



# **THE McNAIR REPORT**

An independent inquiry and report  
commissioned by the RSPCA into the  
Freedom Food animal welfare  
assurance scheme

May 2013

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## **The Inquiry Panel:**

- Duncan McNair LLB (Chairman)
- Rt. Hon. Caroline Spelman MP
- Dr David Main BvetMed PhD MRCVS

## **Special Advisor to the Panel:**

- Christopher Laurence MBE QVRM TD BVSC MRCVS

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The Report is available to download at the RSPCA and Freedom Food websites:  
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# **Report of the independent panel on the operation of the *Freedom Food* scheme**

## **Foreword by the Chairman**

In July 2012 I contacted the RSPCA with various comments and concerns that I had about the operation of the *Freedom Food* ["FF"] scheme. The RSPCA responded by inviting me to chair an independent panel which would review the scheme, and consider its future. I have been very fortunate in obtaining the agreement of eminent panellists to take part in the review. They are:

The Right Honourable Caroline Spelman MP, Secretary of State at the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs 2010-2012;  
Dr David Main, veterinary surgeon and Reader in Animal Welfare and Behaviour at the University of Bristol Veterinary School

I am extremely grateful for the contributions that they have made to this report. On behalf of the panel, I would also like to express our thanks to Christopher Laurence MBE, former Chief Veterinary Officer of RSPCA and a current member of the RSPCA Trustee Council and of the *Freedom Food* board, who acted as adviser to the panel.

The panel extends its gratitude to all others who have assisted in the production of this report, with special thanks to Catherine McGahey for her valuable help.

The recommendations made in this report represent the views of the panel, which were reached after wide consultation with those involved in or with knowledge of the FF scheme. The existence and operation of a scheme such as FF inevitably gives rise to a wide range of opinions. There are many individuals and organisations who regard the farming of animals, however well those animals may be kept, as entirely unacceptable. At the opposite end are farmers whose families have made their livelihoods for generations from farmed animals.

Retailers supply the undoubted demand of the public for animal-based food products. In seeking information for this report, we sought to obtain views from as wide a range of opinion as possible, from retailers and farmers' representatives to animal rights campaigners.

We are grateful to the very large numbers of individuals and groups who responded to our requests for information, and for the thoroughly constructive contributions made by all, whatever their points of view.

In order to encourage respondents to be entirely frank, we gave an undertaking that all contributions would be treated in confidence, and that no attributable comments would be published in our report. For that reason, while we have included within this report a list of all those who provided information (see Appendix 1), and a copy of the questionnaires that we sent to consultees (Appendices 2 and 3), we are not making public the details of any individual contribution.

During the 19 years of its existence, FF has made a very substantial contribution to farmed animal welfare, and continues to do so. I hope that the recommendations that our panel have made will be regarded as constructive and that, if adopted, they will help to improve even further the welfare of farmed animals in future.

**Duncan McNair**

**Chairman**

**13 May 2013**

# ***Freedom Food Review Panel***

## **Terms of Reference**

To thoroughly examine and make recommendations in relation to the working of the *Freedom Food* Scheme, mindful of the RSPCA's desire to develop a future strategy that will:-

- (1) Deliver significant improvements for farm animals within the industry by providing the RSPCA's farm animal standards and welfare assessment as the criteria for animal welfare assurance, examining models including the *Freedom Food* model and ensuring Freedom Food is fit for purpose.
- (2) Best promote farm animal welfare through robust certification processes directed to positively influencing the farming industry, consumers, retailers, decision makers and the wider public.
- (3) Ensure that consumers have confidence in the Freedom Food Scheme.

## Summary of the Panel's Recommendations

### The panel's key recommendations are:

- The RSPCA should maintain and ideally increase its financial and other support for *Freedom Food* ["FF"]
- FF and the RSPCA's Farm Animals Department ["FAD"] should work together to develop and implement an agreed strategy for FF's future development
- **That strategy should include:**
  - (i) Emphasis on quality (of animal welfare) and not quantity (of FF members)
  - (ii) A clear focus on improvements in the welfare of animals
  - (iii) Improved communication to the public of the FF scheme
  - (iv) Plans to increase FF's ability to influence animal welfare standards outside the scheme, both in the UK and abroad
  - (v) In the longer term, an aim to increase the number of FF members
  - (vi) The creation of animal welfare requirements that are both evidence-based and practicable to implement
  - (vii) Robust assessment of compliance by FF members of RSPCA welfare standards
  - (viii) Swift and effective action against non-compliant FF members, especially when animal welfare is compromised
  - (ix) A review system to monitor the effectiveness of FF assessors
  - (x) Inclusion within the strategy of outcome-based assessments

## Introduction

1. There are approximately 8 million dogs in the United Kingdom, 8 million cats and 1 million pet rabbits. It is estimated that there is a total of 67 million pets in the United Kingdom, of which around 45 million are fish.
2. There are 900 million farmed animals in the UK, excluding farmed fish. According to DEFRA, on 1 December 2012 there were 9.7 million cattle in the UK, 4.2 million pigs and 22.9 million sheep. Laying hens, chickens and farmed fish make up the majority of the other farmed species.
3. The *Freedom Food* (“FF”) scheme aims to ensure that all animals within the scheme enjoy the Five Freedoms, which are derived from the Government’s Farm Animal Welfare Council:
  - Freedom from hunger and thirst
  - Freedom from discomfort
  - Freedom from pain, injury and disease
  - Freedom to express normal behaviour
  - Freedom from fear and distress
4. It might be thought that these are the minimum standards that any animal kept in the UK could expect to enjoy. However, that is not the case. In 2011 (the last year for which published figures are available) only 75 million farmed animals (8% of the UK’s population) were reared under the FF scheme. Some, including some animals raised under organic farming schemes, may also have benefited from higher standards. However, the overwhelming majority of the UK’s farmed animals will not have done.
5. The RSPCA, through its FF scheme, has a vital role to play in improving the welfare of hundreds of millions of animals. The RSPCA has a long and distinguished history in animal welfare. Despite criticisms in recent years, it continues to attract admiration and respect across the world. The RSPCA’s tireless work in promoting the welfare of domestic pets is well known,

and deserves wholehearted support. However, greater promotion of the FF scheme could lead to vast welfare benefits for huge numbers of farmed animals, who outnumber domestic pets by almost 40 to 1<sup>1</sup>.

6. There may well be those within the RSPCA who oppose fundamentally the farming of animals, and who therefore do not wish to support a scheme that appears to promote and perpetuate such farming. However, the British public is not, within the foreseeable future, going to give up eating animal products. A reduction in years to come of the number of farmed animals will not help any animal which is being farmed right now. Further, it is of course currently no part of RSPCA policy to campaign for an end to the farming of animals. Goal 4.11 of the RSPCA's animal welfare goals is "to increase the proportion of farm animals reared under higher welfare systems in the UK".
7. The panel believes that the starting point for any review of FF must be a recognition that there are millions of animals who, this year and in years to come, could have their welfare enhanced through greater participation by producers, retailers and consumers in the FF scheme.
8. Some consultees indicated that they felt FF to be a commercial operation, run largely for the benefit of producers, retailers and consumers, in which the RSPCA should have only a limited role. The panel does not share that view. The underlying purpose of FF is to promote and enhance the welfare of farmed animals; it achieves its objective by creating a commercial incentive for producers and retailers, but that incentive does not in any way dilute the essential purpose.
9. The aims of FF are, in our opinion, wholly consistent with the central aim of the RSPCA to improve animal welfare. The panel believes that continued and increased support from the RSPCA for FF will not only be essential to FF's future success but will also enable the RSPCA to improve the lives of hundreds of millions of animals.

<sup>1</sup> These figures exclude both farmed fish and fish kept as pets.

## ***The Freedom Food scheme***

### **Background to FF: structure and funding**

#### **(i) Structure**

10. FF is the RSPCA's farm assurance and food labelling scheme. It was established by the RSPCA in 1994. It aims to improve the welfare of animals farmed for food and to offer consumers a welfare choice. It assesses farms, hauliers and abattoirs by reference to the RSPCA's welfare standards.
11. Freedom Food Limited is a company with charitable status. It is a wholly owned subsidiary of the RSPCA. As the sole shareholder, RSPCA has ultimate control of FF. Management of FF's activities is delegated to a board answerable to the shareholder. The board includes RSPCA appointed members and the RSPCA's Chief Executive is a member of FF's board ex officio. Decisions concerning applications by individual farms, hauliers and abattoirs for membership of the FF scheme are regulated by an independent certification body, NSF International.
12. Before a farm, haulier or abattoir may join the FF scheme, an FF approved assessor must carry out a detailed audit of the unit or business. If every standard applicable to that unit or business is met, membership of FF may be conferred subject to standard membership terms, and the FF label can be used on that farm's or business's products when retailed.
13. Once in the scheme, members are then subject to re-assessment by FF. In addition, the RSPCA's Farm Livestock Officers ["FLOs"] carry out random spot checks on a proportion of members annually, with a view to ensuring that members are adhering to RSPCA welfare standards.

