

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), 13 October 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 40th 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), Mr D Williams (Defra), Mr G Stark (HSE) Dr R Scrivens (HSE) Mr M Willis (FSA) Mr D Jones (FSA)

Apologies: Ms L Fielding (Welsh Government)

### **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 One committee member identified a potential conflict of interest, it was decided this was a personal non-specific conflict and the Member could remain and participate in discussions on the relevant agenda item.

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

### **Agenda item 2: Action points from PRiF meeting of 14 July 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 Q1 2021**

2.2.1 Previously HSE and the committee discussed the outcome of a preliminary meeting held with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and the Food Standards Agency (FSA) to establish the way forward on reporting chlorate results in foods for infants. This discussion reiterated the importance of collaboration between relevant departments required to progress this developing approach to a satisfactory resolution. HSE is in correspondence with DHSC and updated the committee under Agenda item 3.

## **2.3 Action point Style Guide 2021 and application to Quarter 1 report**

2.3.1 During the July PRiF meeting it was agreed there should be an ongoing process to collate and monitor for discussion, suggestions made by the PRiF on the style guide. The suggestions would be brought forward and addressed in an annual communications sub-group meeting to discuss which amendments should be made and reflected in the Quarter 1 2022 report. This was discussed further under Agenda item 8.

2.3.2 The committee had noted and discussed several areas of the draft Quarter 1 report requiring clarification and some areas where the report wording would need to be updated to reflect current post EU Exit legislation and vocabulary. These changes were made to the Quarter 1 report before publication and adopted into the style guide accordingly.

2.3.3 When reviewing the draft PRiF Quarter 1 report the committee suggested some updating of the wording, surrounding the use of the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) in GB, might be required. The secretariat assessed all instances of reference to the RASFF system in the report to ensure their reference applied only to appropriate samples from NI. For GB samples fitting the reporting criteria it was made clear that these also would be submitted to the FSA (Food Standards Authority). This process and reporting format will be used in future reports.

## **2.4 Action point Communication update**

2.4.1 The committee and secretariat discussed ways to communicate more widely the work of the PRiF. The committee had 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 which were discussed further within the communications update under Agenda item 8.

## **2.5 Action point Other Communications update**

2.5.1 The secretariat acknowledged the publication of the PRiF annual report 2020 and discussed its results further under Agenda item 8.

## **2.6 Actions points on samples discussed in Quarter 1 report**

2.6.1 In the previous PRiF Meeting the committee and HSE considered the wording in the report regarding a risk assessment carried out for an exceedance of chlorpyrifos. The wording in the subsequent published report reflected this discussion.

2.6.2 Following a request of clarification around the secretariat's compliance process, specifically when writing to suppliers in regard to an exceedance found in samples originating from a wholesale market, PRiF members suggested including, when available, the UK importer of the goods. The committee offered their assistance in finding the most appropriate contacts for this and the Secretariat is looking at the viability of adopting this additional step in their process.

**Action: Secretariat and Committee members**

2.6.3 The committee noted three samples of mushrooms containing residues of mepiquat in the PRiF Quarter 1 report results. It was identified that there was a label restriction in place for this active that prevents straw from mepiquat treated wheat to be used in compost on mushrooms. The secretariat had previously notified the HSE Enforcement team of the restriction who agreed this would be taken into account when conducting future investigations. In addition, a suggestion that a communication regarding the restriction might be better disseminated to the mushroom growers could be discussed at the Growers Liaison group (GLG) meeting held in November.

**Action: Secretariat**

### **Agenda Item 3: Matters arising**

#### **3.1 Infant food letter DHSC**

3.1.1 HSE updated the committee on the current position of their engagement with the Department of Health and Social Care on the way forward in finding a resolution of the future of chlorate reporting, specifically regarding infant food but more generally in PRiF food surveys.

3.1.2 The committee discussed the necessity of guidance in areas of microbiological safety when considering the inclusion of chlorate results in the 2021 PRiF annual report. The need to involve those with this expertise had driven the decision to bring this issue to the attention of other parts of government.

3.1.3 HSE agreed they would update the committee and seek their advice in any developments as required.

**Action: HSE**

#### **3.2 Quarter 1 2021**

3.2.1 The committee discussed a response related to a finding of an insecticide above the MRL in imported produce. The survey had already been published but the Committee valued the chance to see follow-up. There has been no evidence of crop protection use but a possibility that locust control measures may have been implicated. The committee discussed the issue and considered where additional information might be available if further findings occurred.

### **Agenda Item 4: 2021 Monitoring Programme**

4.1 The secretariat updated the members regarding the 2021 surveys in GB and NI. Members noted that the number of samples being collected in Quarter 3 and 4 of 2021

would be increased by over 500 samples and, as well, that the majority of samples collected in Quarter 3 were purchased in stores, as opposed to online shopping. The secretariat explained this move back to in-store shopping will increase the variety of samples as well as market share.

4.2 The members noted that the current split between online and in-store shopping would reflect current consumer habits.

## **Agenda Item 5: 2022 Update**

5.1 HSE discussed with the committee progress in the preparation of the 2022 programme, including the current position and progress of competitive tenders to provide sampling analysis and sample collection. HSE outlined the logistics required to resolve some of the challenges.

5.2 The members and HSE discussed the sampling programme for 2022. Members noted the number of surveys which will be undertaken and the focus on those foods identified by the programme's 'ranking tool'. This identifies commodities which fit the criteria of requiring more frequent sampling due to results in previous surveys and other contributing factors.

