

General Secretary's Report



Hello to all members of the Association.

It has been quite a busy quarter one way or another with several meetings having seen AMI representation and the Welsh Assembly requesting the Associations views on some specific issues.

This coming month should see the divisional AGM's being held and I would encourage as many members as possible to attend. Any proposals to be submitted to the National AGM on 24th April in Bristol need to be first proposed at divisional level a minimum of 28 days beforehand to be held valid. The divisional secretaries will convey your thoughts and ideas to the National Council and we need your feedback.

Welsh Assembly Enquiry

In January, the Association was invited to submit its thoughts on meat inspection and the way the regulations are implemented to an enquiry being run by the Welsh Assembly. This we

duly did, representing the feedback that comes in from the divisions and the official AMI lines. We were subsequently invited to attend the enquiry and put over our thoughts in person. Rhian Parry and Kevin Lewis from the South West division, and both living and working in South Wales represented the Association at this meeting.

Reading through the other transcripts of evidence given that day, it was abundantly clear that then bodies involved in the enforcement roles were calling for action over the acceptance for slaughter of dirty livestock. You will all be well aware of my thoughts on this score from previous reports, so I will not bore you all by going over old ground. Suffice it to say that the problem is being recognised by all concerned. It remains to be seen if any action is forthcoming on this matter.

Tim Smith's Interview

I read with great interest the interview with Tim Smith, CEO of the Food Standards Agency, printed in the Meat Trades Journal in January. I have to confess that I did not quite believe what I was reading and had to read it a second time before the enormity of what I was reading started to hit home.

“The meat industry needs to grow up if it wants to see an end to government imposed regulation.”

It appeared to be a complete reversal of FSA’s stated aims of eventually handing meat inspection to industry and allowing self regulation. However, at no point in the article was this entirely ruled out.

I read the comments as a challenge to industry to put their house in order and actively demonstrate that they are taking control for the production of clean, safe and wholesome meat. This would entail only slaughtering clean livestock, full implementation of HACCP based principles in production, fully supported from the top down rather than plans just being created because it is now a requirement to do so, and the use of good manufacturing processes across the board.

I am aware of the counter arguments; that industry cannot entirely demonstrate that it is able to produce safe meat with the full time supervision that is in place, but I think that the important point here is that meat production needs to be of a consistently high standard across the board, not just the big players that serve the supermarkets, or the Food Business Operators that have a genuine pride in the service that they offer and the meat that they produce. There are FBO’s out there who are not as committed as perhaps they ought to be, and, as Tim Smith states “every time I think we’re getting close, we get caught out.”

This is borne out by the very well documented food scares of Wishaw

and Bridgend. We have also had well reported unfit meat scandals in the not too distant past.

It was good to read that Mr. Smith reiterated to industry that, “despite its name, the Meat Hygiene Service is not a service to industry, and that front line staff are there as enforcers to protect consumers.” The Association has long said that it is imperative that meat inspection remains independent and impartial from industry, and I believe that Tim Smith qualifies that with this statement.

I was extremely gratified to learn that the man at the top has experienced “life at the coal face”, gaining his slaughter licence slaughtering pigs. But I doubt whether there are very many, if any slaughtermen, or women that wear a collar and tie to do the job these days.

Meat Hygiene Steering Committee – training

The Association has been well represented at all the meetings to do with training. One of our main concerns has been as to whether or not any future trainees would have to be employed to be able to participate in on line practical training and, if so, who would they be employed by? Unless a situation existed as previously, whereby trainees were supervised one hundred percent by employed meat inspectors, we have concerns that it could lead to unqualified personnel carrying out meat inspection on meat destined for human consumption.

A letter has been submitted to the committee stating our concerns but, at the time of writing, the Association has yet to receive a response. When such a response has been received, we hope to attend a further meeting where we would seek further clarification on these matters.

In the past, the Association of Meat Inspectors has been accused of failing poultry meat inspectors in not fighting against the development of the PIA system of inspection. I would like to assure members through this report that in this regard, the relevant questions have been asked and will continue to be asked. I am determined that the Association will not have the same questions asked of it again.

It's not all doom and gloom on this score though; our representatives at these meetings have assured me that the proposed syllabus is in fact quite robust and "vigorous", and in this respect it is to be welcomed.

Seminar

This years Seminar is taking place over the weekend of the 10th – 11th September, at the University of Nottingham. The theme of this years Seminar is "The Value of Meat Inspection" and looks to build on the success of last years event.

Last year we were up to capacity. There are a few more places this year but they are still limited and early booking is advised.

Annual General Meeting

The AGM is set to take place at the Aztec West Hotel in Bristol, on Saturday 24th April. In order that catering arrangements can be met, I would ask any members interested in attending to let me know and book their place by the 4th of April please.

Treasurer

Our current Treasurer, Pierce Furlong is stepping down at the AGM in April, to resume his travels. I would like to thank Pierce on behalf of the Association for all his past efforts and to wish him "bon voyage", on his travels.

This does mean that the position is left vacant and I would ask that any active member who is interested in taking on the role to let it be known at their divisional AGM and to get formally nominated. Formal appointments of Officers in the AMI will take place at AGM in April.

Likewise, the National data base of members is now in an electronic form and, provided members keep the Registrar informed of changes in their details, works fairly well.

I would be happy to stand aside and let another active member take up the reins in this respect should they be prepared to do so.

Again, it would need to be proposed at divisional AGM's and the nominee formally appointed at the National AGM.

I hope to meet more of you at AGM and Seminar.

Until then,

keep up the good work.

Regards,

Ian Robinson