14. The RSPCA's Farm Animals Department ("FAD") is responsible for the development of the RSPCA's farm animal welfare standards. FAD reports to the Farm Animal Strategic Committee ("FASC") which oversees RSPCA policy on farm animal welfare. New standards proposed by FAD, if approved by FASC, are then put to the RSPCA Council for final approval.
15. In December 2011 FF had 3,382 members, comprising 8,080 production units with certificates.

**(ii) Funding**

16. FF is funded from several sources. These are first, an annual grant from the RSPCA; secondly, fees payable by FF members; thirdly, licence fees payable by processors/packers for land animals and producers in the case of salmon; and fourthly, by retailers and caterers who use the Freedom Food label.
17. RSPCA also provides various staff resources to FF without charge to assist FF in managing implementation of its objectives for farm animals, and also provides assistance in personnel and financial management.
18. Part of the RSPCA's annual grant to FF is subsequently paid back to the RSPCA as surplus for the relevant year under a reserve fund policy.
19. The FF scheme is unique; no other food labelling scheme in the United Kingdom is focused purely on animal welfare. RSPCA welfare standards used by the FF scheme have been described as aiming to be at the "stretching end of achievable". They represent an acceptable standard which promotes higher animal welfare while ensuring that animal products are still affordable to consumers who wish to purchase higher welfare food.

20. This report has to answer two essential questions:
  - (i) What is the purpose (or what should be the purpose) of the FF scheme: and
  - (ii) How should that purpose best be achieved?
  
21. This report has been divided into three sections. The first examines the purpose of FF. The second looks at the strategies and policies that FF could put in place to achieve that purpose. The third considers funding questions, and other issues arising from the consultation process.

## SECTION 1

### **The purpose of the FF scheme**

22. The essential purpose of the scheme, from its inception, has been (and remains) to promote improved standards of animal welfare among commercially farmed animals.
23. However, within that broad purpose, a number of issues arise, the principal one of which now concerns the size of the scheme. Should FF accreditation be available only to a limited number of farmers who can demonstrate that the welfare standards of their animals are significantly above those of the industry norm? Or should the scheme be as wide as possible, raising welfare standards to a certain extent for larger numbers of animals, but perhaps not raising them to as high a standard as one would like?
24. The panel received a wide range of views on this issue. Our conclusion is that, at least for the immediate and short term future, the FF label should represent a standard that is significantly above the industry norm. This is for the following reasons:
  - (i) the existence of the FF scheme has already driven up welfare standards generally, at least in respect of the farming of certain species. If FF's high standards are maintained, it is reasonable to hope that standards outside the scheme will continue to be driven upwards;
  - (ii) However, the FF brand is not yet sufficiently well known, and the benefits of membership of the scheme not yet great enough, to attract the majority of the UK's farmers to join it;
  - (iii) In a time of global recession, it will be difficult to persuade large numbers of farmers to make the investment necessary to meet animal welfare and operation of the FF scheme standards;

- (iv) In the short term, the only means of attracting more farmers to join the scheme would (in respect of many species) require RSPCA to lower its animal welfare standards. That is not acceptable for welfare reasons, nor would it be acceptable to existing FF members who have already invested to meet FF requirements;
  - (v) The RSPCA and FF will need to do more to promote FF, to give it a significantly higher profile in the minds of consumers, before larger numbers of farmers will be persuaded to invest to meet RSPCA welfare standards.
25. There is inevitably a tension in this approach. The ultimate aim of the RSPCA must surely be for all farmed animals to be reared, housed, transported and ultimately slaughtered in accordance with acceptable (ideally high) welfare standards. The Freedom Food website states that its aim is “to change the way of life for as many farm animals as possible”.
26. There are inevitable challenges associated with ensuring that the RSPCA standards are pitched at the right level. Standards should provide both a meaningful welfare choice to consumers and retailers above the industry norm and yet should be achievable by farms operating in a commercial context. There can be a complex relationship between the level of uptake and the level of standard. High levels of uptake in some livestock sectors (e.g. non-cage laying hens) may be an indicator of success, as the FF scheme is influencing a large number of farms. However, this success conflicts with a desire to have a challenging standard that exceeds the industry norm.
27. The RSPCA standards for broiler chickens are a step above the industry norm with associated higher cost of production and consequently lower levels of uptake. Low uptake in other sectors such as dairy, beef and sheep may reflect insufficient engagement or marketing within a sector or, as in the case of milk, logistical challenges associated with the traceability of the product from individual farms.

28. The FF scheme in the short term will improve the welfare of a relatively small proportion of the UK's farmed animals, with the goal of driving up standards more generally. The panel recommends that, in the medium to long term, the RSPCA should aim for the standards of FF to be met by a far larger number of farmers, especially where uptake has been low, as it has been for dairy, beef and sheep. However, any initiative to increase membership should not compromise the level of welfare expected on FF approved farms. The reputation of the scheme and the RSPCA depends upon maintaining high standards.
  
29. FF is already well represented in some sectors. Approximately 70% of farmed salmon and 90% of free range eggs are farmed within the FF scheme. Again, in the longer term, the RSPCA and FF may need to consider whether to continue to promote FF at all in sectors in which high standards of welfare have become the norm. FF may prefer to concentrate its limited resources on species and types of farming in which welfare is a greater problem. This, however, is an issue for the future; FF has not yet achieved in the farming of any species the level of saturation that would enable it to say that FF status was no longer needed in that area.

## SECTION 2

### **The means of fulfilling FF's purpose**

30. In this section of the report, we address the following issues:
  - A. The relationship between the RSPCA and FF;
  - B. The need for a new strategy for FF.

#### **A. The relationship between the RSPCA and FF**

##### **(i) RSPCA support**

31. The majority of consultees agreed that the high-profile presence of the RSPCA as the backer and monitor of the FF scheme was, and remains, essential to the scheme's success. The RSPCA has a high degree of recognition and respect among the general public. The FF label has no comparable degree of recognition. In 2012, 24% of shoppers said that they were aware of the FF brand when they were prompted by being given its name. Only 3.4% named *Freedom Food* when asked to think of a label associated with higher standards of animal welfare.
32. Some consultees expressed concern about the closeness of the relationship between the RSPCA and FF, with a few believing that there was, or could be, a conflict of interest between the two.
33. The potential for conflict was seen to exist in respect of issues affecting farming and rural life, such as badger culling or hunting with dogs, in which the RSPCA has taken a stance with which all farmers do not necessarily agree.
34. It seems to the panel that there is no need for such a conflict to exist, or to be perceived. The RSPCA clearly must be free not only to express views on issues such as these, but also to press for a change in the law or to

organise high profile campaigns. It may be that the RSPCA's view on, say, badger culling, differs significantly from that of some farmers, including farmers within the FF scheme. However, the FF scheme concerns predominantly the welfare of farmed animals and the associated labelling of products. It is essential that those who take part in the FF scheme are reassured that the RSPCA's stance on other issues does not in any way undermine the RSPCA's commitment to the FF programme.

35. The RSPCA should at every opportunity make clear its unequivocal support for the FF scheme. It is important that public statements made on behalf of the RSPCA are all consistent with the existence and aims of FF. The panel recognises that many committed members of the RSPCA will be vegetarians or vegans, and may well oppose the farming of animals on principle. However, the practical reality is that animals will continue to be farmed in the UK in vast numbers for the foreseeable future. FF is an RSPCA initiative designed to improve the welfare of those animals. It must be supported by those at all levels of the RSPCA. It would not make sense for the RSPCA, having created FF, and devoted substantial resources to it, not to support it fully.

**(ii) RSPCA's Farm Animal Department**

36. Some consultees were critical of the role of the RSPCA's Farm Animal Department ["FAD"], perceiving an unhelpful level of interference with FF.
37. Major retailers commented upon poor communications between FF and FAD. For example, one retailer talked about a "strained" relationship. Another respondent observed, "There has often been confusion as to who is in charge of FF and relations between the two organisations have not always been positive."
38. Although the independence of certification decisions is guaranteed by the involvement of the accredited certification body, NSF-CMi (now NSF International), the panel agrees that some separation between FAD and FF

is necessary to ensure that operational issues do not unduly influence RSPCA standards. There are also benefits in maintaining some separation between the roles of RSPCA monitors and FF assessors.

39. However, it is clear that, in order to devise a workable, shared strategy, and one that has the full support of the RSPCA, the FAD must work much more closely with FF. The panel recommends that the head of the RSPCA's FAD should be an ex-officio member of FF's board, in order to establish better understanding and communications between the RSPCA and FF.