5.3 The committee discussed the process HSE now employs to report GB samples which fit the criteria which would have previously been raised on RASFF and how these form part of the calculations used in the ranking tool. HSE confirmed that this information does form part of the calculation as well as consideration of data submitted by other countries.

5.4 The committee suggested that some wording be included in the PRiF 2021 Annual report regarding the FSA reporting process and how it is maintained post EU Exit as well as how it contributes, amongst other data, to the selection of surveys.

**Action: Secretariat**

## **Agenda Item 6: Draft Quarter 2 2021 report including correspondence arising**

6.1 Before the meeting the members were asked to view a draft version of the Quarter 2 PRiF 2021 report and associated compliance correspondence received from suppliers of samples found to have residues that exceeded the MRL. The committee were invited to provide written comments on these ahead of the meeting. HSE in turn provided a response to these comments before the meeting and presented the range of comments received for discussion.

6.2 The committee discussed all areas of the report identified as requiring further consideration including those surveys requiring a risk assessment. In particular the members examined the wording used and conclusions reached regarding the consumption of peel in fruit and vegetables and its effect on the outcome of a risk assessment and how this should be reflected in the 'Additional PRiF Comments' section of the report. They agreed that it was important that consumers could see the detailed assessments in full in the risk assessment sections but in the Additional PRiF comments it was not usually necessary to repeat detailed information included elsewhere in the report.

6.3 Regarding HSE's consideration of peel in the risk assessments the committee enquired if there were instances when only the peel was assessed in the report surveys and if there was more information available on consumers' consumption of peel. HSE explained that the MRLs are based on the entire food including peel and therefore HSE risk assessments reflect this. In addition, the risk assessment itself is based on a high residue in a single item, high consumption levels (97.5 percentile) and a large proportion of peel being consumed. A member asked that it is made clear on what basis the distribution of residue between peel and pulp is determined. It was explained that if a value is reported in the text of the report the origin of the value is referenced in the detailed risk assessment.

## **6.4 Bananas and Grapefruit**

6.4.1 The committee discussed at length the wording in the report relating to the risk assessment for samples of banana and grapefruit, identified as containing residues of chlorpyrifos or chlorpyrifos-methyl. HSE reiterated that the assessments, which include results for both peeled and unpeeled fruit, were particularly precautionary and conservative in approach due the concerns of genotoxicity which prompted EFSA not to set toxicological reference values (TRVs).

6.4.2 The committee discussed how this approach was not confined to Europe and indicated that they wished to add a specific comment.

## **6.5 Correspondence arising**

6.5.1 The committee viewed responses from suppliers following notifications of MRL exceedances detected in Quarter 2 samples as part of the monitoring programmes compliance obligations. HSE, as the regulator, also provided their view on the information which will form part of the final reply to the supplier.

6.5.2 Committee members agreed there were some interesting and thorough responses provided by suppliers and growers which assisted the PRiF and HSE in their understanding of the challenges facing suppliers and their effort to maintain compliance. The committee suggested further inroads could be made especially in regard to smaller companies and wholesalers.

6.5.3 Noting the percentage ratio of responses received, a member suggested some means by which the secretariat could widen their response base. The committee suggested this could be achieved by providing further and more focussed guidance in the 'information sheet' it sends to smaller suppliers and includes in its initial correspondence with them. The secretariat agreed to monitor and report results to committee in future meetings.

**Action: Secretariat**

## **Agenda Item 7: Rolling reporting update**

7.1 The committee heard that rolling reporting for May to August has been published.

## **Agenda Item 8: Communication update:**

### **8.1 Communication of PRiF work**

8.1.1 Both the committee and secretariat have been considering ways in which the work of the monitoring programme and PRiF committee could be disseminated to a wider audience, especially using platforms which employ safe and effective alternatives to meeting in person such as webinars.

8.1.2 The secretariat updated the committee on their progress with the availability of a webinar platform. The secretariat agreed to keep members updated of further progress.

**Action: Secretariat**

### **8.2 Style guide-process for consideration of change.**

8.2.1 The secretariat asked the members to send their suggested changes via the PRiF inbox for collating and consideration for future application.

**Action: Secretariat**

## **Agenda Item 9: Defra update**

9.1 Representatives from Defra addressed the committee on the current predicted future challenges faced by the food industry producers and suppliers when dealing with the logistics of the MRL regulatory systems operating in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, particularly with regards to the import and export of foodstuffs.

9.2 Defra confirmed that they are working in liaison with HSE, as the regulator, to identify how best to support the industry and asked if the committee, using their industry knowledge and contacts, could help Defra identify areas which could present difficulties. The committee confirmed they were aware of a number of areas, including the need for guidance documents at this stage, and agreed to feed back their thoughts and suggestions to be considered by Defra.

**Action: PRiF committee members**

## **Agenda Item 10: Any Other Business:**

### **10.1 POST Note**

10.1.1 The members discussed the published POST report which several of the members had contributed to, as well as the thanks received for their work.

10.1.2 The secretariat has been asked to feedback any comments of the committee on the actual report itself. The committee agree they would pass their comments to secretariat.

**Action PRiF committee**

### **10.2 2022 Meeting dates for information**

10.2.1 The members noted the meeting dates for 2022.

### **10.3 Annual report-media/stakeholder interest**

10.3.1 The committee were made aware of recent media and stakeholder interest in the PRiF Annual report published in August 2021.

### **10.4 Recruitment update**

10.4.1 HSE confirmed the recruitment process was ongoing.

### **Agenda Item 11: Date of next meeting:**

11.1 The next PRiF meeting will be held on 26 January 2022. The committee and HSE will confirm whether this meeting will be held remotely or at a COVID-19 secure site, to be confirmed by the end of November 2021.