

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Expert Committee on Pesticide Residues in Food (PRiF)

Minutes of the meeting of the Expert Committee on Pesticide Residues in Food (PRiF), 14 July 2021

The Expert Committee on Pesticide Residues in Food provides independent advice to the Health and Safety Executive, Food Standards Agency and UK Ministers on matters relating to the monitoring programme; this is the 39th meeting of the committee.

Those present:

Chair:

Ms A Davison

Members:

Dr J Blackman, Mr I Finlayson, Mr J Points, Ms D Winstanley and Dr G Hart.

Representatives:

Mr D Faulkner (Northern Ireland Executive), Ms K Viezens (representing Scottish government), Dr S Nawaz (National Reference Laboratory), Mr S Phillips (Defra), Dr R Scrivens and Dr L Dearsly (Health and Safety Executive) and Mr M Willis (FSA)

Apologies received from Mr G Stark (Health and Safety Executive) and Mr D Williams (Defra)

Agenda item 1: Introduction

1.1 The Chair reminded the meeting of the sensitivity of the papers and their discussions. If Members believed that they had a commercial or financial interest in any of the items being discussed, they are required to declare their interest to the Chair and secretariat prior to the meeting. They may then either be invited to absent themselves from the discussions; not participate and/or not be involved in any discussions and decision-making, unless invited to do so.

1.2 Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic the meeting was held virtually.

Agenda item 2: Action points from PRiF meeting of 19 May 2021

2.1 Minutes of the last meeting

2.1.1 The Chair confirmed that the minutes of the last meeting were agreed and were published on GOV.uk.

2.2 Action point from Q4 2019

2.2.1 Following a previous discussion relating to a residue of chlormequat in organic oats and how this would be followed up, committee members requested an update on the guidance used by organic control bodies. A summary of the general criteria and principles was shared with the committee members before the meeting.

2.3 Action point Q4 2020

2.3.1 The Committee continue to examine the obligations of the monitoring programme and PRiF committee regarding the reporting of chlorate residues in infant formula and infant foods. This matter was discussed further in Agenda item 3.

2.4 Action point Q4 2020

2.4.1 Members considered the response provided by the producer/supplier of a Belgian pear sample with a residue of chlormequat. The committee felt that, due to the level detected and the time of year the pears were sampled, spray drift was an unlikely source of the residue. The secretariat agreed to consider all points raised when responding to the producer/supplier.

2.4.2 HSE had previously contacted the producer/supplier and offered the option to include a comment in this in the report which was declined on this occasion.

2.5 Action point 2022 Plan

2.5.1 HSE submitted a paper to the committee before their meeting in May outlining the use of its ranking tool and monitoring matrix to assist in the determination of surveys to be included in the 2022 residues monitoring programme. A committee sub-group was convened in June to discuss the proposals in more detail. The results of the meeting were collated by HSE and shared with the committee before this meeting to be discussed as Agenda item 8.

Agenda Item 3: Matters Arising

3.1 Infant food update

3.1.1 HSE discussed with the committee the outcome of a preliminary meeting held with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and the Food Standards Agency (FSA). The meeting was to establish the way forward on reporting chlorate results in foods for infants, bearing in mind the scope of the monitoring programme, its remit and responsibilities of each party. After some discussion all parties agreed the importance of further collaboration between relevant departments required to progress to a satisfactory resolution. HSE will follow-up with DHSC.

Action: HSE

Agenda Item 4: 2021 Monitoring Programme

4.1 The secretariat updated the committee with the current position of the surveillance programme, including the evolving position of sampling in NI. Safety protocols were in

place to support the commencement of a phased hybrid of both online and in-person sampling in both GB and NI. Gradually re-starting in person sampling would result in a broader market share reflected in collections for the 3rd quarter of 2021.

Agenda Item 5: Communication Update

5.1 The Style guide and PRiF Quarterly reports

5.1.1 The secretariat circulated the finalised draft of the style guide to the committee before the meeting. The paper reflected the decisions made regarding the content format of PRiF publications between HSE and the Communications sub-committee. The PRiF draft Quarter 1 report, with these changes applied, was also circulated to the members before the meeting for comment.

5.1.2 The committee and secretariat noted that there had been a significant amount of work in producing the new documents contributed to by both the HSE and sub-committee. It was agreed that an ongoing process, to be confirmed, would be put in place to facilitate minor suggested amendments when deemed necessary going forward.

Action: Secretariat

5.1.3 The committee noted and discussed several areas of the draft Quarter 1 report circulated to them pre meeting. HSE used this draft as an example of how changes in the style guide would be applied. It was agreed further attention was required in parts where duplication or repetition of phrasing occurred and some areas required more clarity. It was also identified that parts of the reports wording would need to be updated to reflect current post EU Exit legislation and vocabulary.

Action: Secretariat

5.1.4 The committee highlighted that the new alert process of reporting foods to the FSA, replacing the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) in GB, needed to be included in the report. The secretariat agreed that some wording provided by the FSA would be useful to include.

