

Food and Drink Sector Council
17 October 2023 Meeting Summary

Attendees

Co-Chairs:

Tim J Smith CBE	Industry Co-Chair
Minister Mark Spencer	Minister of State for Food, Farming and Fisheries, Defra, Government Co-Chair

Attendees:

Ash Amirahmadi	Chief Executive Officer, Sofina Foods Europe
Karen Betts	Chief Executive, Food and Drink Federation
James Bielby	Chief Executive Officer, Federation of Wholesale Distributors
Sarah Bradbury	Chief Executive Officer, Institute of Grocery Distribution
Sue Davies	Head of Consumer Rights and Food Policy / Strategic Policy Advisor, WHICH?
John Farrand	Guild of Fine Food and Defra SME Forum
Beth Hart	Vice President, Supply Chain and Brand Trust (UK&I), McDonalds
Chris Jewitt	Food and Drink North East
Terry Jones	Director General, National Farmers Union (for Minette Batters)
Claire Lorains	Group Quality Director, Tesco
Robin Mills	Managing Director UK&I, Compass Group
Nigel Murray	Managing Director, Booths
Kate Nicholls	Chief Executive, UKHospitality
Andrew Opie	Director of Food and Sustainability, British Retail Consortium
Matthew Price	General Manager, Uber Eats UK&I
Andy Richardson	Chair of the Food and Drink Wales Industry Board
Nicholas Saphir	Chair, Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board
Kate Stein	Director of Technical, Sainsbury's
Richard Watson	Chief Executive Officer, Nestle UK&I

Apologies:

Anne Anderson	Head of Sustainability and Development, Scottish Sea Farms
Minette Batters	President, National Farmers Union (Terry Jones deputising)

Ian Burrow	National Head of Agriculture, NatWest Group
Joe Clarke	UNITE, National Officer
Andrew Knowles	Chief Executive Officer, Fram Farmers Ltd
Jason Richards	Senior Vice President and General Manager UK&I, Pepsico
James Russell	Managing Director, AF Blakemore and Son
Nick Whelan	Group Chief Executive, Dale Farm Ltd

Introduction

This meeting of the Food and Drink Sector Council was focussed on setting up sub-committees to deliver the FDSC's priorities – workforce, sustainability and food supply resilience – and the Food Data Transparency Partnership (FDTP). Members were reminded that as the engine rooms for the FDSC, agreement on the sub-committee's scope, along with active participation from members and industry, would be crucial.

Workforce Sub-Committee

The Council received a presentation from Ash Amirahmadi and Sarah Bradbury on scoping work for the first phase of the workforce sub-committee. This proposed that the priorities for phase 1 should be sector attractiveness, automation and skills - as recommended in the Independent Review into Labour Shortages in the Food Supply Chain - as the areas where the Council could uniquely have the most immediate and significant impact.

Members strongly supported the proposal for this first phase of work. In discussion, the following points were raised:

- Efforts to attract workforce should extend beyond encouraging young people alone into the sector, to draw also on other parts of society with potential, such as the economically inactive and ex-offenders. An identity or cause would support this drive and make people want to work for the sector.
- Challenges on sector attractiveness pointed to the need to make the case for the economic importance of the sector and the critical nature of its function to supply food. Best practice should be brought together and shared. Generation Logistics was cited as an example of a good initiative to engage talent. In addition, there were case studies of businesses putting resources into attracting workforce which were not now experiencing shortages.
- Initiatives needed to be achievable for smaller businesses as well as larger ones, with 98% of the sector made up of SMEs.
- With its unique whole chain perspective, the Council should link across government and to other sector councils with similar priorities. In particular, retail, hospitality and tourism.

The review's other recommendations could be considered at a later stage and after the Government Response. These were for government to lead initially, potentially

bringing in other groups such as the British Retail Consortium's Migrant Labour Group, on issues such as domestic and seasonal labour. The Council would then consider phase 2 and opportunities to inform wider government policy.

