

GLOBAL OUTLOOK



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In my last column for *MTJ*, I suggested we might be in for something of a supply chain bottleneck. Further complicating the issue is the increasing prevalence of slow-steaming – apparently a further fall-out of the ‘freight rate wars’.

Officially, slow-steaming is the shipping industry’s response to cutting global carbon emissions. Slower speeds clearly mean burning less fuel and absorbing excess capacity as more ships are needed to maintain the frequency of schedules. The continuing rise in fuel prices and a surplus of vessel capacity have meant this practice is increasingly the norm on most trade routes. But it’s worth noting that the carriers have to play a delicate balancing game as running at faster speeds often offers them a competitive advantage over rivals.

The knock-on effect for meat shippers is that it also adds a few days to transit times. For reefer (refrigerated) container shipping this is of even more importance when, for chilled rather than frozen goods, every extra day in transit is crucial – although the carriers will claim that schedule reliability should improve, due to the greater chance to make up lost time.

Despite the general lack of investment in the reefer sector, one of the major German shipping lines has just announced the imminent launch of two new vessels which, as well as offering 9,600 ‘dry’ container slots, will each provide more than 2,000 reefer plugs; something that makes them the ships with the largest reefer capacity in the world. This will not have an immediate impact on freight rates, but one would hope that such news will have a long-term effect that might trickle down the supply chain to the benefit of meat shippers.

Old-school inspection methods need updating

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has completed its analysis of the health risks posed by meat, which will form the basis for the modernisation of meat inspection across the EU.

On 27 June the agency published four scientific opinions on the health hazards posed by meat from cattle, sheep and goats, farmed game and domestic solipeds, such as horses. This follows the publication of opinions on meat from pigs and poultry in 2011 and 2012 respectively.

The analysis recognised that traditional meat inspection was not fit for tackling the biggest modern-day health risks from meat, which include foodborne bacteria and contamination by chemical substances, such as persistent organic pollutants or prohibited substances.

It recommended several changes to meat inspection methods to improve food safety, including the introduction of a comprehensive meat assurance system with clear targets for the main biological and chemical hazards, both at farm and abattoir level.

While recognising that meat inspection was a vital tool for the



Traditional meat inspection is not enough to tackle today’s health risks

detection of specific animal health and welfare conditions, it recommended that for all species, routine palpation or incision techniques should be omitted in post-mortem inspection to reduce bacterial risks. However, it added that changing to visual-only post-mortem inspection would “decrease the quality of surveillance for some animal diseases”, in particular bovine tuberculosis, and recommended that other approaches should therefore be followed to compensate for the associated loss of information.

“Extended use of other information collected throughout the food chain could compensate for some, but not all, the information lost due to the proposed changes,” it said.

The Food Standards Agency welcomed the EFSA analysis and said it would “consider its recommendations carefully in the coming months”. It added that it would continue to work with the European Commission to ensure that the UK’s views were represented in the development of modernised meat inspection rules in Europe.

PETA’s anti-meat ad is banned by the ASA

An anti-meat advertisement, that likened the risks of meat consumption to the risks of smoking, has been banned by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA).

The billboard ad from the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) showed a child smoking a cigar and read: “You wouldn’t let your child smoke. Like smoking, eating meat increases the risk of heart disease and cancer. Go vegan! PETA”. According to the ASA the ad received two complaints, challenging whether the claim that eating red meat causes cancer was misleading and if it could be proven. It banned the ad as it likened the risk of eating any kind of meat with smoking, and consumers would make the connection. “We therefore concluded that the ad was misleading”.

PETA said it was “befuddled” by the ruling and claimed the link between meat and an increased risk of heart disease and some cancers had been documented in various medical studies and journals. It said it felt the claim was not misleading and said it would appeal the ASA’s verdict.

In a bid to defend the ad the pro-vegan animal rights organisation provided several studies that discussed premature death and the consumption of red meat. However, the ASA noted that one study was related to post-menopausal women only, while two other studies “looked at the overall effect of a vegetarian diet, rather than specifically studying the effect of eating meat on increased heart disease (IHD) risk”.

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Retailers back British with supply moves

Asda has launched its new PoultryLink scheme jointly with processor and grower Faccenda, aimed at providing Asda’s broiler and turkey farmers with security and confidence. As well as securing a sustainable British source of poultry products for Asda, the scheme is designed to encourage young people in the poultry industry, as well as identify and overcome issues in the sector.

Meanwhile Sainsbury’s has announced it will be sourcing 70% more British pork to match a move made a decade ago to source more home-grown chicken. This has delivered an extra boost for UK pig farmers and the National Pig Association said it was “pleased by this important move, which strengthens Sainsbury’s commitment to buying British”.