

HM Government

Review into the Integrity and Assurance of Food Supply Networks

Note of meeting with British Meat Processors Association (BMPA)

Location: Defra, Nobel House

Date: 27 June 2013

Attendees:

Stephen Rossides – Director - BMPA

Professor Chris Elliott – Independent Reviewer – Review into the Integrity and Assurance of Food Supply Networks

Mary Newman – Secretary - Review into the Integrity and Assurance of Food Supply Networks

Nick Hughes – Review into the Integrity and Assurance of Food Supply Networks

1. Role of the BMPA

The BMPA's role is to promote the interests of meat processors and manufacturers, including lobbying with the aim of influencing legislation and regulation. Its main interfaces in the UK are with the FSA, DH and DEFRA. It does not get involved in commercial operations in any way.

The BMPA owns and manages Quality Assurance Schemes for pork, ham, bacon and pork sausage. Independent accreditors check and verify that standards are being met. This includes the use of isotope technology.

2. Reflections on the horsemeat incident

The BMPA felt that Government was caught cold during the early days of the incident. There was a lot of finger pointing and the retailers took much of the blame. The onus was very much placed on the industry to do something, which didn't go down well as Government was requiring industry to carry out testing against very tight timetables and with constraints on laboratory capacity.

For the meat industry the horsemeat incident was a disaster. Although 99.9% of companies were doing the right thing, when something like this happens it doesn't matter how good you are – everyone is affected.

3. Priorities for the Review – risk management, testing, traders/brokers, supply chain governance, auditing

BMPA members' priority is that whatever the Review recommends it is risk-based, relevant, proportionate and affordable. On testing, it is more about surveillance and confidence. Testing itself doesn't prevent fraud. Testing has a role but you have to be clear what you're doing it for. Businesses should know what is happening one up and one down in the supply chain but they can't be expected to know what is happening three or four steps removed.

Most BMPA members feel confident about their own suppliers but they may occasionally use traders and brokers. One potential weak point is when companies start using a trader/broker they don't know.

It's very difficult for a business to protect itself against what happened at Silvercrest (where factory managers took it upon themselves to source from unauthorised suppliers). In this case the management went completely outside the normal supply chain. How does an otherwise reputable company protect itself against that?

What BMPA members protest about most is being over-audited. All the testers – BRC, BMPA, retailers etc – are trying to differentiate themselves. In a perfect world you'd have a single BRC audit that is acceptable to everyone but it isn't. Different auditors have different specifications.

4. Other matters discussed – animal ID

In Stephen Rossides' view, animal ID is the single biggest Achilles heel of the meat industry. There is inadequate knowledge of where animals are or where they're moving. It's no more than a paper trail. Ideally, animal ID and movement tracking would be electronic and conducted in real time. The issue is who would own, run and pay for a system that would enable businesses to do that?

5. Further action

It is important for Chris Elliott to talk to the meat slaughterers and processors on the ground who would be better able to illustrate the issues under discussion.

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