Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing with responsibility for the FSA in Wales. In addition, Huw-Irranca Davies MS has been appointed as the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs, and Jeremy Miles MS as the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care. The team have reacted and adapted efficiently and at speed to these developments, making connections with all Ministerial offices whose portfolios relate to the work of the FSA.

4.2 The summer months have been significantly busy for the team in terms of engagement. As you will have seen in the [annual update to the Board in September](#), we supported the Chair with her programme of engagement during this year's Royal Welsh Agricultural Show and facilitated the FSA's information stand in this year's National Eisteddfod at Pontypridd. In addition, we supported the FSA and WFAC Chairs in their August meeting with the local authorities responsible for undertaking official controls in the Menai Strait (Gwynedd and Anglesey Councils), shellfish harvesters and academics from Bangor University during a visit to North Wales. It was a productive meeting where both Chairs were able to hear about the challenges and opportunities around shellfish first-hand from Welsh stakeholders.

4.3 Along with the WFAC Chair, we have supported the FSA Chair in her meetings with Welsh Ministers over the past few months. This includes the Chair's recent introductory meeting with our Minister Sarah Murphy, which was an opportunity to discuss developing pieces of work including national level regulation and market authorisations. This support also extended to the Chair's meeting with Jayne Bryant, the Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Housing back in July (a meeting that had been arranged during Jayne Bryant's term as the Minister with responsibility

for the FSA in Wales), which was a good opportunity discuss the local authority context in Wales, the pressures facing local authorities, and how the FSA seeks to support local authorities to undertake their important work.

4.4 Market Authorisations – the FSA and Food Standards Scotland (FSS) have recently run public consultations on a total of 25 feed additives applications and 1 PARNUT (feed for particular nutritional uses) application. The team are in the process of considering all responses received to the consultations on these applications, prior to advising Ministers. In addition, policy risk managers across the GB nations are currently considering a number of applications that have progressed from risk assessment, these include applications from various food and feed regimes. We are looking to launch our next set of applications for consultation over the winter.

4.5 Local Authority (LA) audits – an audit to test all of the LAs emergency out of hours contact arrangements took place in July with findings indicating that the majority of LAs have effective arrangements in place to deal with emergencies outside of normal working hours. Feedback has been provided to LAs, including those with less than effective arrangements and a draft summary report has been shared with LAs for comment.

4.6 Bread and Flour – work is continuing towards amending legislation relating to bread and flour on a coordinated basis across the UK, which will include the addition of folic acid to flour, that will help to prevent neural tube defects forming in early pregnancy. It is the intention to seek Ministerial consent in each of the four UK nations before the end of the year.

4.7 Food Supplements – the FSA has now published consumer advice and business guidance aimed at supporting the safe consumption of food supplements containing caffeine. This follows the death of an individual who miscalculated the dose of a caffeine supplement, and whose death was attributed to caffeine toxicity. The advice and guidance also refers to other sources of caffeine in the diet (tea, coffee, chocolate, energy drinks) and guides businesses on how to comply with supplement legislative requirements.

4.8 Food Hypersensitivity – the FSA is about to publish a consultation on the provision of information in out of home sector settings, which will cover the new guidance produced by the FSA. The consultation will seek feedback on the guidance, the potential impacts on food business operators and offer the opportunity for respondents to indicate any other issues that the FSA should seek to address in the guidance.

4.9 Incidents update: Mustard Ingredients Contaminated with Peanut – the team have been involved in a non-routine incident which has included action to withdraw or recall a significant amount of affected product. After [publishing urgent allergy advice on 20 September](#), and following extensive food chain analysis, investigations by the FSA and Food Standards Scotland traced the contaminated mustard ingredients linked to suppliers in India. The team in Wales have played an active role in the investigations to ensure action on products that may have been distributed in Wales. The team also ensured relevant Welsh stakeholders were kept informed of developments and distribution of affected products, whilst also keeping Ministers informed of the situation. The team worked closely with their communications colleagues in Wales to ensure the consumer safety messages were disseminated effectively via our platforms. Investigations remain ongoing.

5.10 Launch of Our Food 2023 – the latest Annual Report on Food Standards, Our Food 2023, was published and laid in the Senedd on 8 October 2024. To launch this report in Wales, the FSA's Chair wrote to Ministers, Members of the Senedd and other key stakeholders inviting them to discuss the report findings and other issues of note in bilateral meetings. This year's report reflected that high food standards remained stable but there are questions about the resilience of the food system. The report also reflected a continued long-term decline in the LA workforce, with a growing backlog in the number of food businesses awaiting inspection.

5.11 Communications activity – since the last WFAC themed meeting in July, the communications team in Wales have worked with colleagues across the FSA on the following campaigns, incidents and media interest:

- Food business campaign: FHRS Online Display – Launched on 19 September, this campaign shows businesses how easy it is to display their food hygiene rating online. It promotes the benefits, and directs businesses to a helpful guide. Businesses can download an image of their rating to their websites which updates automatically. We reached our audience through a range of channels using paid social media adverts in English and Welsh, a toolkit for local authorities and partners to enable them to support and share the campaign, and a news story on food.gov.
- Always On: Students campaign – Launched in early September and running until the end of October, this mini digital campaign aims to raise awareness of food safety and hygiene practices among students. [Research carried out by the FSA in 2021 and 2022](#) identified specific challenges and behaviours within this group. Our goal is to drive traffic to the Student Food Safety web pages by collaborating with partners, using both targeted organic social media posts, and running paid social media adverts.
- Supporting incident around mustard ingredients contaminated with peanuts – the Wales communications team were heavily involved in this recent incident working closely to ensure timely communication of messages across relevant communication teams in Wales including Welsh Government and Public Health Wales. The team also disseminated important bilingual consumer messaging via our social platforms. We have seen significant engagement with this content across channels with a noticeable increase in followers during this incident. The team also supported the sharing of information with LAs via the new local authority communication platform, FSA Link. The FSA's internal Welsh Language Unit also supported this incident at pace.

5. Consultations

5.1 Live Consultations

- [Call for Evidence: The impact of discounts on charges for official controls and other official activities in relation to meat premises](#) – to gather evidence on how discounts applied to charges for official controls (OC) and other official activities (OOA) for businesses in the meat sector provide benefits to businesses and consumers. **Date launched:** 12 September 2024 **Closing Date:** 24 October 2024
- [Consultation on Best Practice Guidance – Allergen Information for Non-Prepacked Foods](#) – to seek feedback from stakeholders on proposed best practice guidance for food businesses operators providing non-prepacked food. **Date launched:** 3 October 2024 **Closing Date:** 27 November 2024.

6. Forward look:

6.1 Blas Cymru/Taste Wales – this year's [Blas Cymru conference](#) will take place at Venue Cymru, Llandudno on 24 October. The FSA Chair will be participating in a panel discussion around 'innovation for success' and the FSA Regulated Products team will have an information stand to offer guidance and support.

6.2 Association for Food Protection Conference – this year's conference will be taking place at the All Nations Centre, Cardiff on 6 November and themed around Food Crime and Recalls. A member of the FSA's National Food Crime Unit will be part of the panel of speakers, and the FSA in Wales will have an information stand at the event.

6.3 The NFU Cymru Annual conference will take place on 7 November and the FSA's Chair has been invited to speak at the event. The team will be supporting this engagement.

6.4 In the weeks running up to Christmas we will run our annual Christmas food safety campaign. The primary focus of this campaign is on behaviour change, aiming to improve food safety practices at home during the Christmas period. In the run-up to Christmas, we will also remind and encourage consumers to check the food hygiene rating before eating out or arranging a Christmas party.