

**SUMMARY MINUTES OF THE CEREALS & OILSEEDS SECTOR COUNCIL MEETING  
HELD ON 16 OCTOBER AT 9.00 A.M.  
MS TEAMS**

**PRESENT:**

Tom Clarke (Chair) (TC), David Bell (DB) (Vice-Chair), Tony Bell (TB), Julius Deane (JD), Polly Davies (PD), Russell McKenzie (RM), Sarah Nightingale (SN), Cecilia Pryce (CP), James Standen (JS), Patrick Stephenson (PS), David Walston (DW)

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

Allan Bowie (AB), Ken Boyns (KB), David Eudall (DE), Mike Gooding (MG), Will Jackson (WJ), Richard Orr (RO), Kit Papworth (KP), Ana Reynolds (AR), Roz Reynolds (RR) Steve Ridsdale (SR) , Alison Thomas (AT) (minutes), Jenna Watts (JW) , Philippa Wiltshire (PW)

<b>CHAIR’S WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION</b>
The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.
<b>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</b>
There were no apologies for absence.
<b>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</b>
No new declarations of interest were made.
<b>MINUTES FROM THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 26 SEPTEMBER 2023</b>
The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting to be signed by the Chair.
<b>MATTERS ARISING AND ACTION POINTS FROM THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 26 SEPTEMBER 2023</b>
Most actions had either been completed or were on future meeting agendas for discussion.
<b><i>Grain Market Outlook Conference</i></b> – it was pointed out that the registration page for on-line conference registration included incorrect event location details. DE would ensure this was rectified.
<b><i>Action: DE to ensure location details for GMO Conference on website are rectified</i></b>
<b>ASSURANCE</b>
KB provided context to AHDB’s involvement in assurance. He explained that as one of the six industry bodies who were members of Assured Food Standards, the not-for-profit company which licensed the Red Tractor (RT) quality mark, it had in the past contributed levy funds to support RT work. Funding ceased in 2021 and a statement was issued by AHDB in December 2021 confirming the board’s decision that annual funding was no longer appropriate and calling for change.
Over the past two years, KB explained that AHDB had been working to provide evidence to help inform the ongoing debates around assurance which had included holding discussions with industry representatives and bodies such as the farming unions (including the BFU), Red Tractor and the AIC.
<b><i>Update from Kit Papworth &amp; Philippa Wiltshire on Red Tractor</i></b>
The Chair welcomed Kit Papworth, Red Tractor Crops and Sugar Beet Sector Chair, and Philippa Wiltshire, Assured Food Standards (AFS) Head of Operations, to the meeting and invited them to provide an update on AFS’s proposals to introduce an “Entry Level Crops Feed” standard.

KP thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the council and briefly outlined his understanding of the principal concerns being raised by farmers regarding RT following his appointment as RT Crops and Sugar Beet Sector Chair last summer.

PW gave a slide presentation during which she explained the aims, original vision and purpose of the RT scheme, its history, legislative compliance, and the benefits of assurance, highlighting in particular how a single farm RT assessment provided traceability across all stages of the supply chain. The challenges now faced by assurance in meeting the needs of a broadening range of customers with differing requirements and priorities were also outlined. Further detail regarding RT's plans to review the feasibility of defining and offering farmers the choice to only be assured to an "Entry Level Crops Feed" standard was provided. It was confirmed that these proposals would be considered by AFS sector boards later in the autumn with a decision on whether to proceed likely to be taken in November. If agreed, the new standard was likely to be implemented from April 2024.

After the presentation, discussion took place during which KP and PW addressed questions raised by council members including the implications of the new standard not being REDII compliant, the decision by AIC not to introduce a Gatekeeper assurance approach, and how those who met the full assurance standard would be differentiated from those who only met the entry level crops feed standard.

The Chair thanked KP and PW for their attendance and contributions and they left the meeting.

### ***Request from British Farming Union***

Steve Ridsdale, Chair of the BFU, was welcomed to the meeting by the Chair and attention was drawn to his letter to the council dated 26 September 2023. The Chair invited SR to provide the council with further information in support of the BFU's requests.

SR expressed the BFU's concerns that a proportion of the UK combinable crop growers were not members of farm assurance schemes such as RT and Scottish Quality Cereals and, as such, had fewer marketing opportunities available to them and often received a lower price for their grain. The BFU believed that the functions of AHDB positioned it well to support these growers and SR provided more detail and context to the BFU's 4 specific asks of the sector council, namely:

1. Would AHDB be willing to research, determine and publish what lab tests and sampling frequency criteria is applied to imports by UK purchasers?
2. Would AHDB be willing to develop a UK lab test standard(s) for grain, and work with mills/processors to get this approved as an accepted method to supply UK grain to processors?
3. Would AHDB work to publish a table which identifies each processor and the lab test standards they accept, as this would be useful information when levy payers were wishing to market their grain?
4. Does the Council consider it appropriate for UK growers to only have a single assurance scheme available to them, or should there be more competition in this marketplace with different methods/schemes available, and would AHDB be willing to use its functions to give greater market access choice/methods for levy payers? If so, how?

Debate took place following SR's presentation during which the merits and pitfalls of introducing an alternative assurance scheme were discussed and further information was provided about the processes and testing in place by millers to ensure the suitability of imported grain.

