FSA Science Council 3rd meeting
Future Working Group on data (steering paper)

Background

1. FSA CSA and Science Council Chair requested the current steering paper to frame a discussion of a potential future Council Working Group on data.

2. Specific questions for Council consideration, to be answered as provisional Working Group outputs, would be as follows:
    I.   Over the next 2-5 years, what are likely to be the emerging data tools, techniques and technologies which could have the greatest impact on the FSA's mission, and what value could these add?
    II. What are key implications for the FSA of advancements in open data, data sharing, data governance and legal & regulatory frameworks for the ethical use of data, and how might the FSA appropriately support or encourage private sector adoption thereof?

Context and key points for consideration

3. The availability of low-cost sensing devices, the rise of ubiquitous data storage and transmission, and the commoditisation of computing have all come together to give rise to new data challenges and opportunities.

4. Following on from early in-house FSA successes—such as social media backtracing to localise the source of foodborne illness—more comprehensive, forward-looking FSA efforts may at this point warrant careful investigation.

5. Additionally global food supply chains are rapidly becoming longer and more complex, and vectors by which foods reach the consumer are becoming more heterogeneous. Together this added complexity may point to the need for a holistic FSA consideration of advances in data and associated technologies.

6. A suggested purpose of a Working Group, if established, would be to help the FSA to understand the next phase of improvements of its capability in the area and how to realise these, along with any emerging opportunities, as well as also to better understand which people or groups the FSA should be learning from or working with, through the process of determining inputs to a Working Group and/or as part of FSA's wider work.

7. Implications range from questions regarding the role of data governance, standards and sourcing in improving the flexibility and responsiveness of food regulation in the UK, to the ethical use of data science, machine learning and artificial intelligence to enhance the overall safety and security of the global food supply chain, alongside distributed ledger techniques as are currently being piloted. Openness of data is another question, along with that of the FSA's role in facilitating pre-competitive data sharing in relevant industries.

Next steps:

8. Council to give due consideration to the idea, with discussion at today's meeting and as needed, with a final determination to be made in due course.