Sustainability Sub-Committee

The Council received a summary from Karen Lepper (Deputy Director, Food Data, Standards and Sustainability, Defra) on the scoping work developed by Defra officials over the summer, for the Council to discuss and an industry sub-committee chair to consider when appointed. This proposed three objectives on consolidating data asks, sharing best practice and improving carbon and data literacy. These built on the Council's priority to achieve net zero with a focus on scope 3 greenhouse gas emissions as the most intractable challenge. In addition, they focussed on those areas which brought industry and government together and on avoiding duplication. Defra officials would support industry members when the sub-committee was up and running.

Members broadly supported the proposals. In discussion, the following points were raised:

- Outputs should be practical, deliverable, and measurable, with government support.
- Data asks should be consolidated and simplified, and practicable for smaller scale businesses.
- The Council should focus on where it could uniquely add value, and on sharing best practice and avoiding duplication. To that end, existing activity should be mapped, and a UK lens applied (recognising the scope of the FDSC is England-only).
- Nature and biodiversity are additional components of sustainability alongside carbon. These would require more complex data and more support for primary producers.

Food Supply Resilience Sub-Committee

The Council received an introduction from Danny Roff (Deputy Director, Food Security and Coordination, Defra) of the scoping work which – as for sustainability – had been developed by Defra officials for the Council to discuss and the sub-committee chair to consider once in place. The proposed objectives focussed on understanding industry action on climate adaptation and removing barriers; understanding mid to long-term risks and possible mitigations; and lessons learnt on recent fresh produce shortages. As for sustainability, Defra officials were ready to support the sub-committee when established.

Members broadly supported this work. In discussion, the following points were raised:

- It was vital that the sector remained resilient and able to retain its primary producers.
- Consideration of mechanisms such as the Agriculture Act powers and government subsidy schemes on food production.

- Food supply resilience runs wider than climate risk mitigations. Other key factors include international supply chains and geopolitics, particularly given recent and ongoing experiences.
- Localism also played a role, which raised broader questions about the level of ambition on self-sufficiency.
- The hospitality and retail sectors could balance out shortages in one part of the sector through another.
- Resilience should also cover affordability of food for households, once it had been produced and put on sale.

Food Data Transparency Partnership

The Council received updates from Karen Lepper and Judith Batchelar (Co-Chair of the Eco Working Group, Food Data Transparency Partnership and Deputy Chair, Environment Agency, attending for the FDTP item only) on the FDTP's eco workstream, and from Natasha Burgon (Director of Diet, Obesity and Healthy Behaviours at the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, Department for Health and Social Care) on the health workstream.

In discussion, the following points were raised:

On the eco workstream:

- Outreach should be simple and broad, including for SMEs which often had additional layers of complexity (for example, from outsourcing).
- Clear, long-term goals, a clear baseline and accountability should be established from which to start.
- A level playing field should be in place including support for farmers; and alignment within devolved nations and a UK-wide approach.
- Data literacy – being distinct from climate literacy – risked not being picked up by the FDSC's sustainability sub-committee and could fall through the gaps yet is needed for the FDTP.

On the health workstream:

- Engagement should be wider, including with the devolved governments, SMEs and additional investor groups, when developing health metrics.

Further updates on the FDTP would be brought to the next meeting.

Future of Food (FDSC industry members only)

The Council were updated by Tim Smith on the process for setting up this industry-only discussion on the FDSC "future of food" priority, which would dig into the evidence underpinning the National Food Strategy independent review.

In discussion, the following areas of discussion and potential scope were put forward:

- Maintaining momentum and political support.

- Feedback from other sector councils on resourcing work, collaboration between sector councils and involvement of other government departments and No 10.
- Potential future topics as FDSC priorities such as the Council's role on health, public sector procurement and ability to respond to live issues such as inflation.
- Support for the Council from outside the membership.
- The strategic approach, such as whether the Council should prioritise work through the workforce sub-committee first before widening to the other sub-committees.
- Links into wider industry and food groups, other sector councils, academia and government and embedding food supply risk in government planning.

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The next meeting would be in the new year, with the date to be confirmed shortly.