

ACTION TO TACKLE FOOD FRAUD

Executive Summary

1. Following on from the report to the February Board regarding the investigations at Euro Freeze (Ireland) Ltd, this paper sets out the proposed Terms of Reference for the Food Fraud Task Force and a proposed agenda and time scale for their deliberations. It is intended that the Task Force will initially focus on the meat sector and draw lessons, which will then be expanded more broadly, to the rest of the food industry. The paper also sets out proposed membership of the Task Force.
2. The Board is asked to:
 - **agree** the proposed Terms of Reference for the Food Fraud Task Force (Annex 2);
 - **agree** the proposed timetable and agenda for the Task Force (Annex 3);
 - **request** that interim reports be presented to the Board when conclusions have been reached on the separate areas of the Task Force's work;
 - **agree** the proposed membership of the Task Force (Annex 1).

FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY ENFORCEMENT GROUP

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ACTION TO TACKLE FOOD FRAUD

Issue

1. Following on from the first phase of the Euro Freeze (Ireland) Ltd investigation, the Board agreed to establish a Task Force to consider a series of actions to help tackle the trade in illegal meat.

Strategic Aims

2. The proposed actions link with the aim in the Food Standards Agency's 2005-2010 strategic plan of protecting consumers from food fraud and illegal practices.

Background

3. At the Board's February 2006 meeting a paper was presented updating the Board on the Euro Freeze (Ireland) Ltd investigation and recommending a series of actions to begin to tackle some of the underlying problems which allow food fraud to continue.

Impact

4. Major food fraud can be damaging to consumer confidence and the reputation of the food industry and may in some cases have public health implications. In addition, food fraud can have significant impact of the Agency's ability to carry out all of its strategic obligations by tying up significant resource in often lengthy and complex investigations.

Future Action

Food Fraud Task Force

5. This paper proposes the establishment of a Food Fraud Task Force with membership as set out in Annex 1 and Terms of Reference as set out in Annex 2.

6. The work programme should cover the following types of issues (more detailed proposals are contained in the terms of reference at Annex 2):

- Health marking
- Identification of Animal By-products
- Inspection and audit arrangements for food businesses including inspection frequencies
- The effectiveness of the Agency support mechanisms in respect of food fraud.
- The adequacy of the existing legal framework for prosecution and the suitability of penalties
- Arrangements for encouraging 'whistleblowing'.

Board Action Required

7. The Board is asked to:

- **agree** the proposed Terms of Reference for the Food Fraud Task Force (Annex 2);
- **agree** the proposed timetable and agenda for the Task Force (Annex 3);
- **request** that interim reports be presented to the Board when conclusions have been reached on the separate areas of the Task Force's work;
- **agree** the proposed membership of the Task Force (Annex 1).

MEMBERSHIP OF THE FOOD FRAUD TASK FORCE

Chair & Membership

A senior figure from enforcement.

A Former Board Member who is independent of FSA and current Board.

A senior person with some knowledge / experience of Meat issues.

Chartered Institute of Environmental Health

Trading Standards Institute

LACORS

Food and Drink Federation

British Retail Consortium

British Poultry Council

Meat and Livestock Commission

Association of Independent Meat Suppliers

National Consumer Council

Which?

EU Commission Food and Veterinary Office

Food Safety Authority of Ireland

A representative outside of the food industry with experience of fraud for example: A forensic accountant.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

To consider and report on all issues which are likely to significantly impact on food fraud and in particular to consider the current controls in place to deal with food fraud and their, suitability to control and deter food fraud. It is intended that the Task Force will initially focus on the meat sector and draw lessons, which will then be expanded more broadly, to the rest of the food industry.

Not with standing the generalities of the above to particularly consider:

- A review of health marking requirements.
- A review of inspection and audit arrangements for meat plants particularly cold stores, including inspection frequencies.
- A review of the inspection and audit arrangements for MHS and DARD to ensure sufficient regard is paid to food fraud risks.
- Consideration of inspection frequency of food businesses as part of the review of the Statutory Code of Practice, having particular regard to food fraud risk.
- A review of the roles and effectiveness of the Illegal Meat Task Force, the food fraud data base and the Agency's local authority "Fighting Fund".
- Consideration of the current staining requirements for Animal by-products.
- The adequacy of the existing legal framework for prosecution and the suitability of penalties to act as a deterrent to food fraud.
- Arrangements for encouraging 'whistleblowing'.

In arriving at their conclusions, which should take the form of a report to the Food Standards Agency Board, the Task Force should involve and consult all relevant stakeholders.

PROPOSED TIMETABLE

April 2006 Report to FSA Board

May 2006 First meeting of the Task Force

October 2006 First Interim report of Task Force

February 2007 Second interim report

June 2007 Third interim report

October 2007 Final report of the Task Force