

Chief Executives Report

1. Introduction

1.1 There has been a considerable amount of activity since the last meeting.

2. Engagements and meetings

2.1 The CEO continues to have regular engagement with a range of stakeholders and organisations. On 13 November he attended a Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) meeting on the use of third-party assurance. He also attended the Population Health Framework Programme Board on 26 November.

2.2 On the 05 and 06 November Geoff, Heather Kelman, FSS Chair attended the Scottish Government (SG) Food Security Conference hosted by Mairi Gougeon, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands.

3. Meetings with MSPs

3.1 Elena McWatt, Head of the Operational Delivery Division, Andy Morrison, Head of Food Law and Local Authority Partnerships, Greg Douglas, Senior Enforcement Manager, and Robert McGeachy, Head of Public Affairs and Engagement held a meeting with Emma Roddick MSP. The meeting was a follow-up meeting to discuss issues around venison dealers' licensing, and mobile abattoirs.

3.2 Ron McNaughton, Head of the SFCIU, and Robert McGeachy met Pauline McNeil MSP, the Scottish Labour Party's Spokesperson on Justice, to update her about food crime. This was the final meeting with the opposition parties' spokespersons on criminal justice to update them about the SFCIU's work in tackling food crime.

4. Engagement with Scottish Parliament Cross-Party Groups

4.1 Stuart McAdam, Head of Incidents and Resilience, gave a presentation to the Scottish Parliament's Cross-Party Group on Older People, Age and Ageing, about the Listeria outbreak. Stuart's presentation was well received, and is his third presentation to a Cross-Party Group, following his previous inputs at the Cross-Party Group on Crofting and Cross-Party Group on Animal Welfare on how to prevent on-farm poisoning. In addition to these three presentations, inputs on food crime have also been previously provided by Ron McNaughton, Head of the SFCIU, to the Cross-Party Group on Food and to the Cross-Party Group on Independence Convenience Stores by Ross Clark, Senior Intelligence Analyst.

5. Engagement with Westminster Committees

5.1 The CEO, and the Food Standards Agency's CEO, Katie Pettifer, gave evidence to the House of Commons' Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee. Follow up questions from the Chair of the committee have been received and a joint response with FSA is being prepared.

6. Evidence to Scottish Parliament Committees

6.1 FSS submitted evidence to the Scottish Parliament's Health, Social Care and Sport Committee on the Food (Promotion and placement) Regulations 2025. These Regulations seek to introduce restrictions on the promotion and placement of certain foods and drinks that are less healthy, and in particular foods and drinks which are high in fat, sugar, or salt (HFSS).

6.2 FSS also submitted evidence on The Good Food Nation (Specified Functions and Descriptions) (Scottish Ministers) Regulations 2025 to the Scottish Parliament's Rural Affairs and Islands Committee. These regulations provide that the Scottish Ministers must have regard to the National Good Food Nation Plan when exercising specified functions and specified descriptions of functions.

7. Engagement with MSPs, and with MPs representing constituencies in Scotland

7.1 An update on the wine industry in Scotland was sent to all MSPs, and to all MPs representing constituencies in Scotland.

7.2 Details of the DISH follow-up report were sent to all MSPs, and to all MPs representing constituencies in Scotland.

7.3 Information about FSS's support for food and feed businesses was sent to all MSPs, and to all MPs representing constituencies in Scotland.

7.4 Newsbites was sent to all MSPs, and to all MPs representing constituencies in Scotland.

8. SAFER Update

8.1 The inaugural SAFER Programme Board meeting, chaired by Ian McWatt, the Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) was held on 7 October 2025. He outlined the purpose of the SAFER Programme, which aims to reform and modernise the food law delivery system in Scotland, to support businesses, regulatory partnerships, and consumer protection.

Governance, Accountability and Sponsorship

8.2 The governance and organisational structure, detailed below, were agreed by the programme board.

8.3 Given FSS's role as a Non-Ministerial Office, it was agreed that the FSS Board will act as the Sponsoring Group. The Scottish Parliament and Scottish

Ministers are also listed in the organisational structure, as it is anticipated they may have a role, should any of the outcomes of the programme trigger the need for legislative change.



