

NOTE OF FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY CONSUMER STAKEHOLDER FORUM FIRST MEETING - 24 November 2003

Chair: Dr Jon Bell, Chief Executive

Introduction

Jon Bell explained that the Consumer Stakeholder Forum had been set up:

- to give stakeholders opportunity to discuss current and emerging issues
- as an informal communication vehicle and to explore possibilities for productive partnership working
- to provide an opportunity to talk about FSA plans over the next few months

He explained that there would be separate fora for the Industry and Enforcement stakeholders and similar fora in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

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

Strategic Review

Jon Bell reminded attendees that the Agency's first strategic plan had been published in May 2001. It reflected work, which had been transferred to the Agency from health and agriculture Departments across the UK, as well as the direction, which the FSA intended to take.

He explained that the FSA Board had begun discussing the headline priorities for the next strategic plan. The new plan will not simply be a compilation of on-going work, although inevitably the large volume of work that is carried out as a result of the Agency's role as a non-Ministerial Department will have to be taken into account. The FSA will continue to protect consumers by looking after the safety of food. However, the Board is keen that the Agency should also be more proactive in the area of diet and health.

It was explained that the draft plan would be published as part of a formal consultation next Spring. However, the Board has asked that the views of the principal stakeholders be sought on the headline priorities.

Attendees were asked to suggest targets for each of the headline priorities.

Reduce food-borne disease.

The FSA will seek to secure further reductions in food-borne illness, and its impact on public health, by building on the work already underway to meet current Agency targets.

Attendees commented that it might not be helpful to adopt a pathogen by pathogen approach. Instead, a holistic approach is needed to ensure that individual actions do not have undesirable knock-on effects. The Agency was also asked to bear in mind that the goal is not sterile food. The need for people to develop and maintain a robust immune system needs to be borne in mind.

It was suggested that current good practice guides for food handlers needed to be updated and revised. Attention should also be paid to food handling once food has left the shop.

Give high priority to the FSA's role in diet and health

The FSA intends to be more proactive in the area of diet and health. To do this will require the development of partnerships with key players, including other Government Departments, consumer groups and industry.

Building on the action taken in relation to salt, the FSA intends to work with industry to find ways of making it easier for consumers to make healthy choices.

The FSA will continue to build a sound evidence base to support this work and help to define appropriate and targeted action.

There was general agreement that this area is a high priority for the Agency.

The importance of working with children and young people to establish good habits early in life was stressed. These groups are aware of the issues involved and have

ideas and practical suggestions to make. It was agreed that it is essential that the Agency listens and works in partnership to effect change.

Attendees commented that the current allocation of funding (20% nutrition budget on taking action: 80% budget on ensuring a sound knowledge base) should be reversed. It was also suggested that the emphasis of the research should be directed away from collecting information on the nutrient content of food to practical work to help effect changes in dietary behaviour. As a first step, the Agency should evaluate what is already known and package it for use at a local level.

Current Agency action on salt was welcomed and the Agency was urged to follow it up with similar action on saturated fat and sugar.

Promote informed consumer choice

The FSA intends to build on current work with industry and consumers to make food labels easier to understand and more informative so they deliver information more effectively. This would include:

- **building on the existing Action Plan on Food Labelling, focusing on key consumer concerns; and**
- **generating, collating and disseminating information on food related issues of interest to consumers.**

Attendees pointed out that information on labels is not easy to use despite many years of legislative effort. Public health interests need to adopt an approach much more akin to those used in marketing. One suggestion was to work with retailers to highlight healthy choices through distinctive packaging or displays within the supermarkets. People need help in understanding how health messages apply to them and how they can use the information available on products to decide whether the product is right for them.

Protect consumers from deception

This will embrace both identifying and tackling misleading labelling and protecting consumers from fraudulent or misleading practices.

Print and television advertising were highlighted as lacking proper safeguards leaving consumers unprotected from misleading promotions. It was also suggested that charities need guidance on what message consumers receive if their logos are used on food products.

