

## Meeting of the *safefood* Advisory Committee

Bullitt Hotel, Belfast

Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> / Friday, 21<sup>st</sup> October 2022, 10:00 – 13:00

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### DRAFT MINUTES

**SAC members present:** Prof Elizabeth Keane (Chair)  
Prof Mary Brennan  
Prof Mary Corcoran  
Ms Anne Marie Crowley  
Ms Mary Daly  
Dr Nazih Eldin  
Ms Claire Mac Evilly  
Prof Eileen Gibney  
Dr Muiris O ‘Céidigh

**SAC apologies:** Dr Martin Rose  
Dr Rhodri Evans  
Prof Frank Monahan

**safefood staff:** Dr Aileen McGloin  
Dr James McIntosh  
Ms Colette O’Shea

**safefood apologies:** Ms Patricia Fitzgerald  
Ms Fiona Gilligan  
Dr Gary A. Kearney

#### 1. Welcome, introductions & apologies

The chairperson welcomed the **safefood** Advisory Committee (SAC) members to Belfast for their first in-person meeting in Northern Ireland.

Apologies were noted from Dr Martin Rose, Dr Rhodri Evans, Prof Frank Monahan, Ms Patricia Fitzgerald, Ms Fiona Gilligan and Dr Gary A. Kearney. Dr Rhodri Evans and Prof Frank Monahan both provided comments on the agenda items in advance of the meeting.

There were no conflicts of interest expressed from members regarding the agenda items.

The Chair invited Prof Mary Corcoran and Dr Muiris O ‘Céidigh to introduce themselves as this was their first in-person meeting with the current SAC.

## 2. Minutes of the SAC meeting of Friday, 6<sup>th</sup> of May 2022 and matters arising

**Noted:** The members accepted the minutes.

**Noted:** As a follow-up to the discussion on partnership working with retailers, it was advised that, since the previous SAC meeting, **safefood** have met with the Retail Forum in IBEC to progress this goal further.

**Noted:** Prof Mary Brennan advised that the 'Good Food Nation' Act had been ratified by parliament and is now in law in Scotland. The Act will commence formally in early 2023 after which a National Food Plan for Scotland will be developed. Local Food Plans will emanate from this. Realistically, the National Food Plan will be published towards the Winter of 2024. The Plan also entails an independent Scottish Food Commission which will launch at the same time. This will consist of a chair, four commissioners and secretariat. Funding for this structure has been ring-fenced.

**Noted:** The evolving Scottish Local Food Plans would be of considerable interest in an Irish context, particularly at local and community level.

**Noted:** There were two matters arising and both had been achieved:

- Prof Mary Brennan to forward on the systems report detailing the Scottish local council approach to food mapping and information on the Scottish Good Food Nation bill.
- Prof Mary Brennan to send on further information on the Scottish Regional Ambassador Programme.

## 3. Incorporating sustainability guidelines into healthy eating guidelines (Document SAC 21OCT2022 Doc 3)

Presented by Dr Janas Harrington, School of Public Health, University College Cork: introduced by Dr Aileen McGloin, Director of Nutrition at **safefood**.

**Noted:** Dr Janas Harrington presented an overview of the **safefood**-funded research project '*Review of international practice on building sustainability into national healthy eating guidelines and practical implications for policy*'.

**Noted:** Case studies from seven countries who have already built in sustainability into their healthy eating guidelines were presented and the different approaches and commonalities described, for example to varying degrees all advocated more plant-based diets and less meat consumption.

**Noted:** The factors influencing a transition to more sustainable diet were investigated and it was clear that there was a need for multiple strategies targeting the population at different levels. Consumers are confused with regard to the meaning of 'sustainable' diets and their awareness of the impact of diet on the environment was low. Consumers also don't necessarily equate sustainable with healthy.

**Noted:** With regard to the determinants for consumers' food purchasing, affordability was the key determinant followed by acceptability, and nutrition/health: environmental attributes were less important determinants. A high proportion of consumers were not interested in switching to a more plant-based diet.

**Noted:** A workshop for experts concluded that the current food system was not sustainable and that sustainability aspects should be factored in to dietary guidelines. The experts also agreed that promotion of dietary diversity should be included in dietary guidelines, as well as a reduction in processed meats, and foods high in fat, sugar and salt. Simple and unambiguous communication will be key to influencing consumer choice.

