

Expert Committee on Pesticide Residues in Food (PRiF)

Minutes of the meeting of the Expert Committee on Pesticide Residues in Food (PRiF), 26 January 2022

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 41st meeting of the committee.

Those present:

Chair:

Ms A Davison

Members:

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

Representatives:

Mr D Faulkner (Northern Ireland Executive); Mr D Jones (FSA); Dr S Nawaz (National Reference Laboratory); Mr S Phillips (Defra); Mrs E Ingram (HSE); Mr G Stark (HSE); Ms K Viezens (representing Scottish government); Mr D Williams (Defra) and Ms S Willows (Defra)

Apologies: Ms L Fielding (Welsh Government), Mr M Willis (FSA) and Dr R Scrivens (HSE)

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 had disclosed a potential conflict of interest in advance of the meeting. It was confirmed that this would not form part of the meeting agenda or discussion therefore the member could remain.

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

Agenda item 2: Action points from PRiF meeting of 13 October 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 Actions points on samples discussed in Quarter 1

2.2.1 Following clarification previously sought by members and subsequent adjustments to increase its effectiveness, the secretariat updated the committee on the modifications now in place in the monitoring programmes follow-up process. When HSE finds an MRL exceedance in samples originating from a wholesale market, it will include, when available, the UK importer of goods in the written notification. The secretariat also noted the committee members' offer of assistance in finding the most appropriate contacts when required.

2.2.2 In the Quarter 1 2021 survey results, the committee noted three samples of mushrooms containing residues of mepiquat which had been passed to HSE Enforcement as a possible unapproved use of a pesticide. It was further identified in the meeting that there was a label restriction for the authorised use on cereals in place in GB & NI indicating that any straw from cereals treated with this active should not be used as mushroom compost. To ensure this situation was known by the appropriate bodies HSE included the information in a briefing paper circulated before a meeting of the Growers Liaison Group in November 2021.

2.2.3 It was further agreed that HSE had discharged its responsibility in its compliance follow-up process for these particular instances of mepiquat residue detection in mushrooms. Other detections will be dealt with accordingly.

2.2.4 Post meeting update. Following the January 2022 meeting HSE drew their findings to the attention of the Red Tractor Assurance group and British Mushroom Growers Association.

2.3 Action point: Infant food letter DHSC (Department of Health & Social Care)

2.3.1 HSE had previously explained to the committee of the position of their engagement with the Department of Health and Social Care. The members were updated of HSE's progress in finding a resolution relating to chlorate reporting in surveys of infant food. This was addressed further under Agenda 3 Matters Arising.

2.4. Action point: 2022 Update action

2.4.1 The committee had asked the secretariat to include in the PRiF Annual Report 2021 a description of the post EU Exit Alert process replacing the RASFF process for qualifying GB samples. It was agreed that this and other possible inclusions into the 2021 PRiF Annual report will be discussed at the Communication Sub Committee meeting in February 2022.

2.5. Action point: Quarter 2 report Correspondence Arising

2.5.1 In the previous meeting the committee raised a point regarding the ratio of responses generated by the programmes follow-up process, noting that a high percentage were provided by larger retail sectors. This was considered further under Agenda Item 7 Communication Update.

2.6 Action point: Quarter 2 Communication Update

2.6.1 In previous meetings the committee and secretariat examined the tenable options available to disseminate the work of the PRiF more widely. This was taken forward under Agenda item 7.

2.6.2 A revision of the style guide for PRiF Quarterly reports concluded in 2021. The secretariat agreed that any submitted suggestions for further amendments be discussed at a Communication Sub Committee meeting in February or March and will remain an ongoing agenda item there.

2.7 Action point: Defra Update

2.7.1 A Defra representative had previously updated the members about the predicted challenges that might be faced by the food import and export industry in negotiating the new MRL GB/NI regulatory system. Defra described to members its work with the HSE as regulator, to identify the most effective methods to support this sector.

2.7.2 Defra had invited the committee to provide insight into those areas of the food supply network which they predict will require further guidance and in what form. It was agreed that suggestions would be sent to Defra for consideration.

Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology

2.7.3 Having invited the PRiF members to comment on the [POSTBrief on Pesticides and Health](#), published by the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology on 21 September 2021 in the previous meeting, the secretariat confirmed that all comments had been passed to the POST team.

Agenda Item 3: Matters Arising

3.1 Infant Food Update

3.1.1 HSE provided an update to the committee on the progress of HSE's communications with Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and Food Standards Agency (FSA) in the delimitation of boundaries of responsibility in the reporting of chlorate findings in food surveys of infant foods. HSE presented a number of alternative solutions to be considered to allow the monitoring programme to proceed to a resolution whilst fulfilling its regulatory responsibility.

3.1.2 Following discussion, it was agreed that the results for infant food would not be published until Quarter 4 2021. HSE confirmed that, as there are no risk issues and all suppliers have been informed of results where the MRL was exceeded, holding the publication for a further quarter would allow HSE, DHSC and FSA to progress their discussions on the responsibility of reporting of chlorate findings.

Action: HSE

Agenda Item 4: 2022 Monitoring Programme update

4.1 The meeting heard that HSE has commissioned the 2022 programme for GB and NI, based on the plan agreed with the PRiF during 2021.

4.2 HSE confirmed that the collection of survey samples had commenced for the 2022 programme, in both GB and NI, under the current retail contract. This would remain in place until the conclusion of the retendering exercise.

4.3 HSE provided an update on the position of the analytical procurement exercise necessitated to fulfil EU legislation following EU Exit. HSE confirmed this procurement

exercise would go forward shortly with outstanding analytical requirements being fulfilled by existing facilities in the interim.