**B. A new strategy**

**(i) Outline of the panel's proposals**

40. FF is currently the leading farm animal welfare scheme in the UK. In order to maintain and enhance its position, FF requires a strong leadership structure which ensures that FF and FAD develop and implement an agreed strategy. It is crucial that this strategy has the full support of the RSPCA Council.
41. At the moment, the focus of FF appears to be on the increasing FF membership numbers. The consultation process has led this panel to conclude that the maintenance or improvement of quality is at the present time of greater importance than an increase in the quantity of FF members.
42. The panel recommends that a detailed strategy be devised and implemented which maximises:
- (i) welfare improvements for animals within the FF scheme;
  - (ii) the FF scheme's ability to influence the welfare of animals outside the FF scheme in the United Kingdom; and
  - (iii) (insofar as this is practicable) the ability of the FF scheme to influence the welfare standards of animals internationally.

43. The panel recognises that FF's ability to influence welfare outside the scheme will be very largely dependent upon its effectiveness in improving welfare standards within the FF scheme.
44. The FF strategy should:
  - (i) include clear objectives and milestones, and target times at which each objective should be met;
  - (ii) be developed through close collaboration between FF and FAD, under the leadership of the new FF CEO and the RSPCA's Head of Farm Animals.
45. The panel recommends that the person specification and remit of the new CEO should take account of the need for the CEO to undertake this critical task.
46. The RSPCA Council must have ultimate ownership and approval of the new strategy. The panel recommends that the new strategy should be available for consideration by the RSPCA Council within six months of appointment of the new FF CEO.
47. The specific governance arrangements for developing and implementing the new strategy must be carefully defined. Since the remit of the strategy must be broader than simply a plan for the robust implementation of standards, the panel recommends that both the FF board and FASC should have oversight of development of the detailed strategy prior to consideration by the RSPCA Council.
48. The panel recommends that the membership and remit of both the FF Board and FASC should be reviewed in the light of plans to devise and implement a new strategy. The FF Board and FASC may be suitable for the task of creating and developing the new strategy; however, care must be taken to ensure that the bodies made responsible for this task contain an appropriate mix of skills and expertise. Those body or bodies should include RSPCA trustees (to maintain good dialogue with the RSPCA

Council), members with scientific expertise (to ensure a robust evidence-based approach) and those with political and commercial awareness (to ensure that the RSPCA approach is pitched at a realistic level). In order to achieve good communication, the FF CEO and the Head of FAD should be asked to attend (ex-officio) the meetings of both the FF Board and FASC.

49. The panel recognises that the RSPCA provides the majority of the funding for the FF scheme and will clearly wish in future to direct the strategy of FF. The RSPCA may wish to change the manner in which the Board of FF is appointed. The RSPCA may wish to consider establishing an appointments committee of trustees who are responsible for the recruiting and appointment of all FF Directors according to Nolan principles for fixed terms with the RSPCA CEO being a member ex officio of the appointments committee. The continuity of the Board would thereby be improved and Directors appointed according to their relevant skills.
50. As part of the new FF strategy, the governance structure should be reviewed generally to ensure appropriate stakeholder engagement. In particular the composition and function of species working groups and other technical forums should be reviewed in order to ensure appropriate stakeholder engagement with the standards development process.

**(ii) Details of the proposed new strategy**

51. The panel recommends that the new strategy should address the following issues:
  - a) The maintenance of higher welfare standards;
  - b) Increased transparency;
  - c) Assessment;
  - d) Enforcement;
  - e) Communication and marketing;
  - f) FF's influence on welfare in the UK outside the FF scheme;
  - g) FF's international role.

**(a) The maintenance of higher welfare standards: the setting of standards and derogations**

**(i) The setting of standards**

52. It is clear that, at least in the short to medium term, FF should provide a genuine, higher welfare choice and that RSPCA farmed animal welfare standards must be higher than the industry norm.
53. The strategy should:
- (i) emphasise that the animal welfare requirements of the scheme are science- and evidence-based;
  - (ii) recognise the practicalities for the future development of animal welfare standards.
  - (iii) where possible, define principles such as avoidance of mutilations, that should apply to all species.
54. A criticism made repeatedly on behalf of FF members was that standards were changed with unreasonable frequency. It was said that members invested in a certain method of husbandry, often spending considerable sums, only for the requirements of the scheme to change, requiring further investment before the previous outlay had been recouped.
55. The panel recognises that animal welfare is at the forefront of the FF scheme. The panel also acknowledges that constant advances are made in the field of farm animal welfare and husbandry and that advice on best practice may change frequently. However, any requirements placed on FF members have to be commercially viable. FF members are likely to become disillusioned, and may even leave the scheme, if unrealistic expectations are placed upon them.
56. It is also crucial that welfare requirements which are imposed on members are science-based and can be justified objectively. There was a feeling among some FF members that requirements were imposed by people who

did not have a complete understanding of the nature of the farming in question. Whilst industry respondents recognised that industry experts were involved in the species-specific working groups, there was a general perception that their views were ignored at times and that frequent standards changes were sometimes forced through without due consideration of their practical application, creating uncertainty for investment decisions in the industry. Several respondents commented upon the changes to tail docking requirements as an example. To maintain the credibility of FF among the farming community, FF requirements should be demonstrably evidence-based.

57. The panel understands that, at the moment, each standard is proposed by the RSPCA's Farm Animals Department. If deemed 'major' by FAD the proposal is then sent to the RSPCA's FASC, or Strategic Animal Welfare Panel and then to the RSPCA's Council.
58. The panel queries the necessity for a proposed standard to go through so many committees, particularly since those reviewing the proposals do not, in general terms, have relevant expertise.
59. The panel recommends that, in future, the FAD should continue to propose new standards. Those proposals should be reviewed by a single panel with expertise in the relevant area; the panel should include those with scientific knowledge and those with commercial experience in the industry concerned.
60. The panel believes strongly that the setting of new standards must always remain with the RSPCA, as the credibility of the FF scheme depends upon its independence from RSPCA on the matter of setting standards. However, the panel recognises that relevant individuals within FF and the RSPCA are to be able to make submissions to FAD about any proposed standard before FAD sends the standard for review by the expert panel.

61. The panel also recommends that each proposed new standard should be accompanied by clear and concise text, explaining:
  - (i) The science underlying the standard; and
  - (ii) The animal welfare benefits that are intended to accrue from it.
  
62. One consultee suggested that it would be helpful if each standard (in final form) could be accompanied by a brief statement as to the issue that the standard is intended to address or the outcome that it is intended to achieve. The panel supports this suggestion.
  
63. The panel recommends that new standards be tested through the use of farm-based pilot schemes, giving adequate time and resources for review and alteration of the new standards, before they are imposed nationally. The strategy should address the issue of funding of the pilot scheme. Further, new standards should be devised by panels with true expertise in the relevant farming area, to ensure that the standards set meet the highest practicable animal welfare requirements while remaining commercially viable.
  
64. The panel recommends that existing FF farmers be consulted in respect of any proposed change in standards, and that representatives of FF farmers in the relevant species should always be included within any group proposing such changes.

**(ii) Derogations from standards**

65. On occasions Freedom Food permits a relaxation to its full extent of the application of RSPCA animal welfare standards. Such relaxations are known as derogations. One example of a derogation is the permission given by the FF board (with support from the RSPCA) for use of an infra red technique to trim the beaks of laying hens in substitution for the hot blade beak trimming technique which is permitted by the RSPCA standard. On occasion the FF board permits derogations against the advice of the RSPCA's FAD. An example is certification by FF of farms who have

sourced rearing stock from non-FF farming units, which is contrary to RSPCA standards.

66. The issue of derogations can be controversial. One retailer raised concerns about the fact that FF is able to allow derogations to standards without those derogations being first approved by the RSPCA. The consultee regarded this practice as having the potential to weaken the scheme; the RSPCA's approval of standards was regarded by the overwhelming majority of consultees as critical to the success of the scheme. The panel shares that concern. Derogations should be permitted by FF only where approved by FASC, provided that the FASC members have sufficient technical expertise. If this recommendation is accepted, measures should be put in place to ensure that derogation issues are dealt with in a timely manner.

**(b) Transparency**

67. The FF scheme has nothing to hide and plenty to celebrate. FF should work with farmers who are proud of their livestock to promote greater knowledge and understanding of livestock farming amongst the general public. Many charities, including the RSPCA's education department and farming organisations, are actively promoting the engagement of school children and consumers in farming. In December 2011 DEFRA's Farm Animal Welfare Committee reported that a million children a year visited farms.
68. As part of the new FF strategy, specific initiatives should be developed to support increased transparency and engagement of the public amongst its membership. For example, a long term aim could be that all FF members should allow consumers directly to observe the welfare conditions on their farms at least once annually. Such observation could be achieved by a range of different methods, such as web-based camera systems, viewing windows on the side of buildings, open days or school visits. Any such scheme would need to be carefully controlled to ensure the welfare of the animals was not adversely affected and there was no risk to biosecurity.

