

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

1 COVID-19

1.1 Since the Board meeting on 19th August 2020, FSS has continued to support Scottish Government (SG) teams including Resilience, Food and Drink; and Scottish Ministers, and working with Defra, Food Standards Agency (FSA) and food retailers in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. FSS is also supporting SG on EU exit preparations in relation to the security of food supply.

1.2 Since the last meeting in August 2020, two meat plants took the decision to close due to a COVID-19 outbreak at their meat plant. I would like to thank the Operational Delivery team who have continued to support our work in meat plants during these challenging times. We are planning for more outbreaks over the coming months and have recently boosted our ability to support a number of simultaneous Incident Management Teams through the use of our Incident, Environmental Health Officer (EHO) and Veterinary expertise. I have assured staff that we take health, safety and wellbeing of FSS staff as a priority and we will continue to engage with health officials to ensure our guidance and safe systems of work are being fully applied and kept up to date.

1.3 We have continued to revise and update the [COVID-19 Guidance for Food Business Operators and their Employees](#) and [COVID-19 Questions and Answers](#) and our [Coronavirus](#) webpage now includes Coronavirus information in British Sign Language.

1.4 FSS has aligned with the SG position during the pandemic that working from home for all non-essential workers will continue into 2021 and we do not intend to re-open Pilgrim House this year. We will continue to look at what we can do support staff over the coming months, as well as looking ahead to the arrangements we will need to have in place as and when a return to the office environment becomes possible.

2. Senior Appointments

2.1 On the 16th September 2020, we issued a [press release](#) to announce that Julie Hesketh-Laird will join FSS on 3rd November 2020 on a two-year fixed-term appointment as FSS Strategy Director. Julie's responsibilities will include finalising the new FSS strategy and seeing through our preparations for Brexit and its consequences. As well as delivering the FSS regulatory strategy, nutrition and digital programmes, under the re-structure Julie also has responsibility for communications, governance and infrastructure (including Human Resources, Finance and Information Technology), Audit Assurance, Nutrition Science and Policy and Private Office.

2.2 A new Chief Scientific Adviser has been appointed and a public announcement will be made when we can. We have also confirmed appointments within the Executive - Garry Mournian appointed to C2 Head of Policy, Jacqui McElhiney, C2 Head of Science Delivery, Research, Assurance and Governance and Sandy McDougall, C2 Head of Operational Delivery. Garry's current post will now be advertised externally.

3. Chief Executive's Engagements

3.1 On Saturday 12th September 2020, I spoke at the 55th Annual Association of Meat Inspectors Seminar which took place virtually for the first time in the organisations history. In my presentation, I highlighted the challenges and opportunities facing FSS with EU transition becoming closer, the opportunities for staff to develop their roles beyond

inspection to include the full aspects of official controls, including audit, verification and assurance.

3.2 On the 13th of October 2020, the Chair and I met with Professor Jim McGoldrick Chair and Angela Leitch, Chief Executive of Public Health Scotland to discuss strategic plan engagement.

4. European Union Transition and the UK Internal Market Bill

4.1 The pace of work on European Union (EU) remains challenging, we are continuing to focus on a number of key pieces of work including - legislation (such as revisions to retained EU law; the Scottish Continuity Bill, the trade negotiations for the EU and the Rest of the World; Import and Export Controls and the Northern Ireland Protocol.

4.2 On the 2nd of October 2020, the Chair wrote a [letter](#) on the UK Internal Market Bill to Lewis Macdonald, Convenor of the Health and Sport Committee at the Scottish Parliament. The letter provided our analysis of the potential impact significantly in relation to Scottish consumers that the Bill could have on our ability to discharge our statutory remit to protect Scottish consumers' interests in relation to food.

5. Export Health Certificates

5.1 FSS is working with SG on a high-priority project during the EU-exit transition period to ensure, as far as possible, that the Scottish seafood industry is supported in meeting the export health certificate (EHC) requirements for exporting their food products to EU member states at the end of the transition period on the 31st December 2020.

5.2 FSS will lead on EHC provision at three key logistic hubs located in Central Scotland at Larkhall, Harthill and Bellshill. The hubs will potentially operate a 'groupage' system helping food businesses export efficiently and effectively by having one EHC certificate for container loads of export produce.

5.3 The provision of FSS staff will also help to relieve the burden on resource-stretched local authorities, whilst they continue to provide EHC's for food business who export to third countries as well as those exporting directly to the EU who decide not to use the service provided by the hubs.

