

[Letter sent to all stakeholders]

06 September 2013

Our ref: ABA-37859

Dear _____,

FSA, Poultry Industry and Retailer Roundtable on Campylobacter

Thank you for attending this meeting on Monday. As was observed at the time, it felt unusual to have so many senior people from different parts of the industry together considering a key food safety issue, and I appreciated the commitment from your businesses and yourselves.

We agreed that I would write to let you know the key issues that I identified coming from the meeting and give a sense of my views on the meeting, having had a chance to reflect on where we got to. So this letter is my attempt to deliver on that commitment.

We also agreed that each of you would write to me outlining what steps your business is prepared to take to drive down rates of campylobacter in the food chain. Thank you to those who have already replied. I look forward to considering and discussing your thoughts on this issue bilaterally over the coming weeks and months; and to seeing the steps you decide on put into action, and ultimately I am sure take effect, and reduce incidence of campylobacter in chicken, thus saving lives.

Key issues emerging from the meeting

There seemed to me to be an encouraging agreement amongst all those present that all key industry players had a responsibility to drive down rates of campylobacter in the food chain from which they profited, and that the absence of a “silver bullet” solution did not absolve anyone from that responsibility.

Joint working Group

There was a strong desire to continue to use the Joint Working Group as a technical forum to work on technical solutions to this public health challenge, but there was also a strong commitment to not doing anything that could in any way be considered anti-competitive. I was pleased to hear the producers present propose and agree that the issue of campylobacter should be put firmly at the very top of their technical

directors' priorities as a reflection of its importance to their business overall, and that they would press the British Poultry Council and other relevant bodies to reflect this in their published priorities too.

We were already proposing to review the JWG, and the feedback from Monday's discussion will be helpful in ensuring that we do so in a way that maximises its usefulness and enables those who are members of it to contribute fully within clearly set and legally appropriate boundaries. We will consider whether it is necessary to approach the OFT on the subject but would also welcome contact from your own advisors on this matter.

Your feedback reinforced my view that we cannot and should not rely solely on the JWG to solve this problem, and that additional company specific approaches are needed.

Data transparency

One of the key thrusts of our refreshed strategy is a move to more regular, more openly reported, data about incidence levels of campylobacter at different stages in the food chain, and in different companies. I believe that more regular, transparent reporting on campylobacter will reinforce the focus that the best companies are already bringing to bear on this issue, and create an incentive for all to seek to raise their game to the level of the best. I was pleased to hear an appetite from some of the participants in Monday's meeting for greater sharing of this kind of data, because it will enable more understanding of the issue and of the interventions that work, which will support faster change – our shared objective.

I would very much appreciate your thoughts on what data your company will gather and share to enable this process to take place. This will help to inform our thinking on what data we should in our turn gather and share.

Some suggestions we raised

This drive for transparency related to some of the illustrative suggestions I raised for your consideration as part of your action plans –

- inclusion of a section on Campylobacter in your annual reports/other corporate documents;
- integrating monthly or quarterly monitoring of levels into your KPI system;
- linking bonus payments to key staff to achieving improvements;
- measuring and reporting levels regularly at senior management level;
- campaigning in support of safe end of line interventions that are shown to reduce Campylobacter;

- embracing your role in consumer education while the other steps you are taking take effect.

Some suggestions other participants raised

I welcome the suggestion that existing assured food standards, such as the relevant Red Tractor scheme requirements, could be strengthened or more stringent industry-own codes or standards could be developed, and I would welcome you taking a lead in making this happen, with assistance from us where appropriate. This too is an area where transparency is key – if we as regulator are to recognise membership of assurance schemes as delivering public health benefits, we would expect those schemes to freely share test results and compliance information with us.

I welcome the appetite displayed at our meeting for retail partners to take a lead in future communication with consumers, and to review a possible shared approach to labelling to ensure that consumers are given the best advice on reducing campy risks in their kitchens in the clear consistent terms most likely to support behaviour change.

The FSA also recognises the role we have to play in this, supporting and endorsing appropriate messages and we intend to make Campylobacter the focus of Food Safety Week in June 2014. Planning for Food Safety Week will start very shortly, and I hope this will be a focus for collaborative action. We will be happy to convene a working group with relevant decision makers to focus specifically on communication with consumers.

I also noted and welcomed the strong sense from the meeting in support of end of line treatments, such as antimicrobial washes. Your support as well as our focused efforts will be fundamental for negotiations in Europe to gain approval for any safe, effective end of line interventions. But equally I think we were all agreed that given the timescale involved in European change, and the nature of the campylobacter organism, this takes nothing away from the urgency of the other steps we have discussed.

My summary impression

I was pleased that senior people from functions other than the purely technical gathered together and engaged seriously and constructively with this pressing public health issue.

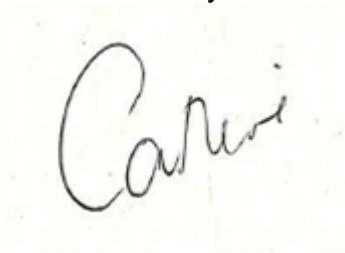
I was particularly impressed with the leadership that some companies were prepared to show in terms of committing to radically driving down levels of campylobacter, including being prepared to invest to achieve this.

I hope that those who were unable to commit to significant further action on the day of the round table will be able to make commitments in the next few days and

weeks. Because while I continue to recognise that much effort has been put in, I also continue to believe we need to redouble our efforts, and demonstrate that every business that is making money from the sale of fresh chicken is making every possible step that the consumer could expect to reduce campylobacter, and I still believe we are some way from being able to confidently say that.

I look forward to receiving your further thoughts and commitments in the very near future, so that together we can step up the pace in addressing this pressing public health issue.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature is written in a cursive style and appears to read "Catherine".

Catherine Brown