

General Secretary's Report



A warm welcome to you all.

Since our last edition we have all had to adjust to the massive change caused by Coronavirus in both the United Kingdom and beyond. I would like to thank you all for the dedication and hard work you have been doing each and every day to ensure that the food we rely on is safe and wholesome. Without your unstinting diligence, our other 'Key and Essential' workers wouldn't be able to carry out their fight to give those affected by this terrible illness a chance to recover. I hope that through the efforts of the senior management at the Food Standards Agency and Food Standards Scotland, to get Meat Hygiene Inspectors and Official Veterinarians included in the Cabinet Office press releases, the public might finally learn of the essential work that we carry out to protect them. As an Association we applaud each and every one of you as hidden heroes, and feel you should all be recognised for the work you carry out.

Elsewhere, we have received concerning reports of how badly affected workers in meat plants have been treated, with localised clusters of infection breaking out. This has been outside of the United Kingdom, but it does highlight the risks that our working environment presents.

There have also been instances where staff have been expected to work in areas where it is impossible to maintain social distancing, often without the provision of adequate protective measures. This is deeply concerning, although thankfully quite rare at home. There are many instances where Food Business Operators have gone above and beyond in putting systems in place to protect both their employees, and ourselves, as well as introducing enhanced monitoring of anyone who is attending a workplace. Such businesses should be thanked for taking a proactive approach to Health Safety and Wellbeing. Where plants have struggled to comply with the Government guidance, it's pleasing to know that our Line Managers will act upon any concerns. I would urge any member who has concerns about both their own personal safety and that of their colleagues and co-workers, to raise these concerns with your

Inspection Team Leader. They can take appropriate action, including if necessary, raising the issue with the Health and Safety Executive.

Although Coronavirus has become a large part of our daily lives, it's important for us to keep a close watch on what else is happening both at home and abroad. The Government continues to hold trade talks with the European Union and other Nations, so we must hope that at the very least the current standards of Public Health, Animal Health and Animal Welfare are maintained. With all the hard work by industry in recent years to reduce microbiological contamination, in partnership with the Regulator, it would be catastrophic if standards were diluted through pressure to secure a trade deal. This is something which the Association will monitor and where necessary oppose and make our views known to the decision makers. We are fortunate to continue as members of the European Working Community for Food Inspection and Consumer Protection, to ensure that we still have a voice in Europe to argue for the highest standards to be maintained. The group has a strong relationship with other Consumer organisations, who are all working to ensure that we have wholesome food to eat. If you haven't already visited their website at <https://ewfc.org> please do, to learn more about the work that they carry out.

The Association were forced to postpone the planned National Annual General Meeting scheduled for March 21st due to the measures introduced to stop the spread of Covid-19. However, we have speculatively rearranged the meeting for Saturday July 25th. There will be further details available on our website. The rescheduled meeting is subject to the rules brought in by lockdown continuing to be relaxed, to allow hotels to reopen, and will no doubt lead to a very different meeting than usual. However, if it proves to be impossible to hold a face to face meeting then, we will probably switch to holding an online meeting instead.

The Council and Trustees, have been exploring the use of online technology, in order to both stay in contact and hold meetings. Due to the late notice for cancellation in March we instead utilised a private forum, hosted on our website to discuss a number of urgent issues, and to transact any required business. Although this worked in principle, it proved to be a cumbersome way of holding a discussion. Consequently, we have now switched to using a well known Videoconferencing platform, with all the security measures available in place. This has allowed a much better way to discuss issues and plan ahead for how we approach the future with regard to public meetings. As mentioned previously, and as we write this piece there are reports of the 'R' number increasing in some areas, we might have to switch to holding events online.

We have already taken the decision to switch this year's seminar from a face to face event to an online hosted one instead. This is based on the ongoing uncertainty of what form the seminar could be forced to take, but most importantly our duty to ensure that both our guest speakers and members Health is protected. We contacted our speakers, to ask for their opinions, and they were in favour of making the change. This is only for this year's event, and we have already booked provisional dates with Harper Adams University for 2021. This will create a lot of work for the Trustees to pull

together, and I hope that as many of you as possible can support us in this venture. We will keep the same weekend in September, as previously announced. Further details will be published on our website, and I would like to thank everyone who was involved in this decision for their support.

Before I sign off for this edition, I would like to take this opportunity to thank a couple of individuals. First, I would like to thank our outgoing editor for all the effort he put in to producing *The Meat Hygienist* over the past few years. Unfortunately, Bill has had to step down from the role, but I am sure you will join me in thanking him for everything he has done to improve our journal, and the high standard of articles he has produced. We wish him well for the future, and I'm assured he will still be an active member within the Association.

I would also like to especially thank Ian Robinson for agreeing to be our guest editor for this edition, and I look forward to reading his editorial when it drops on my doorstep. Ian agreed to help out, as our new editor was unable to produce this edition as his work commitments as an Inspection Team Leader during the current climate left him with very little spare time. I look forward to welcoming him in the next edition.

To keep up with any changes to either the Annual General Meeting, and details of how to register for the online seminar, when available, please visit our website at www.meatinspectors.co.uk

Best wishes to you all, and stay safe in these difficult times.

Regards,

Jeremy