Action: Secretariat

5.2 Other communications update.

5.2.1 The committee and secretariat discussed ways to communicate more widely the work of the PRiF. The committee recognised the limitations currently imposed on any PRiF Open meeting by COVID-19 restrictions. The members and secretariat explored the security practicalities of possible on-line web based solutions and it was suggested that this was added as an agenda item for the next PRiF meeting in October.

Action: Secretariat

5.3 The Annual report publication

5.3.1 The secretariat updated the committee on the current position of the PRiF annual report which was awaiting a publication date.

Agenda Item 6: Draft Quarter 1 report

6.1 The draft Quarter 1 PRiF 2021 report, which will be published in September 2021, was circulated to the members before the meeting, as with previous PRiF meetings in 2020 and 2021. The committee provided written comments on the draft report and its survey results before the meeting for discussion. HSE had provided a response to these before the meeting. Points of particular interest were discussed in more detail at the meeting. Each detailed risk assessment was reviewed in detail. The committee gave several suggestions.

6.2 The committee discussed their additional comments to be added to each of the individual survey pages in the quarterly reports following the revision of the style guide. The committee wished to add information to contextualise the data analysis or results for the reader in addition to the detail provided by HSE.

6.3 Broccoli

6.3.1 The committee and HSE discussed in detail the wording in the report relating to the risk assessment for the exceedance of chlorpyrifos in a sample of tenderstem broccoli. The members suggested that finding a residue like this in broccoli was unusual.

6.3.2 The committee and HSE further discussed the sample risk assessment. HSE confirmed it had employed a conservative approach here, as EFSA (2019) has indicated that no toxicological reference values could be determined for chlorpyrifos due to concerns over genotoxicity and therefore the assessment was particularly precautionary. The committee asked HSE to give consideration to their comments on all the assessments discussed in any redrafting.

Action: Secretariat

6.4 Berries and small fruit

6.4.1 The PRiF asked for clarification of the secretariat's compliance process of writing to suppliers following the identification of an exceedance in a food sample collected from a wholesale market. The secretariat outlined that when an exceedance is identified HSE write to the sample collection point. The committee suggested that, where details of a UK importer of the goods is available, that contacting them as well may provide more detailed information of any follow-up investigation that has been carried out. The Secretariat will consider this for future samples.

Action: Secretariat

6.5 Mushrooms

6.5.1 The committee noted three samples of mushrooms containing residues of mepiquat in the results. It was confirmed that these results had been passed to HSE Enforcement team for further investigation.

6.5.2 A committee member highlighted that there was a label restriction in place for this active that prevents straw from treated wheat to be used for compost on mushrooms. It was agreed to feed this information back to the HSE Enforcement team.

Action: Secretariat

6.6 Rice

6.6.1 The committee noted residues of tricyclazole in samples of rice. HSE confirmed that rice had been advanced as a priority for the 2022 surveys using the foods Ranking Tool due in part to the consistent occurrences of residues detected in the monitoring surveys.

Agenda Item 7: Rolling reporting

7.1 The rolling reporting for April 2021 has been published on 30 June 2021.

7.2 The committee noted the finding of chlorpropham in potatoes at low levels. It was reiterated that chlorpropham is no longer authorised for use in GB or NI following the renewal assessment of this substance. Residues, at lower levels, can occur as a result of transfer from stores and storage containers used to hold the potatoes. Also noted was the pesticide had been authorised for use until October 2020.

Agenda Item 8: 2022 Plan

8.1. HSE submitted an updated paper to the committee before the meeting to help determine the annual pesticide residues monitoring testing programme for 2022.

8.2 The paper confirmed food surveys planned to be undertaken in in 2022. This list included some of those that were scheduled but could not be collected in 2020, as a consequence of the impact of COVID-19 on sample collection, for part of the year. Also submitted were foods which scored highly in the ranking tool as a result of European food alerts, or foods not tested for some time but which have increased in popularity, and those foods that have become more popular, in order to reflect market growth.

Agenda Item 9: Any other business

9.1 Acknowledgement

9.1.1 Committee members were sad to learn that Graham Ward has recently passed away. They wished to acknowledge his very helpful contribution to the work of the committee. Graham had been a member of the Pesticide Residues in Food Committee for two terms since its inception. He provided valuable support, contributions and energy. He was always generous with his time and expertise. He will be much missed by those who knew and worked with him.

9.2. PRiF appointment update

9.2.1 The secretariat updated the committee on the progress of the recruitment of a new member with toxicological expertise.

9.3 Chair's comments

9.3.1 The Chair thanked members and officials for attending the meeting and for the extra work put in on the design of the quarterly reports.

Agenda Item 10: Date of next PRiF meeting

10.1 The next meeting of the Expert Committee on Pesticide Residues in Food (PRiF) will be held remotely on 13th October 2021.