Vision, Objectives and Terms of Reference

8.4 The vision statement and objectives were presented to the programme board and updated to reflect further benefits for both consumers and businesses, clearer definitions, and benchmarking of public health outcomes. The Board also reviewed the programme's terms of reference, with updates made to terminology, governance, and organisational structure.

8.5 You can read these in full on the SAFER section of the FSS [website](#).

Programme structure and timeline

8.6 SAFER will run over 4–5 years in two tranches of work :

- Tranche 1 : Research, evidence, and options analysis.
- Tranche 2 : Transition and implementation of the agreed model.

Four strategic pillars will guide delivery:

1. Food Law Delivery
2. Sustainable Funding
3. Dynamic Regulation and Assurance
4. Data and Digital Enablement

8.7 Recruitment for key roles is currently underway, and technical advisory groups will be formed to ensure stakeholder engagement and codesign is at the core of SAFER.

Communications and engagement

8.8 A staff and stakeholder update will be provided after each programme board with a summary of the key discussion points. The SAFER page of the FSS website will also be updated periodically as the programme progresses.

Funding

8.9 The programme has received £3.25 million from the Scottish Government (SG) Invest to Save fund for 2025–26. Funding beyond this period is currently being discussed with SG representatives and a further update will be provided once available.

Next steps

8.10 The next programme board meeting is scheduled for February 2026, and will focus on the research, evidence, and analysis criteria for SAFER.

9. BSE Negligible Risk

9.1 On 29 May 2025, Scotland, England and Wales were granted BSE NR status by the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH), having previously had a controlled risk (CR) status.

9.2 The EU has now formally recognised Scotland, England and Wales as having BSE NR status. Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2025/2208, amending the Annex to Commission Decision 2007/453/EC as regards the BSE status of certain regions of the United Kingdom, was published on the 4 November 2025 and has become legally binding from the 24 November 2025.

9.3 From 24 November, FBOs will still be required to remove and dispose as SRM the skull (excluding the mandible), brain, eyes and spinal cord of bovines over 12 months of age. Other tissues no longer defined as SRM under NR status can be disposed as ABP Category 2 or 3, or, when harvested hygienically, be sold for human consumption (with the exception of the tonsils, which require removal under Regulation 853/2004, Annex III, Section I, Chapter IV, paragraph 16 (a)).

10. Exercise Aspen

10.1 A National exotic notifiable disease exercise is currently taking place; the aim is to rehearse governments contingency plans for an UK wide outbreak of food and mouth disease. Exercise timings: Tabletop one 05 November, Tabletop two 12 November, Live play 25 and 26 November and Tabletop three 02 December.

11. Areas of Research Interest

11.1 In time for the launch of the new FSS website, our [Areas of Research Interest \(ARI\)](#) were published for the first time. These are brigaded under the six themes of our Food and Health Research programme (FHRP). These are now also accessible (along with those published by other government departments) through the [SG website](#) and [the Government Office for Science database](#), to raise awareness, across the scientific community, of evidence needs for policy development across the UK.

12. Response to Scottish Government's (SG's) consultation on their Strategic Research Programme (SRP) on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture (ENRA)

12.1 FSS submitted its formal response to Scottish Government's (SG's) consultation on their Strategic Research Programme (SRP) on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture (ENRA). The SRP outlines future research priorities, including those relating to the resilience and sustainability of Scotland's food system. FSS has a long history of collaborating with SG and the Scottish Environment, Food and Agriculture Research Institutes (SEFARI) to deliver aspects of the SRP relating to food and diet, and we have welcomed the systems thinking focus of this strategy, which will serve to strengthen partnership working in areas of shared interest which are complementary to FSS's own Food and Health Research Programme (FHRP). We also provided feedback on the Areas of Research Interest (ARI) identified for the SRP which relate to the work of FSS and how it intersects with wider public health policy objectives in Scotland; particularly around One Health, Good Food Nation and the Scottish Dietary Goals.

13. Workshop with FSA and the German Federal Institute

13.1 In October, we took part in a workshop with FSA and the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) to identify areas for collaboration on social science, which was one of the priorities identified in the collaborative workplan we agreed last year as part of our Joint Declaration of Intent.

