

## Gene Editing Working Group

28<sup>th</sup> March 2024, 9.30am on MS Teams

### Attendees:

Madeleine Campbell, Chair  
Rose Jackson, BCVA  
Dominic Wells, Professor of Translational Medicine, RVC  
Emily Craven, EWAP  
Justine Shotton, Past President  
Polly Compston, BVA Policy Committee  
Fritha Langford, BVA EWAP

### BVA:

Anna Judson BVA JVP  
Ali Ramsay – Head of Policy and Public Affairs  
Hannah Killeen – Policy and Public Affairs Officer  
Charlotte Austen-Hardy – Media Officer

### Guests:

Dr Ross Houston, Director Genetics and Innovation, Benchmark Genetics  
Chris Stockdale, Head of Genetic Technology Policy, FSA

### Apologies:

Richard Piercy, Professor of Comparative Neuromuscular Disease, RVC  
Amelia Findon – Director of Policy and Governance  
Charlotte Commins BVPA

## Minutes and Matters Arising

1. The minutes of the January meeting were agreed without amendment.

## Gene Editing in Fish

2. Dr Ross Houston spoke about his work on selective breeding of salmon and how gene editing could be used to enhance this work, and what the risks would be around doing so. Dr Houston's full presentation has been shared separately with the group, but in summary selective breeding is currently used largely for increasing growth, and preventing disease. Breeding programmes have to be balanced across various traits, but strains can be selected for certain factors.
3. Gene editing has the potential to speed up development of a trait, rather than incremental improvements each generation, and to increase the number of traits that can be targeted. However, it should be used to supplement a well-managed breeding programme, not as a replacement.
4. There is a risk of gene edited fish escaping and breeding with the wild population. To control this, the gene edited fish would be kept in a development facility, with only the eggs sold commercially (which is how selected strains are sold now). The commercial fish would then be sterile, which is also an advantage, for salmon in particular, as mature fish provide a lower quality product. This means regulation would apply to the development facilities, rather than fish farms. Shrimp would be an exception to this, as they are sold as live breeding stock.

### **Traceability**

5. Chris Stockdale from the FSA joined the meeting to discuss FSA thinking on gene edited food products and animal feed. He noted that they are focussed on plants at the moment, and that they expect it to be a couple of years before work starts on regulating gene editing of animals for food. Their focus is on the product rather than the process. They do not foresee any major food safety issues around gene editing, but they are currently conducting consumer research to gauge public concerns. In terms of the end product, gene edited animals should not vary greatly from selectively bred animals, and therefore any regulation should be proportionate.
6. HMG are working with the devolved nations to find a joint position on trading of gene edited animals. In part this will depend on changes to EU regulations – Brussels is looking at gene editing of plants, although not animals.
7. Feedback from the supermarkets is that they are trying to gauge consumer views. Existing mechanisms for tracing animals and carcasses, including for organic and farm assurance certification.
8. Regarding imports and enforcement, HMG is looking to be as aligned as possible with international laws. Importers have statutory obligations to comply with UK law. Specific enforcement powers are being introduced in relation to the Precision Breeding Act, to ensure the concerns are understood, and compliance is checked.
9. On labelling, the FSA only uses labelling for safety issues. Consumer information is an issue for DEFRA. The steer from Ministers is that they don't think it is necessary to label gene edited products.
10. GMO animals feed is already in use. It has to be labelled as such, but animals that have been fed on it do not contain any GM material and therefore do not need to be labelled.

### **Draft Recommendations**

11. The working group reviewed and amended some provisional draft recommendations, as attached at the annexe.

### **Any Other Business**

12. None raised.