**Noted:** A carbon footprint, water, nitrogen, to the dietary data from the Mitchelstown Cohort study for an overview of different dietary patterns.

**Noted:** Any drive to make diets more sustainable will require the provision of supports to consumers. These include things like cooking skills for substitute foods, etc., and they must not drive up costs.

**Noted:** Consumer trust in quality schemes and quality markets could also be important tools for influencing dietary changes.

**Noted:** Sustainability is a whole food chain concern and in this regard it would make more sense for policy supports to be provided across the food chain and not just limited to the final consumer.

#### **4. START – a stakeholder view (Document SAC 21OCT2022 Doc 2)**

Presented by Niall McCaffrey, IPSOS, Dublin: introduced by Aoife O'Reilly, Marketing & Communications Directorate at *safefood*.

**Noted:** *safefood* is about to initiate an evaluation of their START campaign. The SAC members, who were not engaged in any way in the campaign, were asked for their opinions of the campaign with a view to feeding this back into the overall evaluation.

**Noted:** SAC members gave their perspectives with regard to the different elements and aspirations of the campaign including the use of treats to manage family dynamics, influencing children to make healthier choices, the effectiveness (or not) of whole systems approaches compared to focussed campaigns, the provision of strategies for consumers to put all the advice they hear into practice, etc.

**Noted:** The targeting and communications for effective message delivery and influencing, as well as support organisations, were discussed.

#### **5. Plant-based dairy alternatives (Document SAC 21OCT2022 Doc 1)**

Presented by Dr Charmaine McGowan, Nutrition Directorate, *safefood*.

**Noted:** Dr Charmaine McGowan presented the outputs from the *safefood*-funded project, '*Plant-based alternatives to dairy*'.

**Noted:** Examples of dairy alternative products were given. The average calcium content was similar to the equivalent amount of semi-skimmed milk but the overall range of calcium content was large. Dairy alternative products were generally poorer in terms of their protein content compared to milk and milk products. The cost of dairy alternatives varies considerably.

**Noted:** 30% of those surveyed said they consumer dairy alternatives at least once a week. However, just 3% of consumers questioned in this snap-shot survey stated they chose dairy alternatives for environmental reasons.

**Noted:** End guidance to consumers with regard to dairy alternatives will still be to source products that are low in fat/sugar, unsweetened, and sources of protein with added calcium. These are important considerations, especially for those who change their diets and need to substitute for certain foods (e.g., IBS, lactose intolerance, etc.).

**Noted:** Ireland is one of the few countries in Europe where fresh milk (as opposed to UHT milk) is readily available. There was discussion around the use of the term 'alternative'; however, there was no flexibility with regard to terminology as this term is used at EU level and also for marketing of these products.

**Noted:** The impact on health of dairy alternatives could be significant depending on how much of them are consumed as part of a diet. There are conflicting messages being provided to consumers specifically

within this product category. This is outside the remit of **safefood** and will require engagement with the industry.

#### **6. Can food safety interventions be sustainable? (Document SAC 21OCT2022 Doc 4)**

Presented by Dr James McIntosh, Food Science Directorate at **safefood**

**Noted:** Changes made across the food chain to enhance sustainability may have an adverse impact on food safety.

**Noted:** The 'Too good to go' campaign in the UK has removed 'Best Before' dates. Some retailers are also removing 'Use by' dates for certain categories of food product. Some caterers are also promoting a zero waste approach and they are proving very popular. Alternative and traditional approaches such as salting and pickling are being advocated as alternatives to chilling and freezing.

**Noted:** The regulatory agencies are cautious with regard to some of the ad hoc sustainability measures such as turning off fridges and freezers overnight, etc. as these moves go against current advice on food storage.

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#### **5. AOB & Date of next meeting**

**Noted:** The EU Retained Law is going through Parliament in the UK. Essentially the law proposes to remove all food (and other) law in the UK.

**Noted:** The next meeting will be on Friday, 5th of May 2023. Venue TBC.

**Noted:** The Chair thanked the members for their participation and advice and closed the meeting.

James McIntosh  
December 2022