

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Review into the Integrity and Assurance of Food Supply Networks

Note of meeting with BRC Global Standards

Location: Nobel House

Date: 23 January 2014

Attendees:

Mark Proctor (MP) - Chief Executive - BRC Global Standards

John Figgins (JF) - Technical Specialist for Food - BRC Global Standards

Professor Chris Elliott (CE) – Reviewer - Review into the Integrity and Assurance of Food Supply Networks

Mike Steel (MS) – Subject Matter Expert - Review into the Integrity and Assurance of Food Supply Networks

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

Sarah Appleby - Review into the Integrity and Assurance of Food Supply Networks

1. BRC Global Standards update on recent activity

BRC said it had viewed the interim report positively. In particular it was pleased to see the recommendation for the development of a standard for traders and brokers as BRC has just launched its own such standard.

BRC said its focus in the past year had been on driving up standards of audits and increasing compliance among businesses. It gave examples of new initiatives aimed at achieving these goals:

- BRC has introduced category exams for auditors to ensure they have reached an agreed level of competency required to carry out their duties. This was sparked by a realisation that some auditors were generalists rather than specialists and were carrying out audits across a number of different categories. BRC has also introduced a star rating whereby if certification bodies put forward an auditor that failed the category exam this would affect their star rating.
- BRC has reduced its pool of certification bodies (CBs) in favour of working more closely with a smaller number of CBs.
- BRC is also working with UK retailers to gather data on product withdrawals which could be used to see where the industry has specific problems and to map how closely this correlates with non-compliances as it is believed there is often a disconnect between the two. It is also negotiating with Leatherhead Research over

access to its Horizon Scan tool, which could be used to inform CBs as to where potential problems in the supply chain exist. BRC said it could potentially see an opportunity to feed information into the Horizon Scan tool as well as to extract information from the tool. CE agreed and said he could see the BRC as a major contributor of information to a tool like Horizon Scan.

- BRC recently launched a new standard for agents and brokers and is in discussions with retailers about how they could help encourage uptake of the standard. CE said he believed the standard would be welcomed by legitimate agents and brokers. BRC agreed but cautioned that it would most likely take some time for the market to drive take up of the new standard. BRC said it intended to raise awareness of the standard by working closely with businesses, holding webinars and providing case studies demonstrating good practice. It said it was conscious of the need to make the standard commercially worthwhile in order for agents and brokers to adopt it and would rely to an extent on retailers driving it by requiring their suppliers to use only certificated agents and brokers.
- The next version of the Global Food Standard (version 7) could include a food crime module. This would not be built into the food safety module but would stand alone and businesses would be able to choose whether or not to adopt it. Work still needs to be done around what the content of this module would include.
- It was noted that BRC is also looking at the role that increased unannounced audits can play in its standards. BRC made the point that unannounced audits change the culture of the organisation to one where people have to work to the standard every day. It was suggested that retailers would need educating that in the short term auditors would be more likely to discover non-conformities as part of a move to unannounced audits.

CE asked whether BRC had considered his recommendation for sampling to be included in unannounced audits. BRC said there had been a strong push back from the US against sampling due to the legal requirement to inform authorities of out of specification results; however the prospect of introducing sampling to unannounced audits in the UK was much more realistic. BRC suggested there was a need for more focused testing and sharing of that information. The idea of surveillance clubs was floated where retailers tested for different things and then pooled their data. MP said he would discuss with Andrew Opie from the BRC whether the BRC could coordinate a surveillance club.

BRC said it was also looking at transparency tools to map the supply chain and was working with potential software companies on how to feed data into their traceability tools. It was agreed that a meeting between the Elliott Review and these companies, facilitated by BRC, could be useful to discuss their system of mapping traceability in more detail.

2. Possible areas for collaboration

A number of areas for collaboration were identified between the Elliott Review and BRC. These were on:

- The new standard for agents and brokers
- The content of the food crime module
- Surveillance and information sharing

3. Next steps

The following actions were agreed:

- CE to discuss agents and brokers standards with the International Meat Traders Association and continue to engage with BRC on how to encourage take up of the standard
- MP to engage with fast food operators such as McDonald's, Burger King and Yum! Group on the new agents and brokers standard
- CE to brief the BRC working party developing the new crime module on what competencies should be included in the module
- BRC Global Standards to attend the meeting between Elliott Review and BRC on 17th February to discuss information sharing and develop the idea of surveillance clubs.
- CE said he would be happy to include good practice case studies from the BRC in his final report
- Consideration to be given to setting up a meeting between the Elliott Review and transparency software providers, facilitated by BRC

28 January 2014