

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON ANIMAL FEEDINGSTUFFS

Meeting of ACAF on 23 September 2009

Discussion Paper

FOLLOW UP TO THE GACS HORIZON SCANNING WORKSHOP

Action: The Committee has been requested by the General Advisory Committee on Science (GACS) to consider the ideas emerging from the workshop and to comment on:

- a) which of the ideas highlighted in the report (summarised in para 73 of the draft report – see Appendix A of Annex I to this paper) should be prioritised for further consideration (in particular those which are most likely to be taken up in practice and/or provide significant support to the aims and objectives of the Agency and/or the ACAF);**
- b) which of the ideas identified is ACAF best placed to take forward, whether on its own or with other Advisory Committees.**

**Secretariat
September 2009**

FOLLOW UP TO THE GACS HORIZON SCANNING WORKSHOP

Purpose

1. Following recent GACS discussion of the draft report of the horizon scanning workshop held in June 2009, ACAF has been asked by GACS to consider the ideas emerging from the workshop and comment on which, if any, warrant more detailed investigation.

Background

2. GACS recently considered the attached paper and draft report of the horizon scanning workshop held on 24 June 2009 in London. The GACS paper (see Annex I) outlines the background to the workshop and summarises the main ideas which emerged from participants' discussions.

3. Appendix A of Annex I to the GACS paper is the full version of the draft report of the workshop, which was sent out in late July 2009 to the workshop participants for a "sense check" and so has also already been seen by several ACAF members who participated on the day.

4. In commenting on the report at its meeting, GACS acknowledged that, due to the format of the workshop and time available, the discussions had only been able to give a relatively superficial view of the issues discussed, based on the knowledge and views of those present. In that respect it was inappropriate to refer in the report to "findings". GACS requested that the report be referred back to ACAF (and SACN) as one of the committees whose earlier discussions acted as a stimulus to the development of the workshop.

Action

5. The Committee is requested to consider:

- a) which of the ideas highlighted in the report (summarised in para 73 of the draft report – see Appendix A of Annex I to this paper) should be prioritised for further consideration (in particular those which are most likely to be taken up in practice and/or provide significant support to the aims and objectives of the Agency and/or the ACAF);
- b) which of the ideas identified is ACAF best placed to take forward, whether on its own or with other Advisory Committees.

ACAF Secretariat
September 2009

Annex I**GENERAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE****PAPER GACS 4-3 For discussion**

Agenda item 6 8 September 2009

Horizon scanning: follow-up of issues arising from the GACS horizon-scanning workshop on future developments in food production
Issue

1. The Committee has previously recognised the importance of horizon scanning as a mechanism for considering future scenarios and how to respond to them. In particular it was interested in exploring ways to support cross boundary working on horizon scanning between different Scientific Advisory Committees (SACs). It hosted a horizon scanning workshop in June 2009 building on ideas emerging from previous discussion in two SACs. This paper provides an overview of the workshop and its outcomes and seeks GACS views on next steps.

The Committee is asked to:

- **consider** the main findings outlined in the report for the horizon scanning workshop;
- **advise** on the next steps in relation to any identified priorities for further investigation and the workshop report;
- **offer** its views on future approaches which might be used to support identified priorities for further investigation.

Origin of paper

GACS work plan; arising from the Scientific Advisory Committees (SACs)

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Issue

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Background

2. In its earlier discussions, GACS has recognised the importance of horizon scanning as a mechanism for considering future scenarios and how to respond to them. In particular, soon after it was formed, GACS identified the importance of exploring ways the different scientific advisory committees might work better across the boundaries of their remits to work together on horizon scanning.
3. At its 2nd meeting on 29 October 2008¹, the Committee noted that an idea to host a horizon scanning workshop on impacts of trends in food production in relation to healthy diets had arisen from horizon scanning activities of two of the other independent scientific advisory committees that advise the Agency – the Advisory Committee on Animal Feedingstuffs (ACAF) and the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN). GACS agreed to take ownership of this initiative and set up a Working Group (WG) to do preparatory work to structure the planned workshop and define a clear remit for it.
4. Consideration of this idea sits well with the current interest globally in the topic of food security, which is no longer confined to issues of food supply - the security of meeting demand for food and hence avoiding chronic malnutrition – but encompasses the sustainability, affordability, quality and safety of the diet.
5. The GACS hosted a horizon scanning workshop '*Future food production for healthier eating: opportunities and challenges*' on 24 June 2009. The workshop's aims were to:
 - identify the more likely developments in primary food production, over a 10- to 20-year horizon, which could lead to ingredients/foods that could significantly support, or hinder, Agency objectives to promote healthier diets;

