

**NOTE OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S CONSUMER STAKEHOLDER
FORUM**

THIRD MEETING – 15th November 2004

Chair: Dr Jon Bell, Chief Executive

Jon Bell welcomed attendees to the third meeting of the Consumer Stakeholder Forum. (The list of attendees and Agency staff at the meeting is attached as Annex A).

1. KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- **Agency's Strategic Plan and Delivery**

Jon Bell explained that now that the FSA's Strategic Plan (2005-10) had been agreed, the next stage would focus on working in partnership with stakeholders to deliver it. Attendees asked questions about the nature of the consultation responses. Jon Bell explained that there was overall support for the direction of the Plan. Micro-nutrients was given as an example of an issue that had been raised by many stakeholders during the consultation and had been incorporated into the final Plan.

- **External Review of the Agency**

Jon Bell explained that the Board had commissioned Baroness Brenda Dean of Thornton-le-Flyde to undertake an independent review of the Agency to assess how well it was meeting its three core values.

- **Review of Stakeholder Relationships**

An Agency official explained that external consultants had been commissioned to undertake a review of the effectiveness of the mechanisms used by the Agency to consult and engage with its stakeholders.

- **Sir John Krebs's departure**

Jon Bell explained that it was hoped that Health Ministers would appoint Sir John's successor by Easter 2005. Interim arrangements were in place in case of a delay in the appointment.

- **Common Commencement Dates**

Jon Bell explained that the Department of Trade and had been piloting a scheme through which domestic legislation, both primary and secondary, comes into force on one or two dates each year. Such a system could not directly apply to legislation derived from Europe, which makes up the vast majority of the legislation dealt with by the Agency. In addition, common commencement dates would not apply to emergency legislation.

2. Salt Update

An Agency official explained that the Agency has a target to reduce the salt intake of the population to 6g per person per day by 2010. The work would target retailers, caterers, manufacturers and public procurement bodies. Changes in salt levels in food products would be monitored, for example through a database of food products. Surveys of consumers by the Department of Health and the Agency would continue to monitor consumer intake of salt.

Attendees raised the following issues:

- What steps were being taken to develop cross-industry projects like Project Neptune on different food products;
- How the Agency deals with food products naturally high in salt, eg some mineral waters;
- How salt content would be expressed on products;
- The value of celebrity chefs endorsing the salt campaign; and
- Whether there were plans to focus on sugar intake.

In response to these questions, officials explained:

- The Agency was beginning to have discussions with retailers to take forward cross industry projects;
- Products were looked at on a case-by-case basis to take into account natural sodium levels;
- The new Strategic Plan has a target to work with health departments to consider targets for energy in and energy out. Learning from the salt campaign could be adapted to the issue of reducing consumption of sugar;
- The 'Sid the Slug' salt campaign had been launched in September 2004. Top-line data from the Agency's Consumer Attitudes Survey (2004) showed that 29% of respondents claimed to eat less salt than they did previously. This compared to a 21% response rate in 2000.
- The salt campaign was currently being evaluated and a shopping basket survey would be conducted in the New Year to further look at people's behaviour in relation to salt.

3. INVITEE'S TOPICS

Labelling

Jon Bell explained that the following issues had been raised by attendees:

- The results of the 'traffic light' labelling trials;
- An update on work on the promotion of foods to children;
- Review of the European Food Labelling Directives;
- Advisory guidance on vegetarian and vegan labelling.

An Agency official explained that the Agency had recently completed work on gathering consumers' views on various labelling options signposting foods, including a 'traffic light' coding system. The results of this work would be discussed with stakeholders and, having taking account of their views, the

Agency would undertake further work on consumer understanding of signposting. A consultation would invite comments on the different labelling formats. The Agency had also funded a study on nutrient profiling.

Stakeholders went onto raise the following issues:

- The Agency could learn from good practice on labelling from Europe;
- Whether consumers would understand the traffic light style labels;
- A suggestion that labels used a 1-5 scale format rather than colour coding;
- Potential confusion caused by a range of different labelling formats in use.

Jon Bell noted that signposting labelling options were voluntary, but that the Agency would encourage industry to adopt them to help consumers make healthier choices.

