

Meeting of the **safefood** Advisory Committee

Friday 9<sup>th</sup> October 2018

Canal Court Hotel, Newry, Co. Down

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**MINUTES**

**SAC members present:** Martin Roper, Chair

Michael Bell

Prof Mary McCarthy

Gerry Leen

Therese Coleman

Dr Kirsten Dunbar

Prof Joe Hegarty

Prof Elizabeth Keane

**SAC apologies:** Prof Margaret Patterson

Dr Elaine Mooney

Dermott Jewell

Prof Mary Corcoran

**safefood staff:** Dr James McIntosh

Dr Aileen McGloin

Dr Joana Caldeira Fernandes da Silva

Colette O'Shea

**Invited guests:** Jim Power, Jim Power Economics

Louise Connolly, Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland

## 1. Welcome, introductions & apologies

The chairperson welcomed the **safefood** Advisory Committee (SAC) members, **safefood** staff and the invited guests to the meeting.

Apologies were noted from Prof Margaret Patterson, Dr Elaine Mooney, Dermott Jewell and Prof Mary Corcoran. There were no conflicts of interest with regard to the agenda items.

## 2. Minutes of the SAC meeting of Friday 11<sup>th</sup> May 2018 and matters arising

The minutes from the last SAC meeting held on Friday 11<sup>th</sup> May 2018 were reviewed and agreed. There was one matter arising:-

- The SAC members were contacted with regard to establishing a *Working Group looking at Improving the cooking skills of Early School Leavers*. However, we failed to reach a quorum so this Working Group will not be convened.

## 3. Knowledge share

*Impact of currency fluctuations on the lol food chain*

Presented by: Jim Power, Jim Power Economics

**Noted:** Northern Ireland is very vulnerable with regard to the outcomes of the Brexit process. This includes policies that advocate cheap food that will have ramifications for trade and the home agrifood sector. The trend in global agricultural prices since 2013 has been downward. This has ramifications for food production and food safety.

**Noted:** The Brexit process is currently plagued by uncertainty and is happening against the backdrop of some major political shifts in the EU and the rest of the world.

**Noted:** Oil prices may have peaked and indications are that they will reduce over 2020. This is positive for food production, however a weakening Sterling will have a significant negative impact on lol agricultural exports.

**Noted:** The Brexit process will result in export and other pressures on the RoI, particularly in rural regions where agrifood is relatively more important to the local economy.

## 4. For discussion

*a) Cutting out Gluten*

Presented by: Dr James McIntosh

**Noted:** **safefood** is currently looking at the sugar/salt content of Gluten-free foods in a short-term student project

**Noted:** The market trend for Gluten-free foods is increasing year on year worldwide (including the island of Ireland) largely due to a perceived benefit to health which is not substantiated by

scientific research. Coeliac disease now represents a small fraction of the cohort who follow a Gluten-free diet.

**Noted:** There may be negative impacts of a Gluten-free diet on BMI, Fibre and protein intake.

**Noted:** Consumers on a Gluten-free diet need to be aware of the requirement to maintain a healthy balanced diet. This could be a communications imperative.

*b) Food Standards Agency Allergy Campaign*

Presented by: Louise Connolly, Food Standards Agency

**Noted:** The first iteration of the FSA's three-year food allergy campaign focuses on 16-24 year olds as this was identified as a particularly vulnerable group.

**Noted:** The 'Easy to ASK' campaign focusses on empowering young consumers to be forthright in asking about allergens with eating out.

**Noted:** Stands were organised at a number of events across NI, including at University Freshers events, to get the message out there. Printed and social media were also utilised for the campaign.

**Noted:** The KPIs are to increase in confidence of food allergic young adults, increase allergy awareness in society, assist food businesses in meeting their allergen obligations and ultimately reduce the number of allergy related incidents

*c) Know your onions: What the NI food industry needs from a multi-layered Brexit*

Presented by: Michael Bell

**Noted:** The complexity of Brexit impacts on the agrifood sector cannot be understated.

**Noted:** The workings and integrity of the food supply chain are critically important for food safety. There are two distinct views: The EU views food safety and integrity as a public good whereas the UK does not necessarily. Therefore, the EU takes a greater interest in the food supply chain.

**Noted:** Brexit is, and will, create enormous logistical problems for the UK food supply chain, least of all the actual number of employees within the sector which is falling precipitously.

**Noted:** In the event of a 'no-deal' Brexit, the average tariff on food imports is likely to be around 22%. Cutting tariffs would undermine UK food producers.

*d) Community Food Initiatives*

Presented by: Dr Joana Caldeira Fernandes da Silva

**Noted:** The purpose of the Community Food Initiatives is to influence the eating habits of low income families on the island of Ireland by promoting greater access to, and availability of, healthy and safe food in low income areas, using a community development approach.

**Noted:** *safefood* is now funding this initiative for another three years following a successful evaluation of the 2016-2018 CFI programme.

**Noted:** The programme focuses on increasing awareness/knowledge around healthy eating and shopping, budgeting and food/meal planning skills, cooking skills, preventing food wastage, food safety and hygiene, as well as events and structures to promote healthy eating.

**Noted:** This is achieved through a partnership approach with other public bodies and agencies, local authorities, CFI leaders and community organisations.

#### *d) Recent research tenders*

*Presented by: Dr James McIntosh*

Details of the projects published in the *safefood* tender call of 14<sup>th</sup> September 2018 were given. There were 7 projects in total and applications were received for six of them. The projects were as follows:-

1. Use of antimicrobials in animal health on the island of Ireland: knowledge, attitudes and behaviour
2. Assessment of the use of meat thermometers by consumers on the island of Ireland
3. Food safety advice for vulnerable patients/residents in healthcare settings on the island of Ireland
4. Socioeconomic cost of food hypersensitivity on the island of Ireland
5. Exploring the world of food – the perspective of families with children
6. Food supplements – exploring our reasons for taking them
7. Public acceptability of policies to address obesity

#### **5. For Information - *safefood* CEO Report**

*Presented by: Dr Alieen McGloin*

**Noted:** In the absence of an NI Assembly and the NSMC, *safefood*'s 2017 and 2018 Business Plans and *safefood*'s 2017-2019 Corporate Plan await formal approval.

**Noted:** The START campaign kicked off in September 2018. This focuses on encouraging a healthy weight for children. This is the first of a 5-year campaign. Traffic to the website on this has been significant. The campaign was presented at a number of events including the National Ploughing Championships.

**Noted:** The Rufus the messy monster campaign was relaunched and Early Years NI and Early Childhood Ireland have been targeted as well on this occasion following E. coli outbreaks in this area.

**Noted:** The Christmas food safety campaign this year will focus on radio and digital advertising, updating consumer advice on the *safefood* website and enhancing the 'Chef Bot' messaging service and publicity.

**Noted:** Details were given of a number of collaborations involving *safefood* personnel and also activities within the Knowledge network and the Research Office.

## **6. AOB & date for next meetings**

**Noted:** The term of service for five members of the SAC will conclude in November 2018. However, due to the suspension of the NSMC, further recruitment was not possible. These members will therefore be given the option to extend their term of service for a further year.

**Noted:** The venue and date of the next meeting will be decided in due course.

**Noted:** The Chair thanked the members and closed the meeting.