69. A culture of transparency could also be promoted if FF facilitated voluntary sharing of information. For example, many farmers might want to make public some details of the welfare status on their farms such as their FF membership status, their production system and a summary of welfare outcome results. The panel recognises that, at the moment, some FF farmers fear that they will be targeted by animal welfare or animal rights groups if they announce publicly that they are FF members. In these circumstances, it is impossible to require farmers to make their FF status public. However, if the confidence of other animal welfare and rights groups in the FF scheme could be gained, publication of FF status should be possible and should actively be encouraged.
70. As part of the increased transparency culture a renewed attempt should be made at engaging those in the animal welfare community who are not supportive of the animal welfare improvement goals of the FF scheme. Since some of these groups oppose the farming of animals on principle, their support will inevitably be difficult to obtain. However, since all concerned must recognise that the farming of animals will continue in the UK for the foreseeable future, it is hoped that these welfare groups will be persuaded to join the RSPCA and FF in promoting higher welfare standards for these animals. The groups already recognise that a goal to end the farming of animals does not preclude campaigners from working to promote the welfare of those animals that are currently farmed.
71. The confidence of these groups in FF has been lost because of the perceived failings by the RSPCA and/or FF to identify and deal robustly with abuse and neglect of animals within FF farms. The panel believes that there is no purpose to be served in continuing a debate as to whether those allegations are correct or not. The groups are absolutely right to say that neglect, abuse and cruelty should be identified wherever it exists, and the perpetrators prosecuted and/or (at the very least) removed publicly from the FF scheme. If other animal welfare and rights groups have confidence that the RSPCA and FF will take effective action in such cases, then co-operation with those groups may be restored.

72. Further, public confidence in FF will be badly dented if (i) alleged abuse is again exposed by third parties, having apparently not been detected by the RSPCA or by FF assessors; and/or (ii) those found to have abused animals are permitted to remain in the FF scheme (or are re-admitted after an unduly short period of suspension).

**(c) Assessment**

**(i) Inspection and monitoring**

73. It was clear from the consultation that the independence of FF from the farming and retail sectors was highly valued, and was seen as a major factor in the integrity of the FF scheme overall. Independent assessment of FF members was seen as key to promoting and maintaining confidence in the scheme.
74. The panel explored the possibility that monitoring by the RSPCA's Farm Livestock Officers ("FLOs") could be combined with FF assessments. Having considered the issue, the panel acknowledges that such a merger is not practicable. The monitors provide the essential independent oversight. They may (and currently do) take risk into account when deciding which premises to visit, although we would wish for the risk assessment to be more formalised. They can (and do) provide advice to the producers. FF assessors have a formal role, requiring annual inspection (at a minimum). FF staff can (and do) provide guidance, but not as part of the assessment process. In accordance with UKAS requirements, FF assessors must undertake impartial assessments and so cannot provide specific instructions on solutions. However, assessors can and do encourage the spread of best practice among FF members. This encouragement has the potential to improve animal welfare very significantly; the panel recommends that FF staff continue and expand their work in this area.

75. In order for the FF scheme to have credibility, any system of monitoring, assessment and enforcement must be robust, transparent and consistent. The responses from consultees indicated that confidence in the scheme's robustness was lacking, from the perspective both of farmers and of animal welfare groups.
76. Having considered the consultees' responses, the panel recommends that a regime involving self-assessment by FF members should not, in general, be adopted. FF may wish to consider permitting verifiable self-assessment in respect of low-risk aspects of the scheme, such as the provision and verification of paperwork. However, the panel remains concerned that any element of self-assessment will (rightly or wrongly) create a perception that the FF scheme lacks sufficient independent scrutiny. Such a perception will lead to a loss of trust in the FF brand.
77. The majority of consultees who considered the issue of unannounced inspections agreed that they were necessary. The panel agrees, and believes that such inspections are essential, both to create and maintain public trust in the FF scheme, and in order to improve the prospects of uncovering abuse. The panel believes that the current unannounced visits from RSPCA monitors should continue and the potential for unannounced visits from FF assessors should be retained within the membership agreement. Defining the optimum use of these assessments should be an important component of the new strategy to ensure robust implementation of the standards.
78. The panel recommends that:
- (i) Each FF member should continue to be subject to an annual, announced inspection by FF. The member should be given 24 hours notice of that inspection;
  - (ii) Unannounced inspections by FF assessors should be made. The FF agreement with members permits such inspections to take place. The RSPCA state that in 2010, 75% of all monitoring visits were unannounced. Careful consideration should be given to increasing

the level of unannounced monitoring visits;

- (iii) In order to use resources most effectively, unannounced inspections should be targeted, and should focus on new FF members and on high risk members and those identified in previous inspections as having been non-compliant with FF welfare requirements;
- (iv) The panel recognises the central importance of the RSPCA FLOs' monitoring visits. Their ability to provide evidence promptly to FF of any failings by FF members is key to the FF scheme. FLOs' monitoring visits should continue. These should be unannounced and independent from FF assessments and inspections. The panel understands that these visits are already made on a risk-assessment basis, although there may be value in such risk assessment being carried out centrally and formalised. If possible FLO monitoring activity should be increased, and carefully targeted towards higher risk units, with an emphasis on more unannounced visits.

79. Some consultees suggested that FF should in some way reward good performance by FF members. A reduction in the number of unannounced inspections to members performing well would follow automatically if a risk-based approach to unannounced inspections were adopted. However, the panel would be wary of any policy that reduced inspections and monitoring below a meaningful level, however well the FF member in question was performing. The risk of FF not detecting a reduction in performance levels would be unacceptably high. The consequences of the RSPCA and/or FF failing to detect falling standards may be catastrophic, both in terms of the welfare of the animals concerned and in terms of the very public damage that may be done to the reputation of the FF scheme.

**(ii) Training and competence of monitors and assessors**

80. There appeared to be widespread support for existing procedures, although some respondents recognised the high cost of the monitoring by the RSPCA's FLOs. One retailer suggested that the involvement of third parties in inspections weakens the integrity of the scheme.

81. The panel agrees that it would be ideal if all FF assessors were FF employees. However, the panel recognises that, in practice, it will be necessary for FF to rely on self-employed assessors to complement its existing staff. The panel recommends that the performance of all assessors (but particularly those who are self-employed) be closely monitored.
82. The panel recommends that, as part of the new strategy, the roles and responsibilities of all individuals in FF and FAD who can influence the implementation of standards should be clarified. Consistency of approach when assessing or monitoring farms is essential. For example, variable technical interpretation of standards is a potential cause of major reputational risk; that risk needs to be carefully controlled.
83. The panel suggests that FLO monitors should continue to visit some farms to monitor a sample of farms between annual FF assessment visits. However, the new FF strategy should also consider the use of suitably trained FLOs to observe FF assessments directly. The panel consider that the interaction between the FF assessor and producer is so critical to the reputation of the scheme that the RSPCA should instigate a review system to monitor the effectiveness of the assessors. This should be seen as a mechanism of sharing best practice between FF assessors.
84. The role of the RSPCA's Field Operations Manager and its Head of FAD in the management and supervision of FLOs are acknowledged by the panel and are to be encouraged.

**(iii) Increased efficiency**

85. The FF strategy should specify detailed methods for increasing the efficiency of existing assessment procedures, especially those involving joint assessments with other welfare schemes.
86. The panel understands that FF staff and agents, while carrying out FF assessments, also carry out Red Tractor assessments. Whilst the Red Tractor

scheme has animal welfare requirements primarily based on legislation and DEFRA codes, it is also broader in scope, covering other matters such as food safety and environmental issues. The Red Tractor scheme imposes different requirements from FF and (in general terms) lower animal welfare standards. Nevertheless, it does operate within an accredited certification framework and so does provide some assurance to the market.

87. Some may perceive there to be something inherently unattractive about FF assessors being used to approve a system requiring lower welfare standards. On the other hand, the panel recognises that time and money are saved by the combination of the two assessments. Further, the combined assessments address concerns raised by farmers, namely the time taken by, and biosecurity risks of, repeated inspections.
88. The panel therefore recommends that these combined inspections be permitted to continue.
89. Joint assessments undoubtedly provide an important time-saving benefit to the farmers. However, it is clear the assessment procedures have not been designed to maximise the efficiency of the assessor. The checklist has not been designed to collate data efficiently in a farm environment, which leads to duplication of effort. Maximising the time available for animal welfare assessment and discussion is essential for the welfare improvement goals of the scheme. FF should, therefore, work with other schemes and NSF International to develop more efficient procedures that maximise the time available for assessors to observe livestock directly. The fee structure should also be reviewed to ensure that income derived from joint assessments adequately covers the additional time taken to attend relevant training days, collate additional evidence during a visit and complete the additional paper work after a visit.
90. The panel believes that the increased use of technology could also improve overall efficiency. In particular, tablets would enable assessors to record information electronically on the farm, obviating the need for assessors to

make notes on paper and then enter them onto a computer later. In particular a device that allowed a visual record to be made of specific areas and embedded in an inspection report would be a significant advantage.

