

HM Government

Review into the Integrity and Assurance of Food Supply Networks

Note of meeting with LGC

Location: LGC, Queens Road, Teddington

Date: 30 September 2013

Attendees:

Dr Derek Craston – Chief Scientific Officer, Government Chemist and Managing Director, LGC Science & Technology

Dr Steve Wood – Head of Regulatory Services, LGC

Selvarani Elahi – Deputy Government Chemist and Business Manager Food Research

Michael Walker – Consultant Referee Analyst, LGC

Professor Chris Elliott – Independent Reviewer – 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. Professor Chris Elliott (CE) Introduction

CE provided brief background to the Review and his wish to meet with a wide range of organisations with an interest in ensuring the integrity of food supply networks. He said that he wanted to learn more about LGC's role during the horsemeat incident and assuring the integrity of food supply networks more generally. His perception had been that LGC had not been involved in testing as much as he had expected, although they had dealt with disputed test results in the official control system.

2. Discussion

Dr Derek Craston (DC) provided background to LGC and their current activities. Around 17 years ago LGC had been largely a Government focussed organisation. It had been privatised in 1996. LGC is now an international science-based company in a range of sectors including health sciences, forensic science, genomics, reference materials and proficiency testing, which underpin the safety, health and security of the public and the regulation of industry, for both private and public sector clients.

During the horsemeat incident LGC's role had been to provide advice primarily to the Food Standards Agency. As the Government Chemist it was also involved in resolving disputed formal sample testing results in the official control system. LGC did not have a validated test method for horse meat in place at the outset of the horse meat episode and it did not

make commercial sense to undertake the testing at that time given the time and cost it would have taken to get the necessary resources and methods in place. But LGC had since taken steps to enable it to provide a high throughput service if it was required in the future. LGC had had some concerns about the quality of methods being used during the horsemeat incident and had not wanted to compromise their reputation. But in any case, Government had wanted LGC to be involved to provide expert advice rather than to help with testing. Public Analysts and other private sector providers had stepped in to meet the testing demand. CE asked about the extent to which LGC intended to become more involved in authenticity testing. DC said LGC intended to ensure it had appropriate methodologies in place. He said that it was difficult to build a commercial business around dealing only with incidents. There was a need to create a more established market for testing. That could mean requiring companies to test more frequently or set up a large surveillance programme. The alternative was to create an operation which was more flexible with flexible chemistry able to move from one assay to another quickly. LGC had decided to focus on the latter way forward. They had made some company acquisitions to facilitate that.

CE said that one of the issues he was considering was the lack of national or EU reference official laboratories for authenticity. He had queried the lack of a national reference laboratory with the FSA and had been told LGC fulfilled that role. Michael Walker (MW) said the confusion might have been caused by the nature of some of LGC's activity in advising Defra and FSA. CE said he had raised the issue of the lack N-RLs and EU-RLs for authenticity with DG Sanco and they had listened to his comments with interest. CE said that he had more general concerns about domestic laboratory and testing capacity given the fact that the number of Public Analysts were reducing and they were trying to service a wide range of customers.

MW queried whether recommendations from the Review relating to testing would be cost neutral. CE said that was unlikely because the baseline starting point was already low. Industry was however already investing in testing solutions. He said that an authenticity programme would probably be required but if set up properly it would not significantly increase costs for industry. The main barrier to overcome was an industry view that paper audits were sufficient. There was little no science based validation of BRC audits and little of retailer audits. In addition, they were not designed to detect fraud. The focus was on ensuring food safety. DC noted the parallels with other sectors such as the pharmaceutical sector where there was a need to assure the integrity of supply chains. A huge amount had been done by the industry to deal with counterfeiting.

MW queried the extent to which the arrangements CE had in mind on authenticity programmes would differ from those undertaken by FSA some years ago. CE said he had had some concerns when the FSA's programme had been discontinued before the machinery of Government changes. A similar programme would probably need to be rebuilt. CE said that his Review would be considering whether or not the machinery of Government changes should be reviewed. MW noted that FSA's focus had increasingly turned towards food safety as resources had been reduced and in addition the authenticity work had lacked a champion on the FSA Board.

3. Conclusion

CE thanked LGC for making time available to discuss his Review.

3 October 2013