5.4 The work will be carried out by trained FSS staff and recruitment has commenced for both Certifying Officers (COs) and Certification Support Officers (CSO's), to ensure a consistent and verifiable approach to the export certification process is maintained throughout Scotland. The COs will be Environmental Health Officers, Food Safety Officers or Veterinarians in the first instance, and all CO's will be registered with Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA).

5.5 It has been made clear by Scottish Ministers, that failure to meet the EHC requirements in a post EU-exit world is unthinkable both to the Scottish fishing industry and Scottish economy, so a project management approach has been adopted to take this essential activity forward at pace. Scottish Ministers have been fully apprised of the work being undertaken by SG/FSS officials in respect of the logistics hub project, and are in agreement with the strategy.

6. Scottish Food Crime and Incidents Unit

6.1 Operation Hancock

6.1.1 Towards the end of August 2020, a highly significant blackmail case (Operation Hancock) was in court in London, in which our Scottish Food Crime and Incidents Unit (SFCIU) were heavily involved alongside colleagues from Hertfordshire Constabulary, Police Scotland, the Food Standards Agency, retailers Tesco and baby food manufacturers Heinz and Cow & Gate.

6.1.2 Over a period of two years from Spring 2018, the defendant, Nigel Wright, was demanding money with menaces (blackmail) by making threats against Tesco that, unless they paid him in the region of £1.4 million, he would place contaminated food (in this case baby food laced with razor sharp shards of metal) on their supermarket shelves. In what was described at the court as one of the largest and most complex investigations of its kind, the safety of the public was paramount throughout and exhaustive lengths were taken to identify the suspect. The SFCIU were involved in a series of fast-time interventions including product recalls, a media blackout and arrests in a highly complex project which involved law enforcement agencies and public health bodies on both sides of the border working at a national and international level.

6.1.3 Mr Wright's defence was that he was 'acting under death threat from travellers to commit the crimes' was systematically dismantled in court and the jury found him guilty of all charges. He has been jailed for 14 years.

6.2 Food Crime Priorities for 2020-21

6.2.1 On Tuesday 29th September 2020, the FSS SFCIU published its food crime priorities for 2020-21, alongside a joint UK Food Crime Strategic Assessment with the FSA's National Food Crime Unit and both [reports](#) are available on the FSS website.

6.2.2 The SFCIU has taken an evidence and intelligence-based approach, working with partners and industry to identify key areas of concern which have previously and continue to be targeted by criminals, to the detriment of consumers and responsible businesses. The priorities are red meat, fish, counterfeit/illicit alcohol and wild shellfish. These areas, assessed as high risk and vulnerable to food crime in Scotland, will be set out in the Control Strategy, which also looks to address issues across the entire supply chain with its aim to identify, understand and tackle food crime; ultimately protecting consumers and our reputable food and drink sector.

6.3 FSS Whistleblowing Report – 2019-20

6.3.1 We are required to report annually on the number of whistleblowing disclosures we have received and on the 30th of September 2020, we published the [FSS Whistleblowing Report - 2019-20](#). FSS is listed in legislation as an organisation that workers can approach outside their workplace to report suspected or known wrongdoing related to food and feed safety standards.

7. Communications and Marketing

7.1 Handwashing Tracker update

7.1.1 At the end of August 2020, we highlighted the importance of essential, thorough handwashing to prevent food poisoning to consumers, after a [new survey](#) revealed less than a third (29%) of people always use soap or hand wash and water when they are at home. Additionally, around one fifth of respondents said they spend less time than the recommended 20 seconds washing their hands.

7.1.2 The handwashing tracker, conducted by Ipsos MORI, took place between 10th and 14th July 2020. This is the first of a quarterly tracker which will run for two years to April 2022.

7.2 Taste of Grampian Food and Drink Virtual Festival 2020

7.2.1 Taste of Grampian, the north-east's largest food and drink festival took place virtually this year from 18th to 20th September 2020, with FSS as one of the sponsors. It was held in six digital 'tents', each streaming a variety of video content throughout the event e.g. interactive tastings to cooking demonstrations and live online entertainment, with over 90 sessions available to watch. FSS had a virtual "Eatwell Tent", which shared healthy, delicious and easy-to-cook recipes, as well as showcasing a series of food safety and healthy eating videos with top tips and advice for families.

