

NOTE OF FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY CONSUMER STAKEHOLDER FORUM

SECOND MEETING – 17 May 2004

Chair: Dr Jon Bell, Chief Executive

Jon Bell explained that the aims of the Forum were to:

- Provide an opportunity for stakeholders to ask questions about and discuss topical and emerging issues with the FSA.
- Take soundings on a current FSA initiative (specifically the FSA Strategic Plan for 2005-10)
- Look ahead and keep up to date with the FSA and stakeholder plans for the next six months.

The list of attendees and FSA staff at the meeting is attached at Annex A.

Attendees Topics

Jon Bell explained that three topics that attendees had signalled beforehand were:

- Glasgow City Council's school catering initiative;
- Involving Consumers in FSA work ; and
- Defining the term 'vegetarian'

Jon Bell found Glasgow City Council's school catering initiative interesting, and explained that the FSA was keen to link into local initiatives. It was working with other Government Departments on a range of food-related issues.

An FSA official updated attendees about the range of work being undertaken to involve consumers, including those that were 'hard to reach'. For example, the FSA had visited a number of community groups across England and Scotland to seek their views on food related issues affecting low-income consumers. The FSA had also organised a successful meeting with hard to reach population groups in March 2004 and was strengthening links with these key groups.

The use of the term 'vegetarian' was raised. It was pointed out that consumers were confused about what it meant. Jon Bell agreed to set up a meeting to examine the issue in more detail.

Stakeholders then went on to raise the following issues:

- Organic and free-range eggs and fair trade products should be better priced and more widely available.
- An update was requested on the FSA's primary and secondary school meal survey
- The importance of using a range of ways to provide information to consumers on food issues.

In response to a question, Jon Bell reported that FSA action on salt would continue. The FSA's salt awareness campaign would be launched in the autumn and feature TV advertisements. The FSA would continue to work in partnership with food manufacturers to reduce the salt content of their products.

Attendees commented on how difficult it was for consumers to understand the way fat was labelled on food products. Jon Bell explained that the FSA was exploring the possibility of using more straightforward labelling, for example using a 'traffic light' system to highlight low, medium and high fat, sugar or salt content.

It was suggested that there should be a space on an appropriate website for consumers to register mislabelled products. Such a website would be of particular use to Trading Standards Officers and the media. Jon Bell agreed that this was an idea worth considering.

Attendees argued that the Food and Health Action Plan from the Department of Health did not resemble an action plan. Jon Bell said that he hoped that the forthcoming Department of Health Public Health White Paper would focus more clearly on the Government's action on nutrition and health.

Strategic Plan

Jon Bell explained that a consultation on the FSA's draft Strategic Plan 2005-2010 was currently underway. Attendees were invited to comment on the general direction of the Plan, including its main targets and key themes.

Questions were asked about trans-fats and sustainability. On trans-fats, Jon Bell said that considerable progress had already been made in reducing exposure, but it was important to monitor this. He explained that the Board had discussed a preliminary paper on sustainability in relation to policy development and estates management. Sustainability should be woven into future FSA policies but no decision had been taken as yet as to how best to do this. The Board would be returning to the issue in the autumn.

An attendee asked how the FSA assessed the economic impact of the possible options raised by the Strategic Plan. An FSA official explained that there is a general requirement on the FSA to act proportionately and look at the costs and benefits of all its policies. The Strategic Plan quoted some of the costs associated with obesity and poor health and it was possible to estimate potential benefits by the extent to which measures were likely to affect these figures.

Attendees' Forward Look

The representative from Barnados informed the meeting of two pieces of research they had worked on: one looking at how the loss of free school meals during the school holidays affects children, and the other on how school children made food choices. They agreed to share the outcomes with the Agency.

FSA Six Month Forward Look

Jon Bell briefly outlined some of the work that FSA would be taking forward over the next six months. This included a review of FSA-funded research to date on GM foods, the Young Consumers of the Year competition and a Food Hygiene campaign. Further details are outlined in Appendix B.

Date of the Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on **Monday 15th November 2004** from 12.30 – 3.30pm in Aviation House.

Annex A

CONSUMER STAKEHOLDER FORUM

17TH MAY 2004

DELEGATE LIST

Neera Sharma	-	Barnardo's
Olena Baker	-	British Heart Foundation
Nicky Burnett	-	Coeliac Society
Emma Fluck	-	Consensus Action on Salt and Health
Penelope Gilbert	-	Consensus Action on Salt and Health
Susan Knox	-	Foodaware
Stella Nicholas	-	National Consumer Federation
Patience Purdy	-	National Council of Women
Glen Grimes	-	The Stroke Association
Jeanette Longfield	-	Sustain
Tony Bishop-Weston	-	The Vegan Society
Liz O'Neill	-	The Vegetarian Society

FSA STAFF IN ATTENDANCE

Jon Bell	-	Chief Executive
Pat Stewart	-	Deputy Chief Executive
Barbara Richards	-	Corporate Secretariat, Consumers and International Division
Julie Norman	-	Strategic Development Unit
Ike Damon	-	Strategic Development Unit
Jaz Bangar	-	Consumer Branch
Victoria Combe	-	Consumer Branch

Annex B. Six Month Forward Look

- Novel Foods Division will be carrying out a review of the research we have funded to date on the safety of GM foods in order to identify new areas of research which we might commission in the future in this area. We will start this process in July and will look to have some input from consumer organisations during the process.
- The FSA has sponsored the "Young Consumers of the Year" competition for the last 2 years. The 2004 national final of which will be held at the TSI Conference on 23 June in Manchester. The competition involves hundreds of schools from across the country, challenging to become the nation's top young consumers of the year. The competition makes the competitors aware of their responsibilities as well as their rights and gives them essential life skills as they prepare for the world of work and, for teachers, on many occasions links to the citizenship curriculum. As part of its sponsorship, the FSA provides information packs (which this year included FSA information on labelling, allergy, nutrition and food hygiene) to all schools that reach the Regional finals and sets the questions for the Food rounds in the finals.
- At the beginning of June, as part of the FSA's Food Hygiene Campaign activities, we will be launching a humorous television campaign aimed at consumers. This campaign will introduce cross contamination messages, with a view to increasing awareness and understanding of the impact of cross-contamination on good food hygiene, and look to encourage behaviour change when preparing food in the home. The advert will run for four weeks over the summer period.
- In the autumn we are planning to launch the second phase of our campaign to improve biosecurity on chicken farms. This work is the main focus of our strategy to reduce levels of campylobacter in UK produced chicken (and is an important part of our broader farm to fork Foodborne Disease strategy and Food Hygiene Campaign). The biosecurity campaign aims to reduce contamination arising at source and is targeted at poultry farmers. In phase one we produced a poster and leaflet which we mailed directly to poultry farmers to remind them of the importance of good biosecurity to control campylobacter and to raise awareness about best practice hygiene measures. The second phase, which we are currently planning, will be to deliver a programme of regionally-based technical workshops for farmers, facilitating their training in practical application of key biosecurity measures.
- A second year of grants for local initiatives related to food hygiene have recently been awarded (£10K each) to 15 Local Authorities for work which will take place over the next 12 months. Several of these grants have been allocated to develop initiatives specifically targeted at vulnerable groups. Work will also be carried forward to build on a successful FSA funded local initiative developed last year aimed at school children.