14. Publication of review of chemical contaminant risks

14.1 In November, we published [a review of chemical contaminant risks in wild caught fishery products](#), which is now being used to support the development of risk based sampling plans for assessing the occurrence of established and emerging environmental pollutants in accordance with legislation.

15. UK-India Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) 'Section 42' report advice

15.1 On 24 July the [UK and India Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement \(CETA\)](#) was signed following three years of negotiations. On that date, the respective Chairs of Food Standards Scotland (FSS) and the Food Standards Agency (FSA) were commissioned by the Minister of State for Trade to deliver joint advice on the food safety and human health aspects of this trade agreement. This advice contributes to a government report (required under [Section 42\(2\) of the 2020 Agriculture Act](#)) alongside advice from the Trade and Agriculture Commission (TAC) on the measures applicable to trade in agricultural products, animal and plant health, as well as animal welfare and environment protections.

15.2 The UK Government's Section 42 report, which includes the FSS/FSA joint advice and TAC advice as annexes to the report, was laid in the UK Parliament on 25 November and can be accessed [here](#). The FSS/FSA joint advice has also been published separately on our website, and can be accessed [here](#). The joint FSS/FSA advice concludes that the UK-India trade agreement upholds the UK's existing food

safety and nutrition standards, not requiring any changes to UK legislation, nor does it introduce new equivalence decisions for agri-food products. Ministers remain responsible for food safety, guided by science-based advice from FSS and the FSA, and the UK retains full autonomy to negotiate future SPS agreements, including with the EU.

16. Amendments to high-risk food and feed of non-animal origin Regulation (EU) 2019/1793 (Review 4)

16.1 Regulation (EU) 2019/1793 sets temporary increases of official controls and emergency measures governing the entry into GB of specific high-risk food and feed of non-animal origin from certain countries. The Regulation requires regular review of products subject to enhanced controls listed within its Annexes in order to consider new information and non-compliance. The review is delivered by FSS on behalf of Ministers in Scotland through our risk analysis process. The outcome of the risk analysis is implemented by way Scottish Statutory Instrument. The fourth review has now been completed. The Official Controls (Import of High-Risk Food and Feed of Non-Animal Origin) Amendment (Scotland) Regulations 2025 was signed by the Minister on 04 November and will come into force on 01 January 2026. Parallel legislation comes into force in England and Wales on the same date.

16.2 Summary of Amendments:

The amendment introduces 14 individual updates to the Annex I and II lists:

- 2 commodities with reduced control frequency: Jackfruit from Malaysia and Okra from Vietnam (pesticide residues).
- 3 new commodities added to Annex I: Papaya from Brazil and Pitahaya from Thailand (pesticide residues) and Groundnuts from Paraguay (aflatoxins).
- 8 commodities are subject to stricter controls due to elevated risk, including: Aubergines from Dominican Republic, Peppers (Capsicum) from Uganda and Nutmeg, Mace, Cardamoms, Okra, Drumsticks, and various spices from India (pesticide residues).
- 1 commodity (Sesamum seeds) had commodity codes expanded to extend the range of commodities subject to import controls.

16.3 One commodity was removed from control: Sweet peppers from China (Salmonella).

16.4 These changes reflect updated risk profiles and ensure that controls are focused on commodities posing the greatest public health risk.

17. Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) Infant Formula Market Study – Four Nation Response

17.1 The four nation Government [response](#) to the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) [market study](#) into the UK infant formula and follow-on formula market was published on 3 December. The CMA's report sets out recommendations for action to deliver better outcomes for parents who depend on infant formula to feed their babies. The response is a joint response from the Scottish, UK and Welsh

governments, Food Standards Scotland, the Department of Health and Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland.

17.2 Getting the right nutrition at the start is crucial for a baby's healthy growth and development. While Scottish Government policy remains fully committed to supporting breastfeeding, they recognise that some families cannot, or choose not to, breastfeed. For families that do not exclusively breastfeed, infant formula is an essential item and the CMA report highlights the need to give parents and carers the confidence to choose lower priced products and to encourage manufacturers and retailers to compete more on price.