91. The panel is concerned that some farms have a number of species, of which only one or some are FF accredited and others are not. In some instances, the farm may have animals of the same species, some of which are FF certified and some of which are not. In the latter situation, there are very real difficulties in establishing traceability. For example, on pig farms it is difficult to see how one can verify that pigs reared in FF-approved pens are destined for a FF-labelled product whereas pigs from the same farm but kept in pens of a different design are not. The panel's view is that the possibility of some animals but not others on the same farm being within the scheme is a recipe for confusion and error, and also gives the impression that the farmer is not wholeheartedly behind FF standards. We recommend that each site should be either wholly in or wholly out of the FF scheme, although we recognise that there may be practical difficulties in the case of very large sites. Each site should be readily identifiable by reference to an appropriate map and/or DEFRA holding number.

**(iv) Welfare outcome assessments**

92. The consultees who expressed an opinion on monitoring were virtually unanimous in arguing for welfare outcome assessment ["WOA"]. WOA is a practical and scientifically informed way to measure welfare in farmed animals. It aims to provide an effective, accurate and direct picture of animal welfare. The panel is aware that a WOA scheme, AssureWel, is being introduced in collaboration with the Soil Association and University of Bristol.
93. The panel recommends that the wider application of the outcome-based approach is included as part of the new FF strategy and that FF should continue to collaborate with others to define the optimum approach. By

using welfare outcomes to promote continuous improvement at a farm and thereby scheme level, the aim should be to ensure that the FF scheme truly delivers on its welfare aspirations.

94. The principle of transparency should also apply to summaries of welfare outcome data. Progress on welfare improvement should be reviewed and reported regularly. Since the outcome measures that are being used are primarily health rather than behaviour based, the panel recommends that outcome data is presented in an appropriate context i.e. as a farm level management tool encouraging farmers to take action, or as part of scheme reports that concurrently present the FF requirements for behavioural freedom.

**(v) Guidance to FF members**

95. A recurring complaint by farmers was to the effect that farmers did not receive sufficient guidance and assistance from FF in understanding and applying the requirements of the FF scheme. The panel regards it as essential for FF to employ and train staff who can provide the necessary guidance to potential and actual FF members.

96. FF may wish to consider training individual members of staff in the requirements of a specific type of farming, in order to build up expertise. Staff members who are experts in a particular area should be made available, whether by telephone, email or otherwise, to assist FF members.

**(d) Enforcement**

97. Robust assessment and the provision of guidance will be pointless unless firm action is taken against those FF members found to have been in breach of FF requirements. There is however undoubtedly a distinction to be made between those farmers who have failed to complete paperwork correctly and those who are found to have abused their animals.

98. The panel recommends that:
- (i) an FF member found to have committed any serious breach of animal welfare or to have failed repeatedly to comply with other requirements of the scheme is expelled from the FF scheme;
  - (ii) after expulsion, the former member may not apply to re-join the scheme for a significant fixed period (perhaps in the order of five years);
  - (iii) any evidence of neglect, cruelty or other abuse of an animal by an FF member is reported to the RSPCA Inspectorate for investigation. The RSPCA can then consider prosecution in appropriate cases;
  - (iv) minor breaches of the scheme should lead to suspension until an assessment is conducted showing compliance. Repeated minor breaches could lead to expulsion;
  - (v) FF staff, assessors and FLOs should be trained to record their findings, preserve evidence and take other necessary steps in order to assist in prosecutions;
  - (vi) The FF website should carry a list of members of FF and should also carry the details of those suspended and expelled, and the reasons for suspension or expulsion.
99. The panel acknowledges that there may be legal difficulties in imposing a draconian penalty such as expulsion with no right to re-apply for a fixed period (or at all). FF may wish to consider establishing an appeal process under which any FF member could appeal against any finding or sanction against it.
100. Some respondents have suggested that FF may also wish to consider publishing on its website a summary of the inspections (both announced and unannounced) that its FF assessors and the RSPCA FLOs have carried out. Again, the panel recognises that, in the present climate, FF farmers may not wish to have their status made public. An alternative approach would be to provide positive information as discussed in the transparency section earlier. The panel recommends that, at the very least, FF should make public anonymised information on the proportion of farms assessed and monitored.

101. There seems no reason, however, not to publicise the names of those who have been expelled, or subject to other sanctions, for breach of the RSPCA standards. Some of this information may be provided via a controlled access list, available to those in the supply chain who need this information. The panel understands that no such list of producers is currently available (although the FF website invites potential purchasers to telephone FF in order to obtain details of producers). The new strategy, which should be promoting a culture of transparency as well as rigorous enforcement, should define the optimum approach for publishing such information.
102. It is obviously essential that potential purchasers such as retailers and caterers can readily check whether a supplier is still a member of FF; details of expelled former members must therefore be made accessible.
103. The panel notes with some concern that it was not easy for it to obtain from FF details of those members and former members of FF who had been found to have breached FF requirements; in particular it was difficult to obtain information about the sanctions, if any, applied to those members, or about any prosecutions. The panel recommends strongly that FF maintains detailed records of all members and former members who have failed to comply with FF standards. Such records are essential for enforcement action, if nothing else; FF must know a member's history, including any history of previous non-compliance, when determining any sanction for further non-compliance.
104. The panel also has grave concerns that the FF Board has not grappled in the past with the serious implications of instances of animal abuse by FF members. It is obvious that such abuse:
- (i) harms the animals subjected to it (and the numbers of animals involved may be large); and
  - (ii) may cause catastrophic damage to public confidence in the FF scheme, particularly if it was third parties, and not FF or RSPCA staff, who detected and publicised the abuse in the first place.

105. It is essential that the FF Board is seen to act robustly, both in identifying instances of abuse and in dealing with FF members responsible for it.

**(e) Communication and marketing**

106. The FF scheme will thrive in future only if it achieves a significant level of recognition among consumers. It is demand for FF products that ultimately ensures the scheme's survival. At the moment, the degree of recognition of the FF label among consumers is low. The RSPCA has the resources to increase that level of recognition.

107. As part of the overall FF strategy, a clear communication strategy must be developed in close collaboration with the RSPCA communication team. This strategy will need to consider the optimum branding of the scheme to maximise the potential for consumers to realise a higher welfare choice. The FF scheme should be positioned as a unique higher animal welfare scheme that enhances the reputation of the RSPCA. The RSPCA should make clear its pride in the creation and success of the FF scheme.

108. The communication strategy should be reactive by responding to stories such as the horsemeat scandal to reinforce the value of robust animal welfare assurance systems. These positive messages should be embraced by all RSPCA spokesmen whenever the opportunities are presented.

109. The panel recognises that funds are not infinite and that available resources have to be carefully targeted. Further, no member of the panel has formal marketing expertise in this area, and it is clearly wrong for us to give specific advice in marketing matters. However, the horsemeat scandal did seem to offer an opportunity that should not be missed.

110. The scandal has heightened public awareness of food sourcing. Anecdotal evidence indicates that, in the weeks following the initial news, sales of processed meats fell in supermarkets and rose in local butchers' shops.

Consumers clearly wish to be reassured about the sources of the meat that they are eating. Traceability is one of FF's great strengths.

111. It seems to the panel that this time of raised public consciousness is an ideal time for the RSPCA and FF to bring the FF scheme firmly before the public. Consumers can be reassured that any meat bearing the FF label is exactly what it is said to be and that, if necessary, each item sold can be traced back to a specific farm. The public can be reminded at the same time that FF products come from farms that maintain high standards of animal welfare. We recognise as a panel that the costs of marketing can be high. It is not for us to prescribe the means by which the FF message should be placed before the public. The panel notes, however, that in recent months both Tesco and Sainsbury's have chosen to place full page advertisements in national newspapers. In the case of Tesco, the advertisements apologised for the presence of horsemeat in its products and in the case of Sainsbury's, the advertisements highlighted the fact that no horsemeat had been found. It seems reasonable to the panel to assume that this form of advertising, if thought effective by the big supermarkets, is likely to be effective if used by the RSPCA and FF. It is also reasonable to suppose that as a consequence of this scandal, interest amongst consumers as to how animal-based food products are produced has increased.
112. ***The panel recommends that steps be taken immediately to promote FF in the light of the horsemeat scandal. This is not a matter that should await the formation of FF's new strategy.***
113. The cost effectiveness of the previous consumer-focused marketing activity needs to be carefully scrutinised, given the relatively low brand awareness of FF and the very high public awareness of the RSPCA brand. FF is the RSPCA's scheme. More prominent use of the RSPCA brand would probably achieve greater public awareness of FF, and at lower cost, than promotion of the FF brand.