### ***Council Discussion and Agreement of Next Steps***

Following the presentations from RT and the BFU the AHDB Cereals & Oilseeds Sector Council had a debate after which they concluded that an independent review should be commissioned to provide the answers to the questions being raised by the BFU and other levy payers about assurance in the combinable crops supply chain.

It was agreed that, as a first step, AHDB would appoint independent experts to undertake a thorough examination to provide transparency and clarity of the quality, traceability, testing requirements and process for grain to enter all UK end-markets, outside of the existing assurance schemes.

The council agreed that in agreeing the scope and terms of reference for the review, AHDB should consult with levy payers including BFU representatives and that the independent experts would need to speak to all interested parties across the supply chain.



It was proposed by the Chairman that the decision of the Council just taken, to conduct the aforementioned work, be communicated immediately after the meeting by way of a press release.

After a brief discussion of the reasons for doing so and the emphasis required, the Council agreed.

**Action: Decision to conduct assurance work to be communicated immediately after meeting by press release.**

It was suggested that, subject to external experts being engaged to undertake the review by the end of 2023, its findings should be available in spring 2024.

**Action: AHDB to appoint independent experts to undertake a thorough examination to provide transparency and clarity of the quality, traceability, testing requirements and process for grain to enter all UK end-markets, outside of the existing assurance schemes**

It was also suggested that that valuable lessons could be learned from other assurance initiatives operated by other countries including, in particular, Northern Ireland's Food Fortress network. It was agreed that this should be included as an agenda item at a future meeting for further discussion.

**Action: Northern Ireland Food Fortress initiative to be included as an agenda item for discussion at a future meeting**

## RESEARCH & KE

### **Delivery and development – implementation and approach**

MG gave a slide presentation during which he outlined proposals for the operation of the Research Sub-Committee which, through quarterly reviews of proposals, would make recommendations to the sector council on future research projects.

The voting membership of the sub-committee and rationale for its composition was explained. JS would be chair and it was agreed that he would be supported on the sub-committee by 3 other council members (possibly, but not necessarily, including TC) as well as 2 levy-paying, non-council members and senior AHDB staff members. Other council members, expert witnesses and staff members would be invited as observers of the sub-committee as appropriate.

Plans to introduce a "letter box", possibly on the website, to enable anyone to submit a question were highlighted and the process by which staff would review these prior to submitting questions to the sub-committee for consideration explained. A flowchart illustrating the decision-making process which would then be followed was shared. It was emphasised that whilst it would be the sub-committee's remit to make clear recommendations, the council would ultimately decide which of the five possible outcomes described applied to each project and authorise any necessary funding.

The sector council was supportive and in favour of the proposals as described by MG. There was agreement that the sub-committee would give the council sufficient overview, provide levy payer transparency and that the introduction of the "letter box" would make it simpler for levy payers to submit questions. It was acknowledged that AHDB already had various channels available for the generation of ideas for future research including, for example, its Monitor and Strategic farm network, feedback from the RL review and interaction with levy payers at shows and events which should be exploited.

Discussion took place regarding the need for the sub-committee to consider and score requests for research based on how closely they were linked to the C&O strategic objectives and the availability of funding and resource.

The council also agreed that more should be done to facilitate conversations and build relationships with organisations such as Innovate UK and commercial companies who might be willing to provide funding support.

It was noted that the possibility of creating a separate research projects reserve and budget was being explored. This would provide the sub-committee and council with more granular detail and clarity about when funds would be drawn down, rather than simply a project's overall cost.



### ***Research Sub-committee Terms of Reference***

Draft terms of reference for the sub-committee were shared. These were agreed by the council as presented.

### **EDUCATION**

Roz Reynolds joined the meeting and gave a slide presentation outlining the activities undertaken to educate young consumers between the ages of 3 and 16, highlighting in particular the successful partnership and collaborative working with the British Nutrition Foundation around “Food – a fact of life” and LEAF Education.

Strong support for AHDB’s education work had been evident in the 2022 Shape the Future vote and consequently funding had been increased. RR outlined new activities which were now being piloted as a result. This included work to support farmers to deliver school farm visits, providing ingredients to support cookery in schools and expanding AHDB’s resource toolkit to support education of previously untargeted 16–18-year-olds.

The chair thanked RR for her work and informative presentation.

### **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

#### ***Additional Testing Contaminants Monitoring in Cereals 2023***

Attention was drawn to the paper seeking the council’s approval of funding for additional contaminants monitoring testing for samples collected from harvest 2023

The council discussed the request but concluded that it could not approve it based on the information provided. Further detail was requested including the rationale for each test and whether completing the testing would generate a commercial return. Concerns were raised regarding the cost of the testing and whether partner organisations had been asked to contribute to help fund the work or if the testing could be done more efficiently to reduce the costs. The council also questioned whether the cost of testing some of the minority crops was disproportionate to the level of levy income generated by them.

It was agreed that the council would be provided via email with further detail in response to the points it had raised to allow a decision to be taken on whether or not to proceed with the additional testing prior to the next council meeting.

***Action: Further detail regarding the additional testing for contaminants monitoring to be provided to the council via email***

There being no further business, the Chair drew the meeting to a close at 1pm.

### **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

- Wednesday 6 December 2023 (in person)

