

HM Government

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

# Note of meeting with Food Standards Agency (FSA)

**Venue:** Defra, Nobel House

**Date:** 27 June 2013

**Attendees:**

Catherine Brown - Chief Executive – FSA

Will Creswell - Head of Incidents and Official Controls Policy – FSA

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

David Foot – Assistant Secretary - Review into the Integrity and Assurance of Food Supply Networks

## **1. Chris Elliott introduction**

CE explained that the intention of the Review was to look forward and to identify ways to improve the integrity of the food supply network and not to look backwards and focus on the horsemeat incident. The role of the Review was not to criticise industry or regulators for how they undertook their roles in the horsemeat incident. His Review needed to set out focussed recommendations to achieve practical and workable improvements.

## **2. Sharing of information/intelligence on food fraud/adulteration.**

Catherine Brown (CB) said FSA acknowledged that there was a need to build dynamic systems to help deal with future incidents. For example, FSA needed to better understand the economic drivers for food fraud. It needed to find ways to encourage industry to share information. FSA intended to discuss how this might be achieved with industry. But industry was wary about sharing data with FSA because it might be placed in the public domain through Freedom of Information requests. The horsemeat incident provided an opportunity to put new information sharing arrangements between industry and government in place. There were supportive comments from industry that had to be

turned into tangible commitments. There was an issue of whether sharing of information could be achieved voluntarily or if it had to be mandatory which industry leaders are divided on. There was also scope to improve the usage and usability of the IT system used to report on surveillance.

CE described the system put in place in Northern Ireland whereby companies shared information held by the Institute for Global Security within Queens University Belfast. CB said that any system had to be able to deal with food safety incidents as well as authenticity. It would be sensible to ask industry to provide information for both rather than make separate arrangements. CB said that there needed to be an integrated approach.

### **3. Impact of the machinery of Government changes**

CE queried the impact of the machinery of government changes in 2010. CB said that the FSA Board's view was that work relating to authenticity sat best with tackling food fraud and ensuring food safety and that that meant that work should sit within FSA. CB suggested that should there be a lack of appetite for reversing the machinery of government changes, it would be possible to leave the small amount of authenticity policy in Defra but move all aspects of implementation and enforcement to FSA.

### **4. Sampling and testing arrangements**

CB said that there was a need for standardisation across the laboratory network. Currently the Public Analyst laboratories worked to different local authorities using different tests. There was a lack of consistency. CB agreed with a suggestion from CE that there might be benefit in a national reference laboratory which could be a centre of excellence and could set standards. CE raised the issue of setting acceptable levels of cross contamination where plants process different products. CB said that it might lead to two standards - one which met the needs of faith groups (a zero based approach) and one for other consumers. There might be a price premium for that approach which would need to be identified and impacts assessed.

CB said that the FSA were aware of views, for example in Defra, for more of a focus on end of process sampling at the expense of focusing on HACCP. FSA and reputable industry leaders were clear that, appropriately applied, HACCP had a critical role in ensuring food safety and that end of process based testing could not replace it.

### **5. Other matters discussed**

CB highlighted some of the key findings from Pat Troop's review which was due to be published shortly. It had found that FSA had to do more on risk identification and horizon scanning. It had to improve its incident response plan. It had to improve how it worked

with local authorities. CB commented that there was a problem co-ordinating local authority engagement because the co-ordinating body LACORS no longer existed. The FSA would therefore need to take more of a leadership role. CE raised the issue of how FSA shared information with regulatory bodies across Europe. This was an issue that was being looked at under Commissioner Borg's plan. CB said that with regard to the EU RASFF system FSA agreed that it would be sensible to bolt authenticity/fraud incidents onto the existing system, rather than build a separate system.

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