Stakeholders were asked whether there are other headline priorities which the Board should consider. Suggested areas were:

- Sustainability. This is of great concern to consumers and potentially cuts through many areas of the Agency's work.
- Aspects of food safety other than those relating to microbiology need to be visible.

Other issues

A number of different issues were raised at the end of the meeting. These included:

- The importance of getting information out to consumers on allergies and intolerance and the role of the food service sector in relation to this
- The importance of things moving forward on the Food and Health Action Plan by the end of the year.
- How the Board will prioritise the different options for tackling promotion of foods to children without any prior cost benefit analysis

FSA six month Forward Look

Jon Bell briefly outlined some of the work that the FSA would be taking forward over the next six months. This included the various nutritional surveys and the salt campaign in 2004, consultation on the new GM regulations in April 2004, the Board paper on Pesticide Minimisation in February and a range of other work and surveys. Further details are outlined in Annex B.

Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on **Monday 17th May 2004** from 12.30 – 3.30pm in Aviation House.

Annex A

Attendees

Jo Butcher	National Children's Bureau
Sue Dibb	National Consumer Council
Penelope Gilbert	CASH (Consensus Action on Salt and Health)
Susan Knox	Foodaware
Belinda Linden	British Heart Foundation
Jeanette Longfield	Sustain
Norma McGough	Coeliac Society
Wendy Moore	Royal Institute of Public Health
Stella Nicholas	National Consumer Federation
Liz O'Neil	Vegetarian Society
Patience Purdy	National Council of Women
Peter Simmons	Allergy UK (British Allergy Foundation)
Monique Warnock	Consumers' Association

FSA Staff

Jon Bell	Chief Executive and Chair
David Statham	Director Enforcement and Food Standards
Barbara Richards	Corporate Strategy, Consumers and International Division
Jacqui Webster	Consumer Branch
Chris Lawson	Meat Hygiene Service
Martin Reid	FSA Scotland
Carolyn Ainsbury	FSA Scotand
Hilary Neathey	FSA Wales

Annex B

Six month forward look (as at mid-November)

Nutrition

Surveys

- NDNS Report Part 4 – publication January 2004
Nutritional status data (blood, analytes, physical measures)

- NDNS Report Part 5 – publication April 2004
Final and summary report

11 December Board meeting – papers on

- Dietary Survey Review
- Progress Report on Nutrition Action Plan

Joint survey with DfES on standards of meals in secondary schools – publication Spring 04

Joint survey with OfSTED – primary schools approach to foods eg. meals, tuck shops, teaching - publication Spring 04

Retail and takeaway pizza survey – fat & salt content – results due Jan 04, publication shortly afterwards, exact date t.b.c

Campaigns

Salt Campaign – early 04

Food Labelling and Standards

Authenticity on Basmati Rice – results to be published by end of the year

Survey on Fresh, Natural and Pure Labelling – whether FSA Guidelines are being followed – results to be published by the end of the year

Chemical Safety

Board paper on Pesticide Minimisation – February 2004

Various Commission proposals on Food Additives expected early 2004 – will be taken forward

Chemical Contaminants and Animal Feeds

Surveys

Metals - TDS 2000 - Went to COT for first comment in October. Information sheet to be published in Spring 2004.

Arsenic - TDS 1999 - COT statement published; Information Sheet being drafted for publication in January.

Dioxins, PCBs - Infant formulae - Information Sheet being drafted; data may go to COT for comment.

Dioxins, PCBs in Baby Foods - likely publication in February.

Dioxins/metals - UK soil/herbage - Contractors' report expected in December.

Further dioxin results for EU monitoring programme. Free-range egg samples also taken - these results could be significant. Probable publication in March.

Maize products survey (from which came fumonisins in maize meal) - final report from CSL imminent.

Mycotoxins in offals - CSL proposal to complete work. Will not be finished until into next year.

Mycotoxins in oats survey - final results received. Indicate no problem.

GM DNA in milk - publication in Journal likely next month.

None of the above projects are known to have major implications.