

**Food and Drink Sector Council
16 October 2024 Meeting Summary**

Attendees

Co-Chairs:

Tim J Smith CBE Industry Co-Chair
Daniel Zeichner MP Minister of State for Food Security and Rural Affairs, Defra,
Government Co-Chair

FDSC members:

Andrew Knowles Chief Executive Officer, Fram Farmers Ltd
Andrew Opie Director of Food and Sustainability, British Retail Consortium
Anne Anderson Head of Sustainability and Development, Scottish Sea Farms
David Lloyd Chair of the Food and Drink Wales Industry Board
Ian Burrow National Head of Agriculture, NatWest Group
James Bielby Chief Executive Officer, Federation of Wholesale Distributors
Jason Richards Senior Vice President and General Manager UK&I, Pepsico
John Farrand Managing Director, Guild of Fine Food
Karen Betts Chief Executive, Food and Drink Federation
Kate Nicholls Chief Executive, UKHospitality
Nicholas Saphir Chair, Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board
Nigel Murray Managing Director, Booths
Sarah Bradbury Chief Executive Officer, Institute of Grocery Distribution
Sue Davies Head of Consumer Rights and Food Policy/Strategic Policy Advisor,
WHICH?
Tom Bradshaw President, National Farmers Union

Apologies:

Ash Amirahmadi Chief Executive Officer, Sofina Foods Europe
Beth Hart Vice President, Supply Chain and Brand Trust (UK&I), McDonalds
Chris Jewitt Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Food and Drink North East
Claire Lorains Group Quality Director, Tesco
James Russell Managing Director, AF Blakemore and Son
Joe Clarke National Officer, UNITE
Matthew Price General Manager, Uber Eats UK&I
Nick Whelan Group Chief Executive, Dale Farm Ltd
Richard Watson Chief Executive Officer, Nestle UK&I

Robin Mills Managing Director UK&I, Compass Group

Officials in attendance:

Emily Miles Defra, Director General, Food, Biosecurity and Trade

Toby Nation Defra, Director, Agri-Food Chain

Dave Morris Welsh Government

Alice Biggins Scottish Government

Joy Alexander Northern Ireland Government

Introduction

This Food and Drink Sector Council (FDSC) meeting was the first since the election of the new government and focussed on: outlining the Co-Chairs' vision of how the future work of the FDSC will align with the government's priorities and missions; updates on the FDSC's Resilience Roundtable and Workforce Sub-Committee; and sector support for customer choices in health and affordability.

Future vision for the FDSC and role in supporting government missions and priorities

The Co-Chairs communicated their vision to Council members that the FDSC should focus on providing a small number of clear outputs in support of the government's missions and priorities, and that its work should be bound by specific deadlines. Tim Smith also provided an update, following agreement with Minister Zeichner, that the FDSC's strategic advisory role to the Food Data Transparency Partnership (FDTP) would cease; allowing the FDTP to continue under an independent mandate.

In discussion, the following points were raised:

- Members suggested that the FDSC should adopt a more cross-government approach to deliver the government's priorities and missions, including working with devolved administrations.
- Members noted the need for agreement on how FDSC actions should be owned and delivered between meetings.
- Members noted that food data is still an area requiring development and understanding from the sector. Minister Zeichner reiterated the government's commitment to the work of the FDTP, emphasising that better understanding and use of food data will be key going forward.

Resilience Roundtable

The Council received a presentation from Nigel Murray on the Resilience Roundtable, which held its inaugural meeting earlier in the month. The main objective of the Resilience Roundtable is addressing how the UK can maintain resilient food supply as risks and impacts emerge in the future. The themes of the Resilience Roundtable's work were communicated to members. The next steps of the roundtable will include agreeing priority workstreams and actions to take forward.

Members and Co-Chairs reflected positively on the first meeting of the Resilience Roundtable and its work. In discussion, the following points were raised:

- Members questioned what was meant by ‘resilience’ and whether it’s focus was around increasing the UK’s food security more broadly or strengthening support for food products where the UK already has strengths. Nigel Murray confirmed that the aim, ideally, is to achieve both.
- Members that attended the roundtable emphasised its proactivity and focus on tangible outputs, questioning whether there were activities within its scope that could be progressed immediately such as healthy and sustainable diets.
- It was noted that food producers will need time to adapt to any changes to the UK Food System facilitated or encouraged by the work of the Roundtable.

Workforce Sub-Committee

The Council received updates from Sarah Bradbury on the activities of the Workforce Subcommittee’s Sector Attractiveness Working Group, including the ‘Mmmake Your Mark’ campaign. The Institute of Grocery Distribution has led this working group with support from industry and trade associations. The ‘Mmmake Your Mark’ campaign’s purpose was to boost the attractiveness of the sector by uniting industry in communicating why the food and drink industry is a great place to work, targeting 18–24-year-olds. Analysis reveals it had a collective reach of over 7 million people.

Members noted the success of the campaign and fed-back positively on the work of the Workforce Sub-Committee.

In discussion, the following points were raised:

- How the sector is experiencing challenges with the implementation of the apprenticeship levy.
- Members questioned how the ‘Mmmake Your Mark’ campaign will be measured as a success against long-term outcomes. It was noted that activation of the sector towards this initiative is the current measure of success and that measured perceptions of careers in the food and drink sector have improved.
- Members noted that older audiences should also be targeted by future Sector Attractiveness Working Group activities.
- Members also suggested that there could be cross-government collaboration on introducing food science as a subject into school at an earlier stage.

Sector support for customer choices in health and affordability.

The Council received a presentation from Sue Davies on how the sector, as well as government, could better support consumers to enable them to access healthy and affordable food, including targeting those who are most at risk of food insecurity. Current challenges identified included high food prices, convenience, time constraints and labelling.

In discussion following the presentation, the following points were raised:

- The comparability of the UK with other countries regarding food affordability and shelf prices was considered, with suggestions that the cause of food poverty should be addressed.
- The role of government in supporting food affordability and access to healthy and nutritious food with discussion around the role of ultra-processed and high in fat, sugar or salt foods in this debate.

- Suggestions for a more focused approach on tackling food deserts and consideration of the role of convenience stores.
- Members highlighted the complexity of factors affecting access to healthy and affordable food including wider-cultural trends, consumer values, planning and regulatory restrictions.

Close

The next meeting is to be held in the first quarter of 2025, with the date to be confirmed shortly.