114. In addition, the RSPCA is in any event in a position to provide effective support at relatively low cost. The RSPCA has at its disposal a national network of branches and volunteers. The panel recognises that each branch is an independent charity and holds a fair degree of autonomy. However, it seems to the panel that a request to branches to put up posters in their local animal home, to hand out FF leaflets and stickers at flag days outside local supermarkets, and to include FF within talks given by RSPCA volunteers within the local community, would be a low cost means of spreading awareness of FF. The FF's Farm Animal Week in mid July 2013 will fall during a major fund-raising period (mid-summer and the end of the school year). RSPCA branches are bound to be holding events on the weekend of 20-21 July. They could be asked to promote FF during those events.
115. Some retailers insist that products meet RSPCA welfare standards, because their own ethical policies require such standards to be met, but do not use the FF logo at the point of sale. It seems to the panel that increased public awareness of the FF scheme might well encourage those retailers to use the FF label. The FF strategy should also consider methods to raise the profile of the FF label, including the requirements for labelling product ingredients.
116. The panel puts forward the following suggestions for the active promotion of FF:
- (i) FF farms could be asked to arrange open days in which members of the public can visit the farms, as long as biosecurity and animal welfare issues can be resolved. Several organisations, such as Farming and Countryside Education, already exist to help farmers organise public events and school visits. Farmers need support to deal with health and safety issues as well as developing the appropriate communication messages.
  - (ii) FF staff members should give talks to schools, colleges, community groups etc, perhaps as part of a package involving a farm visit<sup>2</sup>;
  - (iii) Local RSPCA fund-raising events should promote FF.

<sup>2</sup>The panel notes that in December 2011 DEFRA's Farm Animal Welfare Committee recommended that children at both primary and secondary school level should be taught about farm animal welfare, and that farm visits should be encouraged. Dr David Main, a member of the current panel, was a member of that Committee.

117. An area of the market that FF does not yet appear to have penetrated significantly is that of catered food. The panel understands that restaurants are already being targeted by FF. McDonalds has just announced that all of its pork is to be FF pork. It already uses FF eggs. McDonalds actively publicises its animal welfare and food assurance standards, and such publicity can only assist FF. Greater participation in the FF scheme by other major chains should be actively sought.
118. Costs considerations may make FF food unattractive to publicly-funded and cash-strapped bulk purchasers such as schools, universities, hospitals and prisons. However, these organisations are vast purchasers of animal food products. The panel recommends that the possibility of promoting FF to large providers of catered food be considered. FF should work collaboratively with the Food for Life partnership and the Soil Association catering mark schemes that encourage the use of FF products within a range of institutions.
119. Retailers as well as those in the food service industries should also be targeted. These business to business animal welfare requirements are becoming increasingly important for Corporate Social Responsibility policies. The FF scheme strategy should maximise this potential and not undervalue the benefit to retailers of the link with the RSPCA brand.
120. The panel suggests that, as part of the new strategy discussions, a small working party be set up, to report in 3 months' time, to consider the marketing proposals made above, and to consider FF's marketing strategy as a whole. The panel believes that a complete overhaul of this strategy is needed; promotion of FF is crucial to the scheme's survival and success. The panel recommends that the new CEO of FF should take the lead in addressing this area of FF's work.
121. It is clear, for the reasons given above, that the RSPCA needs to be closely associated with any FF marketing campaign. The RSPCA is highly trusted by the public in the field of animal welfare. In comparison, FF is little known.

**(f) The role of FF in influencing animal welfare outside the scheme in the United Kingdom**

**(i) The relationship between FF and other farm assurance schemes**

122. The panel recommends that the FF scheme should continue to work collaboratively with other schemes where there are common interests. The collaborative work as part of the AssureWel project is an example. As described earlier the RSPCA standard should be above the industry norm. As discussed there is also value in facilitating joint assessment of both FF and Red Tractor schemes. However, the panel believes that the joint assessment should be much more efficient. Perhaps this could be achieved by allowing mutual recognition of similar standards, in order that the assessor can focus his assessment on the key animal welfare differences between the schemes.

123. The panel recommends that FF should seek, in the medium to long term, to include more farmers and more species. As FF membership increases, the relationship between FF and other organisations with lower welfare standards may have to be re-visited.

**(ii) The relationship between FF and other animal welfare organisations**

124. It is to be hoped that an improved monitoring and enforcement system will reduce (if possible, to zero) any instances of animal abuse on FF farms being identified by third parties in circumstances in which the RSPCA and/or FF were unaware of what was happening. The panel's strongest recommendation is for the improvement of enforcement and monitoring procedures so that all can be confident that members are complying with their FF obligations.

125. If confidence in FF monitoring and assessment is restored, a more positive relationship with other animal welfare groups should be achievable.

**(g) The role of FF in influencing animal welfare outside the United Kingdom**

126. The RSPCA has an international reputation as a leading animal welfare organisation and has regular contact with a significant number of other country-specific animal welfare organisations, particularly in Europe through Eurogroup for Animal Welfare [“Eurogroup”]. It is therefore not difficult to encourage those organisations to adopt the FF model in their countries and the panel recommends that the RSPCA should seek to do so, particularly through Eurogroup. Were such schemes to be established and the RSPCA were confident that they were as robust as FF we see no reason why there should not be mutual recognition. The panel is aware of the best practice principles for animal welfare schemes developed as part of the AssureWel project, which could be used to define the critical elements of higher welfare schemes.
127. The panel recognises, however, that the expansion of FF outside the UK may have to be a medium or long term goal. If for no other reason, mutual recognition of welfare-based assurance schemes will be practicable and attractive to producers only if each of these schemes has an existing high profile in its own country.
128. Whilst the focus of the FF scheme should remain with UK production, the panel recommends that RSPCA FAD with the support of FF explore mechanisms for mutual recognition with other high welfare schemes in order to spread best practice and deliver animal welfare benefits outside the UK.

## SECTION 3

### **Funding of FF *Freedom Food***

129. The issue of the funding of the FF scheme is outside the primary scope of this report. Most of the recommendations made in this report will cost money to implement, while some of the efficiency measures could result in reduced costs if implemented efficiently. While the fees paid by FF members, and the licence fees paid by retailers, cover a proportion of the costs of the scheme, the panel understands that FF receives significant financial support from the RSPCA.
130. It was clear from the consultation that farming members of FF cannot be expected to contribute substantially more to the cost of the scheme. One retailer said in terms that the cost of FF products was a barrier to wider uptake of the scheme and that any imposition of further costs, which would inevitably be passed on to the consumer, would have a negative impact overall on the purchasing of FF products. In the current economic climate, any act that increases the price of an FF product is almost certain to damage the scheme.
131. The panel recommends that the new strategy takes account of the cost implications of implementation of the panel's recommendations. The strategy should also address the funding of the FF scheme as a whole (with or without implementation of some or all of the recommendations) and put forward proposals for the ways in which costs might be met in future.
132. While details of the funding arrangements are not a matter for this report, the panel should emphasise its belief that the RSPCA's unequivocal support for FF must include the maintenance by the RSPCA of proper levels of financial support by RSPCA for FF, especially during this crucial phase of the public's anxiety about food sources. The RSPCA should also provide financial (and other) support to grow awareness of FF as a brand and to improve market penetration. The former Chief Executive of FF concluded

in a paper to RSPCA Council in 2011 that the removal of the RSPCA subsidy to FF would necessitate FF being taken over by an external partner or, failing that, FF's outright closure. The current investment by RSPCA in FF amounts to around 1.5% of the total cost base of RSPCA. The panel recommends that all proper steps be taken under professional advice to maintain (at the very least) and, if possible, enhance present RSPCA levels of support for FF.

## **Miscellaneous**

### **The location of FF's headquarters**

133. The panel has seen an article, contained in the April 2013 edition of the Ranger magazine, to the effect that FF's offices may be moving back into RSPCA's own building. The author of the article argues that such a move would compromise FF's independence.
134. The panel does not agree. It has concluded, for the reasons set out above, that greater co-operation is needed between the RSPCA and FF. FF's most valuable marketing asset is its public association with the RSPCA. Further, the panel has recommended that the RSPCA should continue to provide substantial financial support to FF. Strong links between the two are not only inevitable, but should be encouraged. While FF undoubtedly has functions that must remain separate from RSPCA activities, the panel does not believe that the sharing of office space would damage FF at all in the eyes of the public. Ultimately, it is the perception of consumers that is of the greatest importance; FF will flourish only if more customers can be persuaded to buy its endorsed products.
135. Further, the panel recognises that in the current economic climate, savings have to be made. If a move back to RSPCA accommodation would release further funds for FF or other animal welfare activity, the panel believes that to be a good thing.

## **Wildlife impact and mitigation control**

136. It is inevitable that any farming enterprise will attract wildlife that are both a biosecurity risk and an economic risk. It is not compatible for FF as an animal welfare scheme to encourage any means of wild animal control that causes more than the minimum welfare risk to the wild animal species. The panel supports the view that any measures to control wild animals should in the first place seek to exclude them from doing any damage. Where that is not possible any methods of control used must seek to minimise any adverse welfare consequences on the target species.
137. There is considerable controversy amongst producers concerning the standards governing the management of wildlife. In particular many respondents raised the issue of badgers and TB and some respondents raised the issue of the effect of seals on fish farming. These are difficult dilemmas and the review panel considers that this is outside the scope of this review. However, the general principle should be that the RSPCA should make every effort to engage stakeholders with these difficult issues to ensure animal welfare in each sector is progressed.

