Latest AFS Update 25.3.21

Background

Assured Food Standards (AFS) is a key standard for UK retailers. As one of the owners of AFS, BRC nominates members to represent our views on the main and sector Boards. This is their latest update on developments with AFS.

1. New Chair

Christine Tacon has been appointed for a 3 year term, she previously ran Co-operative farming and was the Groceries Code Adjudicator. She reflected on the recent consultation reviewing the standards, saying she was disappointed at the negative coverage it had received. She urged NFU, AHDB and retailers to do more, although she was reminded of the joint supportive open letter co-ordinated by the BRC and signed by major retailers as well as work with supply chains. (Also worth noting the consultation didn’t go as far as retailers had asked, for example lifetime assurance and climate change reporting)

She said her focus is on efficiency and effectiveness of standards and increasing visibility of the logo. You may have seen the latest advertising campaign which began earlier in March.

1. Consultation

As above there has been negative coverage and push back from some farmers. They continue to challenge the value AFS delivers, and whether that will be enhanced through these changes. They are also opposed to changes in some aspects of animal welfare, environment and workers welfare.

1. Scheme changes

There has been support from some retailers and farmers to develop a new module for grass fed beef and dairy. AFS has produced higher production modules before, such as enhanced chicken. This module, if it follows similar ones such as Bord Bia, would specify the minimum period spent at grass and the % of feed from grass. However, whilst these groups see the benefit in marketing there has been wider push back, both around the specific development of the module and whether AFS should be focusing on other issues such as carbon footprinting.

AFS is also considering a combined ruminant standard to reduce the complexity and duplication of audits. More work on this is being considered through the sector boards.

On pigs, AFS is asking vets to renew their registration on an annual basis. AFS wants more visibility of which vets are working with farmers.

1. Scheme Integrity

AFS has asked how retailers view decisions to suspend farms from their supply chains. An example was given of a farm exposed by the Daily Mail where major retailers had suspended supply. That farm claims to have worked through its issues and assured its processor it was fully compliant but is still unable to rejoin supply chains. AFS wants to know what reassurance would convince a retailer to reinstate a suspended farm.

AFS is also investing in improving compliance. It is working with CBs to improve their approach, including the support and pay of auditors.