

ROSS WARBURTON, FDF PRESIDENT – WELCOME REMARKS

FDF President's Reception – 9 December 2009

Introduction

Good evening everyone and welcome to this year's Food and Drink Federation President's Reception. One of the few perks of doing this job is that I am 'allowed' to provide the fizz for this reception – as a way of thanking both our members and our key stakeholders for all their efforts over the course of the past 12 months.

And I am delighted to see so many of you here this evening.

Now, this year's event is slightly different in that we have added in a formal element to proceedings – we are today reporting on our second year of progress in delivering FDF's Five-fold Environmental Ambition – and I am delighted that Environment Minister Jim Fitzpatrick is here with us to help launch our new report.

It is also my opportunity to publicly thank a few individuals – Thanks to Fiona Dawson who led our steering group that developed and launched the ambition and to Andrew Kuyk and his team who have laboured hard in to the evenings to produce the report .

Tonight's reception is all the more timely because of the discussions now underway in Copenhagen, which is making sure that the issue of climate change is high on the political and media agenda.

We all recognise the importance of achieving some sort of global consensus on action to tackle climate change. And irrespective of whether or not any meaningful 'deal' is thrashed out at the UN conference in Denmark, our businesses are already being reshaped by the public momentum that has been building with respect to the environment.

Industry has responded positively to that agenda. Corporate leaders in many sectors are showing genuine leadership as they strive to adapt their companies to make them more sustainable and better able to compete in the low-carbon future that we will all face.

The food sector's positive response

Members of the Food and Drink Federation are acutely aware that we must also show leadership in tackling climate change.

As the UK's largest manufacturing sector , we recognised in 2007 that there was an obligation on us to set out the role we should take in addressing the many environmental issues facing society

And that gave birth to FDF's Five-fold Environmental Ambition.

We identified the areas where we felt our members could make the biggest collective difference to the environment and made a number of commitments.

These were:

- Reducing CO₂ emissions by 20% by 2010 against a 1990 baseline;
- Sending zero factory waste to landfill from 2015;
- Reducing packaging through our support for WRAP's Courtauld Commitment;
- Embedding environmental standards in our members food transport practices;
- And developing the Federation House Commitment with Envirowise to help our members achieve significant reductions in water use.

I am please to say today that our new report confirms that we've made significant progress across all five 'pillars' our Environmental Ambition.

So what have we been able to achieve ? Some highlights you'll find in the report....

- FDF members have reduced their CO₂ emissions by 19% in 2008 as measured from our 1990 baseline
- 23 FDF members have now signed the Courtauld Commitment to reduce the amount of packaging reaching households and 15 member companies have joined a labelling scheme to provide consumers with standardised on-pack information in relation to packaging recyclability;
- And the first 36 signatories to the Federation House Commitment on water efficiency reported savings of more than 500,000 cubic metres of water in the first year of operation .

Clearly, there is a tangible business benefit to food and drink manufacturers from engaging with these issues.

The efficient use of energy and water, and the reduction of waste, all contribute directly to both cutting costs and increasing the efficiency of our commercial operations. The benefits that come from reducing our environmental impact and increasing operating efficiency are doubly important at a time when the economy remains under pressure and we face the longer-term challenge of trying to meet steadily rising world demand for safe, affordable and nutritious food.

But life doesn't stand still and

We recognise that as the debate on climate change and the environment continues to evolve, our approach needs to be developed in the light of a plethora of policy developments, initiatives and programmes.

In particular, we 'll need to take account of the outcomes of the UN Climate Change conference in Copenhagen; the emergence of a new post-2010 Courtauld Commitment on packaging; Defra's Food 2030 strategy; the increasingly important discussions on 'water footprinting'; and the implications of Government's efforts to establish a single resource efficiency body under WRAP. There's a lot going on that directly affects us.

So, we'll be reviewing our strategy in 2010 to ensure the Ambition remains true to its objectives. We will work with our members, Government, best practice bodies, supply chain partners and key opinion formers to help us to build on the successes of the past two years.

We're determined to make a real difference now and in the future to the environment. However, we can't deliver on our Ambition in isolation – Government must also play its part in supporting us as we strive to improve our environmental performance.

Government can help us invest in low carbon technologies by providing a stable framework which promotes business confidence and long-term planning, by extending the existing Climate Change Agreements beyond 2015.

And it's only Government that can ensure we have the necessary infrastructure to enable us to cut waste disposal and maximise resource efficiency through recycling and recovery technologies, such as anaerobic digestion.

At the same time, though, we'll also keep reminding policy makers and regulators that any new environmental policies must promote and protect the international competitiveness of the UK food sector.

Conclusion

Partnership between industry and Government will be vital to ensuring that the food sector can be successful in meeting its responsibilities in tackling the challenges of climate change.

But I hope you all agree that we have shown a real appetite to make a real difference – we are making genuine progress – and we look forward to refreshing our Five-fold Environmental Ambition in 2010 to ensure that our sector continues to show leadership in this area.

Before introducing our principal guest, can I publicly thank all FDF staff for their efforts and hard work in 2009. It's been a challenging year for everyone in the room and you've risen to the occasion.

Introduce the Minister

It's now my great pleasure to introduce our principal guest for this evening Jim Fitzpatrick , Minister of State for Food farming and the environment . Minister, can I thank you for coming along this evening - I'm looking forward to what you have to say to us .