17.3 FSS has the policy responsibility for the legislation on infant formula and follow-on formula, which sets robust nutritional and compositional standards, alongside rules on how formula milk products are labelled, presented and advertised to protect parents and carers from inappropriate claims or promotions. This means all infant formula sold on the UK market is safe, when used appropriately, and meets the nutritional needs of babies, regardless of the price or brand.

17.4 In this joint UK response to the CMA's recommendations, the four nations set out a strong package of non-legislative measures, including supporting parents and carers to make better-informed decisions and encouraging retailers to voluntarily implement measures to facilitate product comparison and stimulate competition between brands. FSS will continue to collaborate on a four nation basis with the Scottish Government and through the Nutrition Labelling and Compositional Standards framework group to progress the package of measures.

18. Webinar on DISH Meat and Dairy Modelling Report

18.1 On 07 October we published our [report which modelled the impact of reducing meat and dairy intakes in children](#), in line with recommendations from the Climate Change Committee. This follows on from our previous [report which explored the impact in adults](#), published in March 2024. The report has been widely disseminated to key stakeholders across public health, climate change and industry. To further support dissemination and raise awareness of the research, we hosted a [webinar on 29th October](#) which will provide an overview of the key findings and include a question and answer session.

19. Scottish Dietary Advice Forum

19.1 FSS hosted the first Scottish Dietary Advice Forum on 07 November 2025 to consider the recommendations from the recently published [Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition \(SACN\) statement on the WHO guideline on non-sugar sweeteners](#). The forum has been created to enable a coordinated approach to the risk management process of new dietary recommendations from SACN in Scotland. It will consider the broad ranging implications of any changes to public health nutrition advice across multiple policy areas. This approach is expected to ensure that new or updated advice is disseminated and implemented within national resources and policy frameworks in a more efficient, consistent and aligned manner.

20. Exercise Pegasus – UK Pandemic Preparedness

20.1 Food Standards Scotland (FSS) participated in **Exercise Pegasus**, a Tier 1 UK Government pandemic exercise and the largest scenario of its kind undertaken by the UK Government in recent years. The exercise assessed national-level decision-making, resilience, business continuity and cross-government coordination in response to a severe pandemic.

20.2 Pegasus was delivered over three “Anchor Days,” each representing a different phase:

1. **Emergence** – initial detection and assessment of intelligence
2. **Containment** – rapidly increasing domestic transmission and growing system pressures
3. **Mitigation** – widespread disruption, significant workforce impact, and the introduction of national measures

20.3 Participation in Exercise Pegasus provided FSS with a robust test of our ability to coordinate effectively, communicate clearly, and maintain essential regulatory and public protection functions during a major UK-wide emergency. Lessons and recommendations from the exercise will inform future resilience planning and will be reflected in FSS’s ongoing preparedness work.

21. FSS/PHS Foodborne Outbreak Workshop:

21.1 On 21 November 2025, Food Standards Scotland (FSS) and Public Health Scotland (PHS) jointly delivered a Foodborne Outbreak Workshop, designed to strengthen Scotland’s capability to manage and respond to foodborne outbreak investigations.

21.2 The workshop consisted of three key sessions:

- **Roles and Responsibilities:** Joint presentations from FSS and PHS outlining organisational roles during outbreak management.
- **Tabletop Scenario Exercise:** Group work based on a realistic foodborne outbreak scenario, focusing on incident response and decision-making.
- **Strengths and Opportunities:** Discussion to identify what works well and areas where further improvement would enhance outbreak management.

21.3 The event was well received, with participants expressing strong interest in making it an annual engagement. A final workshop report will be produced, setting out the key outputs, learning, and recommendations to support continuous improvement in our joint approach to foodborne outbreak response.

22. Export Missions

22.1 The EU fishery products audit took place in Scotland and England from 29 September to 21 October. The auditors reported systematic failings with regards to LA resource, lack of sampling and lack of verification of food hygiene/safety. This

reflects the findings from the 2024 dairy audit. We are currently awaiting the audit report.

