

HM Government

Review into the Integrity and Assurance of Food Supply Networks

Note of meeting with Food Standards Agency (FSA)

Location: FSA, Aviation House

Date: 10 July 2013

Attendees:

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

John Questier - Head of Food Fraud Branch - FSA

John Caseley - Incidents Branch - 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

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

NB – comments belong to FSA unless stated

1. FSA Authenticity Programme

Prior to the 2010 Machinery of Government changes there were three full-time and one part-time staff working on the FSA's Authenticity Programme which had a budget of around £600k. Twenty or so projects were running as part of the programme.

In 2010 the Authenticity Steering Group and Authenticity Methodology Working Group transferred to Defra. The Working Group identifies new methods that need to be developed with public analysts for enforcement purposes. The group's work has carried on since joining Defra but it has been less visible.

2. The Food Fraud Database

The Food Fraud database was set up in 2005. It sources intelligence from a wide range of sources, primarily local enforcement authorities, whistleblowers and other government departments, the rationale being that lots of organisations have an interest in food fraud and are handling fraud data.

Subject to any necessary data security controls, the FSA will hand fraud intelligence to the appropriate enforcement body, most commonly local trading standards. Data that suggests a food safety issue will go back to the FSA Incidents team while data suggesting malicious activity or organised crime will be referred to the police.

There are other databases operated by other official bodies with wider counter-fraud or fraud-related responsibilities, for example, the Intellectual Property Office.

3. Opportunities and challenges in intelligence sharing and gathering

Key to intelligence is the recognition that if criminals are involved in one sort of crime they're probably involved in another and using that insight usefully.

The FSA is interested in building further expertise in how it handles intelligence. If you don't draw linkages when you put the data into the Food Fraud database it's of less value.

The FSA admits to encountering difficulties when trying to widen the network that feeds into the database, particularly where industry is concerned. The system relies on people sharing information which doesn't always happen. Encouraging industry to share intelligence has been tricky. Some are very reluctant to come forward citing a number of reasons such as commercial confidentiality and data protection concerns. Industry's view is that if you're an open, transparent organisation, like the FSA, you're going to share things with the public. The alcohol industry has been more forthcoming.

Conversely, information coming to the FSA from other sources which could be shared does not always make its way back to industry. The FSA recognises this and is working to achieve a more joined up approach throughout the sector.

In order to improve information sharing the FSA is looking at developing a 'safe space' database. The FSA is actively developing networks across government and with industry representative bodies - it acknowledges that QUB has developed a similar database in NI.

4. Risk identification and classification

FSA admits that there is a need to come up with some kind of classification system for fraud. No form of fraud is acceptable but you still have to prioritise it by risk and impact. Risk and fraud will always be a moving target. There is no foolproof means of preventing fraud, however, there is a need to make it as hard as possible to commit.

The UK counter-fraud approach is currently perceived as being ahead of most Member States in terms of identifying, collating and recording fraud related intelligence.

5. Further actions

FSA said it would be putting together a response to the Review's call for evidence. Both parties promised to stay in regular contact as the Review progresses.

11 September 2013