

HM Government

## Review into the Integrity and Assurance of Food Supply Networks

# Note of meeting with British Retail Consortium (BRC)

**Location:** Defra, Nobel House

**Date:** 27 June 2013

**Attendees:**

Andrew Opie - Director of Food Policy - BRC

Professor Chris Elliott – Independent Reviewer – Review into the Integrity and Assurance of Food Supply Networks

Mary Newman – Secretary - Review into the Integrity and Assurance of Food Supply Networks

Nick Hughes – Review into the Integrity and Assurance of Food Supply Networks

NB – comments belong to Andrew Opie unless stated

## 1. Industry response to horsemeat incident

Since the horsemeat incident food retailers have been reviewing their own procedures, sharing intelligence and horizon scanning through the BRC's food surveillance working group. The group tries to use hindsight analysis a lot - Sudan 1 being a good example of going back to the potential sources of contamination and working forwards.

One of the industry's key reflections post-horsemeat was that it hadn't been good enough at telling the story of how the supply chain works.

The approach of the BRC's members to horsemeat is that they've taken more ownership of the supply chain, for example, not just by auditing their own suppliers but the suppliers of their suppliers. Traceability is too important an issue not to invest in.

## 2. Reflections on food fraud

For the BRC food fraud is much more than just horsemeat. Retailers are testing for authenticity all the time in foods like basmati rice, olive oil and fruit juice. The question is how to work smarter? How to work better with European partners by way of exchanging intelligence? If retailers had known about the FSAI testing in November they'd have done something about it at the time.

The key message from horsemeat is that it didn't show the whole supply chain is broken. If you look at the results they point to fraud.

### **3. Priorities for the Review**

The issues concerning risks and identification of risks are the BRC's main points of interest.

### **4. Gaps in regulatory framework**

When you get down to DNA trace levels the regulatory system hasn't kept pace with advances in testing. For halal products no trace is acceptable and retailers are struggling to keep up with that. There needs to be a discussion around what good looks like in respect of acceptable levels of trace contamination. The kosher supply chain is much more tightly controlled. There is only one authorisation body for kosher foods (compared with around 50 for halal).

### **5. BRC Global Standard for Food Safety**

The BRC standard is reviewed every 18 months. The last review concerned allergens and the next review is likely to look at authenticity.

Although the BRC standard is set up well to cover food safety it is not set up so well to cover authenticity. Some companies are happy to take the BRC audit as their only standard while others will insist on sending their own auditors.

### **6. Industry concerns**

There are concerns among retailers about freedom of information, particularly with regard to information shared with the FSA which could find its way into the media. The second concern is over competition and protecting the brand. You need to find a forum for intelligence sharing that gives people the absolute confidence that the information won't leak.

### **7. Further action**

Chris Elliott asked whether it would be possible for the Review team to shadow a supplier audit. Andrew Opie said he would help facilitate this.

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