22.2 Following completion of the EU Live Bivalve Mollusc Audit in June, the report has been received and FSS are developing a response to the recommendations raised. The report concludes that the UK has a comprehensive official control system for the production of bivalve molluscs intended for export to the EU. However, key shortcomings affect the reliability of guarantees offered for bivalve molluscs at primary production. These include non-compliances in the classification of production areas and monitoring systems, that do not always meet EU standards. The report contains five recommendations to address the shortcomings identified. While these issues do not reflect a systemic failure, they affect the overall level of assurance that the system can provide for compliance with EU standards

22.3 An EU poultry audit has commenced (24 November to 05 December), a number of plants within Scotland are to be visited as part of this audit.

22.4 FSS has been notified of an EU audit on beef, due to commence January 2026, completion of the pre audit questionnaire is in progress. Establishment visits will take place in England and Wales only.

22.5 The EU have published their [Health and food audits and analysis programme 2026](#). Despite an initial indication of there being four to six audits to GB, the plan includes two (beef in January/February and food contact materials (likely to take place in October). A mid-year review takes place in June so that position may change.

22.6 We have been advised that China intends to carry out an audit of live crab for export in March 2026, and this will include a visit to Scotland. This audit is most likely to be a site-specific audit to enable listing.

23. Local Authority Audit Programme

23.1 The Local Authority audit programme on Enforcement activity continues. The aim of the programme is to assess and verify the arrangements in place at Local Authorities to ensure the adequate and effective delivery of Official Controls, specifically enforcement actions in LA enforced establishments. Four audits have been completed to date, with the findings from two of these being published on our website

- [Renfrewshire Council - Enforcement Actions Audit - Audit Findings Presentation Renfrewshire - June 2025](#)
- [Midlothian Council - Enforcement Actions Audit - Audit Findings Presentation - September 2025](#)

24. Update on FSS approach to Hybrid Working: People and Place Working Group

24.1 The 'People and Place' working group (PPWG) has been meeting regularly since June, with representation from all divisions and inclusive of colleagues across

the spectrum of different working patterns and contract types. The group was set up to look at hybrid working from the FSS perspective following the end of the SG Hybrid Working review. The work of the group is centred around a review of the existing FSS Hybrid Working Guidance, considering the application and consistency of approach of current policies and processes.

24.2 A paper summarising the outcome of the Pulse Survey, recommendations and next steps was tabled at the Strategy Forum on 24 September 2025. All recommendations stated in the paper were supported and the Strategy Forum were complimentary of the collective contributions of the group.

24.3 The group has now produced and agreed a draft of the updated FSS Hybrid Working Guidance and a Team Agreement template which will be utilised by Divisions and Branches. The updated guidance and team agreement template will now be circulated to Trade Union colleagues for their review and feedback.

24.4 The updated guidance and team agreements will then be tabled at EMT on 17 December 2025 for approval and sign off, after which, there will be comms and engagement to share this with all staff.

24.5 The intention remains not to rush into any changes, and implementation of the revised guidance and team agreements will be progressed late January/February 2026.

25. Civil Service People Survey 2025

25.1 The annual Civil Service People Survey 2025 took place between Tuesday 23 September 2025 to Tuesday 21 October 2025. A series of comms and engagement was undertaken during the Go Live period to encourage completion and our final response rate, confirmed by the Cabinet Office was 90% (the SG Core response rate was 68%).

25.2 Our Employee Engagement Score will be confirmed at a later date. The timeline for the release of the online results dashboards (subject to Cabinet Office confirmation), following which a series of Comms and Engagement will follow the release of the results dashboards. The HR team will analyse the results and presentations will be delivered in January/February 2026 to the Strategy Forum, EMT, FBC and Head Office and Field Staff meetings.

- Advanced Dashboards: 04 December 2025
- Intermediate Dashboards: 08 December 2025
- Standard Dashboards: 10 December 2025

25.3 It is important that we act on the results from the valuable insights from the survey provides and take practical steps to improve the Employee Experience.

26. Launch of the new FSS website

26.1 On 01 October a new FSS website was launched. We [started a campaign](#) to target businesses across Scotland, with the aim of helping them access the right

guidance, advice, tools and resources to be able to thrive. Digital display adverts and LinkedIn adverts are now live.

26.2 Campaign assets include a video, images, and stakeholder toolkit, with posts appearing on our social channels until early December – please like and share to help spread the word.

For queries contact:
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