Food (Scotland) Bill

The Royal Society of Chemistry

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The Royal Society of Chemistry is pleased to respond to the Health and Sport Committee’s call for evidence.

We welcome the proposal for the new food body, Food Standards Scotland (FSS), to be independent, transparent and at arm's length from Government. Given this independence, however, there will need to be clear routes of communication with the relevant Health and Social Care Directorates and the Minister for Health and Wellbeing in Scotland.

An independent evidence base for food safety requires an independent scientific process for which adequately trained and resourced personnel would be paramount. It will be important that sufficient sampling takes place so that food safety issues are picked up early and standards are ensured. Having a broad range of scientific expertise is important for ensuring that the full range of challenges can be suitably addressed. Scientific and policy based staff should be able to forge strong links with the wider academic community in order to remain at the forefront of knowledge and be able to adopt and share best practice.

Last year’s horsemeat scandal highlighted the importance of control of the entire food chain. There has been a sustained decrease both in the number of Public Analysts within the UK over the past four decades and in the resources available to them to undertake their job. FSS should ensure that there are enough Public Analysts available in Scotland and ensure that they are properly resourced.

The Royal Society of Chemistry awards the Mastership in Chemical Analysis (MChemA) which is the statutory qualification for appointment as a Public Analyst and Agriculture Analyst (www.rsc.org/MChemA). We work closely with the Association of Public Analysts (APA) and its Training Committee to ensure that candidates have the appropriate skills and knowledge to qualify.

In principle, expanding the role of the FSS to address public health problems in Scotland is welcomed as long as the necessary scientific and technical expertise is sufficiently provisioned and adequately resourced.
Nutrition is a major, modifiable and powerful factor in promoting health, preventing and treating disease and improving quality of life. Over-nutrition and reduced physical activity have contributed to the growth of diseases such as obesity. Understanding the interaction of food intake with human health and providing food that is better matched to personal nutrition requirements is therefore essential.

The chemical sciences are key to identifying alternative or parallel supplies of ‘healthier foods’ with an improved nutritional profile. One of the main challenges is to produce food that reduces the fat, salt and sugar components that can be detrimental to health, while maintaining positive customer perception and satisfaction.

The FSS, in its role of overseeing food standards and the nutritional challenges facing Scotland, could ensure that these issues are addressed by funding new research and evaluating the latest research already available.

As well as being a driver for improvements in health through changing diet and improving nutrition, the FSS has the opportunity to ensure Scotland is continually researching and recommending new technologies that improve food safety and reduce food waste and waste from food packaging.

There is an unacceptable amount of food wasted in all stages of the supply chain. The UK food industry alone accounts for about 10 million tonnes per year (10 per cent) of industrial and commercial UK waste. Packaging and food waste are the two most significant waste issues for the industry. The main challenge is to find ways to minimise this waste or, within the context of lifecycle analyses, use it for other purposes.

The areas noted above are areas where the FSS could increase its scope and remit in order to maximise its impact on the entire food process. We believe this would lead to improved health outcomes and an improved environment, also creating a more sustainable environment for food production.

We hope that the Committee will find this useful in scrutinising the Food (Scotland) Bill and would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

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