## **Education**

138. In addition to individual guidance to farmers, it would also be valuable if there were increased awareness of the technical content of the standards in the agricultural community. The FF strategy should consider methods to increase this awareness. For example, it could consider the role of agricultural colleges in teaching agricultural students about the content of different assurance standards.

## **Food labelling**

139. One retailer commented that food labelling requirements of processed products were confusing and too restrictive. The retailer gave the example of a pizza topped with FF chicken. The FF label could not be used unless

the cheese was FF as well. The panel suggests that, in such instances, the label should identify the FF component e.g. “Freedom Food chicken”.

### **Specific species**

140. The panel received many helpful and detailed submissions from consultees concerning specific species. It was not possible for us to deal in any useful level of detail with these submissions in the Report; however we will seek the permission of these consultees to pass their observations on to FF for

## APPENDIX 1

### LIST OF CONSULTEES WHO REPLIED TO THE PANEL'S QUESTIONNAIRE

Company name or surname	First name (if applicable)	Job Title (if applicable)
Agra CEAS Consulting Ltd		
Animal Aid		
Baker	Keith	Non-executive member of the <i>Freedom Food</i> Board
Barker	Irene	
Baylis	Bob	RSPCA Council Trustee
Bluett	Kay	RSPCA Council Trustee
Booker Group Plc		
Bray	Tim	RSPCA Council Trustee
Compassion in World Farming		
Co-operative Group Ltd		
Dierenbescherming (Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals)		
Dowling	Ted	RSPCA Council Trustee
Edwards	Prof Sandra	Department of Agriculture University of Newcastle
Eyton	Audrey	
Food Animal Initiative		
Gardner	Barbara	RSPCA Council Trustee
Grant	Leigh	Former CE, <i>Freedom Food</i> Ltd

Company name or surname	First name (if applicable)	Job Title (if applicable)
Harley	Karen	RSPCA Council Trustee
Hillside Animal Sanctuary		
J Sainsbury's plc		
Kent	Sebastian	(for Mr Julian Richer and Mrs Rosie Richer)
McDonald's Restaurants Ltd		
National Farmers' Union		
National Farmers' Union Scotland		
National Pig Association		
Neil	Heather	CEO, RSPCA Australia
NSF-CMi Certification		
Red Tractor Assurance		
Rimington	Linda	RSPCA Council Trustee
Road Haulage Association		
Ryder	Dr Richard	RSPCA Council Trustee
*Salmon and Trout Association		
Sodexo Group		
Soil Association		
Squair	David	Acting CE, <i>Freedom Food</i> Ltd
Stonegate Farmers Ltd		
Stradbroke (BQP) Pig Producers		
Tesco plc		

Company name or surname	First name (if applicable)	Job Title (if applicable)
Tomlinson	Mike	RSPCA Council Chairman and <i>Freedom Food</i> Board Member
Tomlinson	Christina	RSPCA Council Trustee
Traditional Norfolk Poultry Ltd		
Tredgett	Jane	RSPCA Council Trustee and <i>Freedom Food</i> Board Member
2 Sisters Food Group Limited		
Vaughan	Tom	Non-executive member of the <i>Freedom Food</i> Board
Vergerson	Jeff	
Waitrose Ltd		
*Waitrose Farming Partnership		
Webster	Prof John	Emeritus Professor of Animal Husbandry, University of Bristol
World Society for the Protection of Animals (UK)		
Wrathall	Dr Julia	Head of Farm Animals Department, RSPCA
Yeates	James	Chief Veterinary Officer, RSPCA
<p>*These parties were not formally consulted by the panel but nonetheless provided submissions.</p>		

**APPENDIX 2**  
**QUESTIONNAIRE SENT TO CONSULTEES OTHER**  
**THAN *FREEDOM FOOD***

***FREEDOM FOOD* INDEPENDENT REVIEW**  
**GENERAL QUESTIONS TO CONSULTEES**

**General**

1. What do you consider to be the principal purpose(s) of the *Freedom Food* Scheme and the RSPCA welfare standards?
2. How effective do you consider the *Freedom Food* Scheme and the RSPCA welfare standards to be by reference to the principal purpose(s)?
3. How effective do you consider the *Freedom Food* Scheme to be by reference to the following purposes:
  - a. Ensuring animal welfare of the animals within the *Freedom Food* Scheme?
  - b. Driving up standards in the food industry more generally?
  - c. Driving up animal welfare standards internationally?
  - d. Raising awareness of animal welfare issues?
  - e. Providing a higher animal welfare choice of produce for consumers?
4. Please identify any evidence which underlies your view of the effectiveness of the *Freedom Food* Scheme.
5. Do you consider (a) the public and (b) other relevant parties (please specify) to have confidence in the *Freedom Food* Scheme?
6. Do you consider the *Freedom Food* Scheme to operate transparently? If not, what specific improvements do you think could be made to improve the transparency of the operation of the scheme?
7. Generally, are there any improvements you would suggest being made to the *Freedom Food* Scheme or to RSPCA welfare standards to improve their effectiveness?

### ***Freedom Food* relationship with RSPCA**

1. Are you aware that *Freedom Food* is associated with the RSPCA?
2. Are you aware that *Freedom Food* is a separate company from the RSPCA but is owned and financed by the RSPCA?
3. Do you believe that the RSPCA's connection with *Freedom Food* strengthens the scheme?
4. Do you believe the RSPCA is strengthened by its connection with *Freedom Food*?
5. Do you believe that *Freedom Food* should be directly controlled by the RSPCA, operated through a separate company owned by the RSPCA (as at present) or more loosely connected to the RSPCA?
6. What level of oversight do you believe the RSPCA should have in relation to the *Freedom Food* Scheme?
7. Do you have any observations on the present and historic operation of the relationship between *Freedom Food* and the RSPCA?

### **Membership Agreement**

1. Have you seen the Membership Agreement between *Freedom Food* and suppliers and other members of the *Freedom Food* Scheme? If so:
  - a. Do you consider that the present Membership Agreement is suitable?
  - b. Do you consider that any specific improvements could be made to the Membership Agreement?
  - c. Do you believe that the Membership Agreement strikes the right balance between providing *Freedom Food* with discretion and identifying the specific consequences of particular offences/breaches of the scheme?

### **Membership Numbers**

1. What factors do you believe should regulate the size/number of members of the *Freedom Food* Scheme?
2. Do you believe there is an optimal size for the Scheme?
3. Are you aware of the size of the *Freedom Food* membership? If so:
  - a. Do you consider it to be too large, the right size or too small?
4. Do you consider that there are any particular issues associated with the size of the Scheme?

### **Membership Standards (namely, RSPCA welfare standards as applied by *Freedom Food*)**

1. How high do you believe the animal welfare standards for *Freedom Food* should be?
2. How high do you believe the animal welfare standards for *Freedom Food* are at present?
3. How extensive do you believe the animal welfare standards for *Freedom Food* should be?
4. How detailed do you believe the animal welfare standards for *Freedom Food* should be?
5. By reference to other farm assurance schemes, should *Freedom Food* seek to match or exceed such standards?

### **(1) Assurance and (2) Inspections as conducted by *Freedom Food* assessors and RSPCA Farm Livestock Officers**

1. In order to become a member of the *Freedom Food* Scheme what level of scrutiny should suppliers be subjected to?
2. Please comment on your views as to when (if ever) members should be asked to self-certify matters relating to their compliance with the terms of

the Scheme and when the *Freedom Food* scheme should perform checks to ensure compliance?

3. What evidence should suppliers be required to provide to become a member of *Freedom Food* and to retain membership status?
4. How often do you believe a supplier should be inspected to check their compliance with the membership standards?
5. Who do you believe should carry out inspections of suppliers?
6. How frequently do you believe inspections should be carried out?
7. Do you believe inspections should ever/sometimes/always be notified to suppliers in advance?
8. Please provide any comments on the relationship between the cost of inspections and the need to maintain the integrity of the scheme/confidence in the scheme?

#### **Funding, Price and Awareness**

1. Do you consider that *Freedom Food* has sufficient resources to undertake its work to a high standard at present?
2. If not, where do you believe further funding could and should be derived from (i.e. higher fees to suppliers/food supply chain, higher prices for *Freedom Food* products, licensing fees from retailers, higher contribution from the RSPCA)?
3. Do you consider that increased funding of the *Freedom Food* scheme could lead to significant improvements in the integrity, effectiveness and/or reach of the Scheme?
4. Do you believe that the RSPCA should do more to promote the public awareness of the *Freedom Food* Scheme?
5. Do you consider that the RSPCA should do more to explain the way in which the *Freedom Food* Scheme works?
6. Do you believe more should be done to raise awareness of the animal welfare benefits of the *Freedom Food* scheme by encouraging retailers to require their suppliers in the food industry to be FF members?

## **Relationships**

1. How would you evaluate the relationship between *Freedom Food* and:
  - a. The public?
  - b. Suppliers?
  - c. Retailers?
  - d. Other assurance schemes?
  - e. Relevant scientific community?
  - f. The RSPCA?
  - g. Other animal welfare organisations?
  