¹ Minutes of GACS committee meeting on 29 October 2008:
<http://www.food.gov.uk/science/ouradvisors/gacs/gacsmeetings/gacsmeets2008/gacsmeet0810/gacsmins081029>

- examine the reasons for these and identify actions that should be taken – by the Agency or the SACs, or other funders – to facilitate, or otherwise to respond to, the potential developments.
6. The focus for the workshop recognised, as relevant background, the global context of the future supply of food in the UK (currently 60% self-sufficient in all foods and over 74% self-sufficient in foods that can be produced in this country²) and that in future the global food system is likely to come under pressure from climate change, resource-related issues and population growth.
 7. Within the context of addressing these issues (possibly by technological approaches) and managing any accompanying changes in agricultural practices, there may be an opportunity to devise strategies for future primary production of foodstuffs³ that significantly support Agency objectives to promote healthier diets.
 8. The draft report is at Appendix A. This has been circulated to participants in the workshop (including GACS members) for a “sense check” and comments on the veracity of the report. Any emerging themes in comments received prior to the meeting can be reported by the Secretariat if appropriate during discussion of this item.

Discussion

9. Although the main focus of the workshop was to identify scientifically/technologically feasible developments in areas of primary production that have the most realistic chance of leading to products which will come to market, workshop participants also highlighted a wide range of more fundamental, underpinning issues which they considered of importance to the overall aims. The specific issues identified in the various syndicate groups are listed in paragraph 72 on page 28 of the draft report.
10. It should be noted that for some of the suggestions put forward by participants, there are initiatives already underway that will help to address the points made. Nevertheless, the importance of having a robust evidence base to support decision-making is recognised.
11. The principal findings of the workshop are that :
 - there is a need to develop a better understanding of consumers’ behaviours, what they want from their food and what they will find acceptable– in particular, there was a need to understand better consumers’ perception of technological innovation, especially, in this context, if this would result in healthier foods;

² Defra - Ensuring the UK’s food security in a changing world 2008

³ Primary production covers all agricultural and aquacultural food production including crop cultivation, dairy and egg production, livestock rearing and fish/shellfish production.

- it was felt there is a need for better co-ordinated delivery of public nutrition advice and one coherent set of evidence-based guidance on diet and health: a range of different messaging options, including the latest technology, should be used to inform the public and help them make the right choices;
 - there is scope for consumers, either through their own self-interest or through policy/economic intervention, to improve their dietary balance within the range of foodstuffs that is available now and likely to continue to be available in the future;
 - where technological innovation is anticipated, such changes need not necessarily involve high-technology solutions;
 - suggested ways for future modification of the food supply include improving the nutritional quality of food through the growing medium, using feed modification in primary production, improved breeding strategies and the direct manipulation of foodstuffs to either introduce, increase or decrease particular individual components - these innovations could also be supported through policy/economic interventions;
 - to address future managed changes in the food supply, it will be necessary to maintain or increase investment in research in this area, while engaging with research internationally and making full use of existing data.
12. The approach tried out at the workshop was a very structured one, which involved participants initially identifying the main issues as they saw them in relation to the aims of the workshop. They were then asked to work on what they saw as the most important of these in developing a “line of argument” on why this is important, why change might be needed, the nature of the change, evidence needs to support this and the key actors in effecting this.
13. Feedback on the event was sought from participants and, as might be expected, particularly when trying a different approach, a range of constructive comments and criticisms was received. These ranged from participants who found the day very stimulating, challenging and rewarding to those who felt it did not quite “do what it said on the tin”; several commented that having more information in advance would have helped them contribute on the day. These comments serve to highlight the challenges posed by undertaking effective horizon scanning. The Agency has noted the helpful comments made and will bear these in mind in relation to future activities.

Next steps

14. The original workshop outline envisaged possible opportunities to expand on the workshop event in respect of (i) the report, and (ii) the outcomes of the meeting, and the views of the Committee are requested for these.

15. For the report, GACS advice is requested on the possibility of:

- gaining further relevant input on this topic, by making the report (Appendix A) available for wider comment, for example via the website, and;
- the value of aiming to get the proceedings of the workshop published in a peer-reviewed journal

16. In respect of the outcomes of the meeting, GACS is requested to consider and advise:

- on whether there are issues highlighted in the report that should be prioritised for further more detailed investigation and which would provide significant support to Agency aims/objectives;
- on who is best placed to take such work forward, and;
- by providing views on approaches which would help in future events.

17. The Committee is asked to:

- **consider** the main findings outlined in the report for the horizon scanning workshop;
- **advise** on the next steps in relation to any identified priorities for further investigation and the workshop report;
- **offer** its views on future approaches which might be used to support identified priorities for further investigation.

Appendix A

See separate document