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UK FSA suggests reform to product-approval process

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UK's Food Standards Agency Board recently met to discuss proposed changes to its Regulated Products Service (RPS). The Board had earlier agreed in 2023 to develop plans to improve the current system to ensure that consumers have faster access to a greater variety of safe and innovative products.

Regulated food and feed products require authorisation before they can be sold in the UK. They undergo a safety check before being placed on the market. To conduct this check, the Food Standards Agency, along with Food Standards Scotland (FSS), carry out a risk analysis process and provide advice to ministers in England, Wales and Scotland, who then decide whether the product can be sold. The current authorisation process was inherited from the EU, and the FSA Board believes that significant changes will be necessary to achieve a high-quality service that can keep up with the pace of innovation in the food industry.

The Board supported two proposals for legislative reform that would help streamline the authorisation process. The first proposal is to remove the requirement that some products previously authorized as safe must go through a reauthorisation process periodically, regardless of whether evidence on safety has changed. The second proposal is a change to allow authorisations to come into force via an official register, rather than by secondary legislation. The Board agreed that these changes would not compromise consumer safety.

The Board also endorsed some further administrative improvements that can be made to the current system quickly. These improvements will have immediate benefits for consumers and businesses by reducing the time it takes to review and potentially authorise new products. The Board is keen to move quickly with more fundamental changes to the current system and has requested further plans for this longer-term reform to be brought to the Board meeting in June 2024.

Professor Susan Jebb, Chair of the FSA, stated that the proposed changes will enable a better outcome for consumers in the future. He said, â??This is a tremendous opportunity for the FSA to drive benefits for consumers by enabling new and innovative products that we assess as being safe to come to market more quickly. It will set a new way of doing things that will be viewed with real interest by regulators around the world.â?•