

## **Food Safety and Food Authenticity Strategy, 2018 – 2020 Launch**

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On 12<sup>th</sup> July 2018, the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), Mr Michael Creed, T.D, launched the Department's Food Safety & Food Authenticity (FS&FA) Strategy. The implementation of the Strategy is a high level priority for DAFM in 2018. The audience consisting of key stakeholders from the agri-food industry, along with representation from the other State Agencies and DAFM staff involved in this work area.

DAFM Secretary General, Mr Aidan O Driscoll, thanked those in attendance noting our shared goals to give assurance to the consumer of the safety and authenticity of food. Threats posed to our food supply and the legislative response of the EU to these threats were noted. Secretary General O'Driscoll highlighted the importance of data and technology in responding proactively to problems. The FS&FA Strategy sets out a pathway of change in which DAFM is fully engaged. He considered it an important moment for DAFM as the challenges facing FS&FA continue to evolve in a rapidly changing world. Reflecting on the ambitious growth targets set out in Food Wise 2025 Strategy, he concluded that, to achieve these targets, food safety and food authenticity must be at the centre of DAFM's activities.

Minister Creed, welcomed all in attendance which included agri-food stakeholders, the Food Safety of Ireland [FSAI], the Department of Health, the Sea Fisheries Protection Agency, the Marine Institute and staff from across his own Department. One of the main aims of this strategy is to sharpen the focus on food safety and food authenticity, thus protecting the consumer and building confidence in Irish agri-food products and protecting public health. Minister Creed noted that his Department is part of the overall "Team Ireland" involved in the control of food safety and food authenticity through monitoring the food chain. He also signified his own commitment to ensuring that food safety and food authenticity is an absolute priority in his Department. The implementation of this three year FS&FA Strategy will capture and respond to the challenges the agri-food sector will face over the coming years. These include new and emerging risks, Brexit and a rapidly evolving trading environment across the 180 plus countries Ireland currently exports to. The FS&FA Strategy will place an emphasis on protecting our reputation for wholesome food while safeguarding public health and the consumer through the delivery of five high level goals: Governance, Communication, Risk, Data Information & Knowledge and Policy & Regulatory Framework. From these goals, DAFM will set out an ambitious action plan of change which will focus on outcomes to deliver a more harmonised and coherent system of food controls. The Strategy will strengthen evidence-based policy and contribute to operational excellence and growth of a culture of compliance across the agri-food sector. Minister Creed concluded with his support for the work of the Strategy.

Representing the FSAI, its Chief Executive Dr Pamela Byrne, welcomed the “*Strong commitment to working together that will be required for success*”. She reiterated the FSAI message that; “*We will assist the Department of Agriculture to deliver safe and trustworthy food for all*”. She noted that Ireland must be able to demonstrate this through the “*hard evidence*” that underpins our commitment to the consumer and safe food. Ireland currently has over 50,000 food business organisations, including farmers, who share responsibility for the safety of the food they produce which in turn ensures consumers are protected and trade is not compromised.

Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer, Ms Paula Barry-Walsh highlighted that “*today we are looking forward and not backwards*”. She acknowledged the work and commitment of all who contributed to the FS&FA Strategy, not least from stakeholders in the regulatory and agri-food spheres. She outlined the implementation plan, noting that its component projects are “*not stand alone projects, but are interlocked and multi-disciplinary*”. Ms Barry-Walsh emphasised that this “*collaborate framework reflects what we can do when we work together*”. While acknowledging that “*change isn’t easy*” she emphasised that the implementation of the Strategy was on “*not a task-changing exercise.... it’s around people-changing*”. A fundamental message from today’s Strategy launch involved changing and “*to change you have to do something you’ve never done before*”.

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