On the subject of the Review of the European Food Labelling Directives, Jon Bell said the Agency had identified a number of areas for improvement. However, the timing of the Review was still unclear.

Jon Bell confirmed that the Agency was keen to disseminate advisory guidelines on vegetarian and vegan labelling.

Allergens

Stakeholders raised questions on:

- How will new/ emerging allergens be dealt with:
- The failure to cover non-prepacked foods in the labelling requirements

An official explained that the new EU Legislation included a mechanism for new allergens to be added to the list of 12 major allergens, involving consideration of the relevant evidence by the European Food Safety Authority. The Agency would also develop possible options to improve the provision of information on allergens in food sold 'loose'. The Agency had provided best practice guidance for caterers and was working to include food allergy and intolerance in training courses for caterers.

One attendee pointed out that when an individual has a life-threatening food allergy, this becomes a food safety issue as opposed to a food choice issue. An official agreed but noted that this safety issue was managed by ensuring that appropriate information was available.

The issue of intolerance to Aspartame was raised. Jon Bell said that he would welcome any new evidence on this issue.

Plant Based EFA Oils

The inclusion of healthy plant based EFA oils in the Agency's healthy eating advice as an alternative to fish sources was raised as an issue. It was acknowledged however that the oils from each source were different and only those from fish were known to be beneficial.

GM

One attendee asked about the Agency's role in the GM co-existence debate and the forthcoming consultation led by Defra. Jon Bell explained that this issue had implications for the food chain and consumer choice and, therefore, the Agency would continue to liaise with Defra during this consultation.

A question was asked about GM and sustainable development in the context of the Agency's new Strategic Plan. Jon Bell said that all future Agency policies would consider sustainability issues.

BSE testing

Jon Bell addressed a question on Patrick Wall's report on BSE testing procedures and reforms to the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS). He explained that the proposed action plan addressing the report's recommendations had been agreed by the new MHS Board at its inaugural meeting on 2 November. The plan would be discussed with Patrick Wall and industry stakeholders before it is submitted to the Agency Board in December.

Food and Low Income Issues

One attendee asked about the Agency's commitment to low-income issues. Neil Martinson explained that low-income issues had been incorporated into the Agency new Strategic Plan.

Consumer involvement

Jon Bell confirmed that the Agency was sometimes able to pay reasonable expenses to consumer organisations attending stakeholder events, at the discretion of the secretariat.

The FSA cooking bus

In response to a question, Jon Bell confirmed that the Cooking Bus, which aims to get across healthy eating and safe food messages to school children, would continue for the next two years.

4. FORWARD LOOK

Jon Bell outlined some of the work that the Agency would be taking forward over the next six months. This included the Food Hygiene Laws Consultation, guidelines on pesticide minimisation and animal feed measures.

The Vegetarian Society informed the Forum that National Vegetarian Week would take place 23-29 May 2005.

5. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will take place on Thursday 19 May 2005 from 12.30 – 3.30pm in Aviation House..

Attendees: Third Consumer Stakeholder Forum
15 November 2004

Olena Baker	-	British Heart Foundation
Catherine Foot	-	Cancer Research UK
Susan Knox	-	Foodaware
Stella Nicholas	-	National Consumer Federation
Lisa Ackerley	-	Royal Institute for Public Health
Nicky Mendoza	-	Coeliac UK
Peter Simmons	-	Allergy UK
Patience Purdy	-	National Council of Women GB
Michelle Smyth	-	Which?
Jeanette Longfield	-	Sustain
Tony Bishop-Weston	-	Foods For Life
Kostana Azmi	-	The Vegan Society
Liz O'Neill	-	The Vegetarian Society
Chris Olivant	-	The Vegetarian Society

FSA STAFF IN ATTENDANCE

Jon Bell	-	Chief Executive
Neil Martinson	-	Director of Communications
Gill Fine	-	Director of Consumer Choice & Dietary Health
Jaz Bangar	-	Consumer Branch
Victoria Combe	-	Consumer Branch
Micah McGuire	-	Consumer Branch
Jacqui Webster	-	Nutrition Division
Sue Hattersley	-	Food Allergy Branch
Ike Damon	-	Strategic Development Unit