

General Secretary's Report



A warm welcome to you all.

I would like to begin this report by thanking Ian Robinson and Peter Watson for once again stepping in to produce this edition of The Meat Hygienist. Our new Editor should hopefully be starting in the New Year.

At the time of writing, England is currently in the middle of it's second period of National lockdown, with varying restrictions elsewhere within the devolved Nations. This has proven to be an extremely challenging time for us all, with colleagues having to shield to protect both themselves and their loved ones, and others having to work at times under different Covid restrictions in England and Wales. We have also unfortunately had the extremely stressful outbreaks in several establishments that Meat Hygiene Inspectors and Official Veterinarians attend daily. Throughout all of the past months, the constant endeavours of the Inspection teams throughout the entire Country has shone through for their professionalism in dealing with the high risks our status as Key Workers has brought. I would like to thank you all, both personally and on behalf of the Association for everything you have achieved this year, working with both our own employers, and the Food Establishments we attend on a daily basis.

I would also like to record my thanks for the support from the Executive Management Teams of the Food Standards Agency and Food Standards Scotland, and the efforts made in sourcing PPE for frontline staff when it has been very scarce to procure, and necessarily prioritised for our Healthcare Professional's use. Our normally office-based colleagues have also had the challenge of adapting to new ways of working, as everything has moved to a remote working environment. I have been fortunate to be able to assist with the testing of some innovative IT systems to enable everyone to work away from the Offices as a member of the Digital Superuser community. The systems developed by both our IT Department and Digital Team have placed us at the forefront of technological innovation, that has enabled the Agency to fulfil its objectives. Communication has been the key to these efforts, and through the use of

Microsoft Teams for all staff briefings, we have had levels of engagement at an unprecedented level. I think I can safely say that we are probably 'streets ahead' of other Government Departments, so congratulations to all involved at Regional and National levels.

The use of online meetings has enabled the Association to continue to engage with the Food Standards Agency, both as a stakeholder organisation, and to have our usual biannual meeting with the Head of Field Operations. Peter Watson and myself had a meeting with Simon Tunnicliffe in November to discuss various issues, and I would like to thank Simon for finding the time to meet the Association during a very busy period. The meeting was very a positive one. The Association has also been invited to engage with other current initiatives, which will hopefully see further opportunities for our members to diversify their role. No doubt we will see and hear more about this in the coming months, but the team working on this project includes former Meat Hygiene Inspectors, so this hopefully bodes well for the future.

Another very positive development was the recruitment of a further cohort of trainee Official Auxiliaries. The seven new staff joined at the start of November, beginning with two weeks of Induction training. Two have joined in the North region and five in Wales and the West of England. I know it goes without saying that all the teams locally will ensure that our vast pool of knowledge is passed on to the next generation. The induction training itself was conducted entirely online, and included a pre-recorded presentation on the Association's history and current activities. There was also mention of the award for the Trainee Meat Hygiene Inspector of the Year, and the benefits of the educational access afforded by the Trust. I would like to wish all the trainees well with their studies, and look forward to welcoming them as members.

Within this edition, you will find some more articles inspired by the presentations from this year's seminar. I hope you will find them of interest, and if you haven't attended in the past but enjoy what you read, perhaps you could join us in person, in 2021. There is no substitute for a live meeting and the opportunity to meet up with friends old and new, and Harper Adams University is a fantastic facility. For those of you who have access, the recording of this year's seminar has now been made available on the Food Standards Agency and Food Standards Scotland Intranets. As IT Manager I would like to thank both organisations for allowing us to upload the recordings. I would also like to thank Kabir Ahmed from Internal Comms at the Food Standards Agency, for his assistance in creating eight manageable video modules, and for his advice and encouragement when we first decided amongst the Trustees to hold a virtual event this year. I would also again like to thank the speakers for their permission to distribute their presentations in this manner.

We are now in the final remaining days before the United Kingdom exit the European Union, and it is still unclear what our new relationship will look like, and if any trade agreement will be achieved as part of the process. This creates both uncertainty and opportunity within the Meat Industry. Uncertainty comes from the fear of the unknown and how the industry will adapt, and what tariffs might apply that affect trading

conditions. Opportunity comes from additional tasks that will now be required when we become a Third Country in terms of export trade. I was delighted to see that there is an opportunity for our members to train to become Certification Support Officers. This will be an exciting yet challenging role, and another way in which we can work closely with our Veterinary colleagues in carrying out Official Controls and demonstrate our professionalism.

The Association will continue to work alongside our European colleagues to ensure that the highest standards are maintained in the protection of Public Health, Animal Health and Animal Welfare. One initiative that looks to have great potential is the European Green Deal. This document sets out the European Commission's strategy towards climate change over the next thirty years. However, it goes beyond in encouraging Countries who wish to trade with the European Union to also adopt Green production methods. There are aspects of the report that the EWFC are particularly interested in such as the proposals for combatting food fraud. As always, if you wish to read about the work of the EWFC, please visit their website at www.ewfc.org

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a Merry Christmas / Happy Holidays, and a peaceful New Year. Lets hope 2021 turns out to be better than 2020.

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

Regards,

Jeremy