2. Do you consider that there are any ways in which the relationships above could be improved?

**Duncan McNair**

**Chairman**

***Freedom Food Independent Review Panel***

**12 February 2013**

## **APPENDIX 3**

### **QUESTIONNAIRE SENT TO *FREEDOM FOOD***

#### ***FREEDOM FOOD* INDEPENDENT REVIEW**

#### **SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO *FREEDOM FOOD***

##### **General positioning of *Freedom Food* (“FF”)**

1. How is FF regarded in the animal food production market?
2. What characteristics distinguish FF from other animal welfare schemes?
3. How are the existence and nature of FF currently communicated to the public?
4. What could be done to improve the level or nature of such communication?
5. If FF is generally regarded as the leading animal welfare assurance scheme, are there risks that it will lose that status? What are those risks and where do they come from?
6. In what ways can FF/RSPCA standards improve animal welfare?
7. What evidence is there that these standards do improve animal welfare?
8. Do you believe FF operates to the full effect it could in improving animal welfare standards? If not:-
  - 8.1 Why not?
  - 8.2 What steps have been taken and are being taken by FF/RSPCA to improve the position?
  - 8.3 With what result so far?
  - 8.4 What further steps could be taken by FF/RSPCA to do so?
  - 8.5 Is anything holding back taking such steps?

##### **9. Marketing and campaigns**

- 9.1 What strategies or campaigns promoting FF are presently underway?
- 9.2 Should any more such promotion be implemented? If so, is anything (for example funding, resistance of retailers) holding this back?
- 9.3 Does a national campaign advertising FF currently exist? If not, why not?

9.4 Is the FF website fit for purpose? Could it be improved? In what respects?

## **10. Public awareness of FF**

10.1 What is the present level of consumer awareness of FF?

10.2 Is it important to increase public awareness of FF?

10.3 How can this be increased?

10.4 Should particular shopper demographic groups be targeted, if so which ones and how?

10.5 Should FF target sectors of overall British meat shoppers?

10.6 Should particular focus be placed on targeting those most interested in higher animal welfare, e.g. those who may not insist on organic or free range produce but:-

10.6.1 Want higher welfare products?

10.6.2 Are most positively disposed towards certified indoor or outdoor farming systems?

10.6.3 Already have as a group a higher awareness of FF and trust it as to traceability, and independence from the retailers?

10.6.4 Are of a particular demographic group, e.g. A, B, C?

## **11. Retailer promotion of FF**

11.1 Could retailers do more to actively promote FF both in store and elsewhere?

11.2 What steps could they take? For example could point of sale marketing and information be enhanced both placed on the product and surrounding it?

11.3 Would this help public awareness?

11.4 Why are such steps not taken sufficiently by retailers presently? Could anything be done to encourage them to do so?

12. Does FF regularly analyse what characteristics of food production most concern shoppers and influence their shopping decisions? If so, does FF then act upon these in promoting itself?

13. To what extent do any of the following factors influence consumers when choosing animal food products?
  - 13.1 The desire for traceability?
  - 13.2 Clear labelling?
  - 13.3 Higher standards of animal welfare?
  - 13.4 Organically produced animals?
  - 13.5 Open air produced animals?
  
14. Could those shopping groups with a low public awareness of FF, who may tend not to think greatly about animal welfare yet may love animals, be influenced by campaigns of information and education? If so, what such campaigns?
  - 14.1 Could general public education in the wider context of animal welfare improve public awareness of FF, e.g. programmes in schools?
  
15. What effect does adverse media coverage have on FF which shows poor standards of animal welfare in FF accredited farms and animal abuse?
  
- 16. Producer awareness of FF**
  - 16.1 Awareness of FF is low across farms and the food service sector. Should this be improved?
  - 16.2 What steps have been taken to do so?
  - 16.3 Could FF cope with regulating/assessing many more members?
  
- 17. Perceived benefits and drawbacks to membership of FF**
  - 17.1 What are the benefits to retailers and others in the food supply chain of membership of FF?
  - 17.2 Are these sufficiently understood by members and potential members?
  - 17.3 Do farms, retailers and others in the chain see drawbacks to FF membership? What are these?
  - 17.4 Are those parties justified as seeing such matters as drawbacks to memberships?

- 17.5 Do farms, etc see FF as insufficiently engaging in dialogue with them; or for example as remote and dictating regulations to them?
- 17.6 What can be done by FF and RSPCA to reassure such parties and to overcome such concerns?

**18. Terms of membership for FF accreditation**

- 18.1 Should the terms of membership of FF be tightened?
- 18.2 If so, in what respects?
- 18.3 Should sanctions for breach of animal welfare standards that are required of members be raised? Should they be more rigorously enforced? In what respects?

**19. Monitoring and assessment of FF accredited farms**

- 19.1 Are RSPCA standards of animal welfare adequately implemented?
- 19.2 Should monitoring of FF members be more rigorously implemented and should they be more regularly monitored?
- 19.3 Could any rationalisation be achieved in the monitoring and inspection of farms that is currently undertaken without undermining the quality of results?
- 19.4 How would that be achieved with the intention of containing costs and resources?
- 19.5 Should monitoring and assessment be on a risk-assessment basis, with fewer visits for those farms shown to have been operating at a lower risk with respect to animal welfare and general compliance with FF requirements?
20. How is it that the low standards recently reported to have existed in certain FF accredited farms have been able to occur?
21. Should the monitoring and assessment of member farms be more transparent, in a way that will reassure the public about FF? For example:-

- 21.1 Should FF visits always be unannounced?
- 21.2 Would it be helpful, for the protection both of the farmer and the FF officer, that all visits be routinely videoed and sound recorded?
- 21.3 Should provision be made for an independent observer to be present on inspection visits?

**22. Performance of assessors and monitors**

- 22.1 UKAS accreditation goes some way towards ensuring that standards are maintained on FF accredited farms but does not guarantee them. FF assessment officers and RSPCA Farm Livestock Officers (“FLOs”) both visit accredited farms, and FF inspectors make formal visits. Is this the most effective way to ensure the required standards are maintained on accredited farms?
- 22.2 Are there ways in which the effectiveness and efficiency of FF assessors and RSPCA FLOs could be improved?
- 22.3 Are there too few assessors/FLOs? How many should there be?
- 22.4 Are they too paper orientated (rather than electronic)?
- 22.5 Do they lack equipment? If so, what equipment?
- 22.6 Do they lack support, advice and clear rules and guidance from management?
- 22.7 Is funding lacking in these respects?
- 22.8 How much additional funding do you consider would be needed to optimise the performance of the assessors and to FLOs?
- 22.9 Could any rationalisation by uniting the roles of the FF assessors and the RSPCA FLOs achieve greater efficiencies?

**23. FF relationship with RSPCA**

- 23.1 Does FF benefit from its relationship with RSPCA?
- 23.2 Is the association with RSPCA important to consumers?
- 23.3 Should the relationship remain as it is? Alternatively, should FF be directly controlled by RSPCA, or more loosely connected to RSPCA?

- 23.4 Is the right amount of influence presently exercised by RSPCA over FF?
- 23.5 Is the RSPCA perceived as defending the industry status quo? If so, is this to the detriment of FF in the marketplace?
- 23.6 Are management controls and lines of communication between RSPCA and FF clear and fully understood?
- 23.7 Do these controls and lines of communication operate well? In what ways can they be improved?

#### **24. Funding**

- 24.1 Should any others in the animal food production process do more to finance improvements in the system? For example, should farms or supermarkets/other retailers contribute more?
- 24.2 If so, are there ways of encouraging them to do so, that may also align with those parties' commercial interests?
- 24.3 Would the prospect of a reappraised and a refocused FF scheme assist in this?
- 24.4 Should FF's main financial support come from the RSPCA?
- 24.5 Should the annual grant from RSPCA to FF be increased to enable improvements in FF?
- 24.6 Please suggest by how much and why that amount?
- 24.7 Should membership charges reflect the size/turnover of the member farm?

#### **25. Pricing of FF products**

- 25.1 Is the retail price of FF products higher than that of non-FF products? If so, generally by how much?
- 25.2 To what is any higher price for FF products attributable?
- 25.3 Do you believe those who buy FF products would be prepared to pay a higher premium, and if so by how much?
- 25.4 Would those who do not buy FF products buy them if the price were lower, and if so by how much would the price have to come down?

**26. FF's engagement with third parties**

26.1 What degree of influence do RSPCA and FF have over others such as to achieve agreement to implementing changes to achieve FF's objectives more effectively?

26.2 Does FF meet or otherwise communicate regularly with other parties it seeks to influence (farms, retailers, etc) to discuss better implementation of FF objectives?

26.3 What procedures exist to systematically gather and publish evidence that FF involvement in the animal food market improves animal welfare?

26.4 By what means is such information disseminated to the public?

**27. General**

We should be pleased to hear if you have any other submissions or observations to make in respect about FF and its operations or how these may be improved.

**Duncan McNair**

**Chairman**

**Freedom Food Independent Review Panel**

**12 February 2013**