7.3 FSS Food in Scotland Consumer Tracker Survey – Wave 10

7.3.1 On the 7th October 2020, we published [Wave 10 of the FSS Consumer Tracking Survey](#), which measures changes in Scotland's attitudes, behaviours and knowledge in relation to food over time. This wave focused on diet and nutrition and was conducted between 3rd and 17th July 2020 and included new questions exploring COVID-19 and its impact in relation to diet.

7.3.3 The key conclusions are:

Knowledge, Awareness & Trust:

- Awareness of FSS stands at 60% – a level that is broadly consistent with recent years
- Awareness - however, new data shows that not all who have heard of FSS feel they really understand the organisation's remit or have a detailed understanding of the areas FSS is responsible for
 - suggesting a need for awareness raising activity that helps build consumer understanding of FSS' role
- Trust - amongst those who are aware of FSS, levels of trust in the organisation are high and performance is rated very highly
- Trust - data shows that the more consumers know about FSS the more they trust the organisation and rate performance highly

Healthy Eating:

- There is widespread acknowledgement of the health risks associated with unhealthy diets, and recognition that these are an issue in Scotland.
- However, 6 in 10 Scots think their own diet is at least quite healthy, suggesting a lack of connection with the issue at a personal level.

- While people feel they have access to information on healthy diets and are reasonably knowledgeable, there is room for more information and guidance.
- Knowledge is not necessarily translated into action, with a significant proportion of consumers not following recommended practices.
- And other barriers to healthy eating remain – cost, time and promotions (in store and when ordering takeaways).
- COVID-19 has clearly impacted on diet and eating habits with consumers eating more snacks and treats but fewer takeaways.

COVID-19 module:

- COVID-19 has clearly had an impact on food related aspects of life for many across Scotland, with the data showing:
 - Evidence of food poverty
 - Concerns about the availability of food
 - And changes in shopping, cooking and eating habits
- A significant minority felt their diet and exercise levels had improved during lockdown.
- Although boredom and furlough contributed negatively to people eating more and snacking more.
- And mental wellbeing has been negatively affected for some, particularly in the younger age groups.
- The public are aware of the immune boosting benefits of healthy diets, and aware of the links between obesity, Type-2 Diabetes and COVID-19.
 - But it is not clear whether they have any sense of personal recognition / risk.

Allergens:

- Data on allergens is very consistent with that seen in the previous two waves, with more than 1 in 10 households personally affected
- Finding information about what ingredients cause allergic reactions does not appear to be a problem
- However, finding clear information on what allergens are in takeaway foods is less easy, and consumers generally believe allergens should be clearly labelled on all menus
- Attitudes towards people with allergies amongst the general population are broadly supportive.

8. Regulatory Policy

8.1 In early October 2020, we launched two consultations - [Wild Game Consultation](#) and [Implementation of Allergen Labelling on Prepacked for Direct Sale](#).

8.2 The purpose of Wild Game consultation is seek the views of members of the wild game industry and other interested stakeholders, on the revised Wild Game Guide produced by FSS. This consultation closes on the 24th December 2020.

8.3 The consultation on allergens labelling concerns proposed amendments to the Food Information (Scotland) Regulations 2014 to require food sold prepacked for direct sale to be labelled with the name of the food and ingredients information. This is intended to improve information to consumers about the allergens and other ingredients in food sold this way. The consultation will seek views of food businesses, enforcement authorities, consumers and other stakeholders. This consultation closes on the 4th December 2020.

9. FSS British Sign Language (BSL) Plan Update

9.1 The FSS BSL Steering Group has been working on the delivery of its first BSL plan. This mandatory piece of work will outline the specific actions FSS plan to carry out to help improve the accessibility of our services and information to BSL users, as well as support [Scottish Government's BSL National Plan 2017-23](#). FSS aim to publish its final plan before the end of this year. As part of this work, we have created a dedicated [BSL](#) webpage where BSL users can easily access all of our BSL/English translated content. This includes information and videos on COVID-19, handwashing and food crime. The page is evolving and more content will be added over time.

10. Corporate Services

10.1 Scotland's Climate Week – 14th to 20th September 2020

10.1 While the COVID-19 pandemic has led to radical changes over recent months, the climate emergency hasn't gone away. Climate Week was an important opportunity to learn more about the challenge we all face and how we can, together, end Scotland's contribution to climate change. During that week, FSS staff were invited to take part in a range of events including workshops and webinars with tips on how to reduce their bills and their carbon footprint, hosted by Home Energy Scotland and Zero Waste Scotland.

For queries contact :
Geoff Ogle, Chief Executive
Geoff.Ogle@fss.scot
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