Agenda Item 5: Draft Quarter 3 2021 report including correspondence arising

5.1 Before the meeting, members were asked to view a draft version of the Quarter 3 2021 report and associated follow-up correspondence received from suppliers. The committee was 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.

5.2 The committee discussed all areas of the report identified as requiring further consideration, including those surveys requiring a risk assessment. Particular attention was given to results identifying those residues of pesticides (not authorised in the UK but found in some imported food) where any detection is considered undesirable due to the uncertainty regarding genotoxicity.

5.3 Banana: Detections of chlorpyrifos

5.3.1 Discussion was held regarding residues of chlorpyrifos identified in a survey of bananas where a residue was detected beneath the LOD (Limit of Determination) MRL of 0.01 mg/kg.

5.3.2 It was agreed in the meeting that, as reflected in previous risk assessments, detections of chlorpyrifos are undesirable due to the uncertainty regarding genotoxicity. HSE reiterated that its assessments in such cases, which include results for both peeled and unpeeled fruit, were particularly precautionary and conservative in approach. HSE concluded that any risks of adverse health effects are low in the sample results observed in this report.

5.3.3 It was further agreed that the additional comments provided by the PRiF committee on the Quarter 3 report survey pages, particularly where it was necessary to summarise complex conclusions, helped to contextualise the findings of the risk assessment. Similar wording would be used for other surveys where chlorpyrifos had been detected.

5.4 Berries and small fruit: Detections of dimethoate and omethoate

5.4.1 Residue findings in frozen samples of blackberries were considered by the committee. Initial discussion was held around labelling legislation pertaining to processed or frozen foods. The Committee discussed the possible origins of the frozen fruit and the addition of a caveat phrase in the report. This clarifies that, where frozen berries are labelled as from the UK, this does not necessarily mean they are grown in the UK. It is likely to be where the product was packed or processed or the address of the brand owner.

5.4.2 In reference to a finding in one frozen blackberry sample, HSE discussed with the committee its precautionary approach to findings of dimethoate and its metabolite omethoate - citing the EFSA conclusion (2018) arising from the potential of genotoxicity. However, based on the dimethoate and omethoate residues in this report, HSE considers any risks of adverse health effects are low due to the limited levels of exposure anticipated.

5.5 Fosetyl-Al in surveys of organic samples

5.5.1 The meeting discussed the detection of Fosetyl-Al in organic bananas and bread. HSE clarified that none of the samples analysed contained residues over the MRL for this active. It was not considered that these findings necessarily indicate pesticide use in breach of organic rules. HSE clarified further that the full residue definition used is “Fosetyl-Al (sum of fosetyl, phosphonic acid and their salts, expressed as fosetyl)” and the residues found in these samples were detected as phosphonic acid. Fosetyl-Al breaks down to phosphonic acid. However, there are several routes by which a residue of phosphonic acid can present in these foods which would be detailed in the report itself.

5.6 Ethylene Oxide

5.6.1 It was noted that, although tested for, HSE did not detect ethylene oxide in any samples of edible seeds.

5.6.2 A brief update by the FSA attested that residues of ethylene oxide continue to be detected in both raw ingredients and finished products, resulting in the continued increased testing at UK Border Control Posts as well as within the food industry via enhanced controls. FSA notes however, that suppliers have made significant efforts to improve compliance with this MRL for food on the GB and NI market. Further testing of foods for presence of ethylene oxide is planned for the 2022 programme.

Agenda Item 6: Rolling reporting update

6.1 The committee heard that rolling reporting up to and including October has been published.

6.2 A sample of ware potato collected in the November/December rolling reporting was noted to have residue of imazalil. It was identified that there is an authorised use of imazalil on seed potato, however there is a restriction in place prohibiting treated seeds (including oversized tubers) being used for human or animal consumption. HSE confirmed that the details would be passed to HSE enforcement team for further information and details of the sample would be redacted until their investigation was complete.

Action: HSE

Agenda Item 7: Communication update:

7.1 HSE outlined to members its intention to restructure part of its follow-up process, specifically its quarterly and rolling reporting correspondence with growers and suppliers. It aimed to ensure it most effectively contributed to the division’s core principle to support good agricultural practice and reduce instances of pesticide exceedances in food.

7.2 It was agreed that HSE would draft amendments to the information leaflet that is attached to letters about non-compliant findings. These changes would be discussed at the next Communication Sub Committee meeting held in February 2022.

Action: Communication Sub-Committee

7.3 The secretariat gave an update on the adoption of webinars as a means of more widely communicating the work of the PRiF. It was reported that there remained a small number of technical issues to negotiate. The benefits of using a webinar platform to

engage with areas of industry was also mooted with further details to be brought to the Communication Sub-Committee in February or March to discuss what the committee may wish to use the platform for.

Action: Communication Sub-committee

Agenda Item 8: Defra Update

8.1 A Defra representative shared with the members a broad outline of ongoing work to reform the use of pesticides in 2022.

8.1.2 Defra explained to the meeting that the pesticides regulatory regime is a legacy system, built up whilst GB were members of the EU. While the regime is designed to provide some of the highest environmental and human health standards in the world, there may be scope for improvements in the way it operates following EU Exit. Defra described to members the opportunity to improve the system, without lowering environmental and human health standards or stepping away from its scientific basis for decision making.

8.1.3 The Defra representative outlined to the members the areas where Ministers are interested in exploring changes to the current system. These included the potential for reducing reliance on chemical pesticides, utilising Integrated Pest Management the uptake for which would be accelerated and incentivised, and encouraging the use of biopesticides. A plan for a simpler, more streamlined system was to be explored with scope to apply regulators' expertise more confidently, particularly in marginal regulatory decisions. In addition, individual decisions would be taken in the context of the wider consequences, so that broader risks and impacts on the environment and economic sustainability are considered.

8.1 4 Defra plans to have proposals ready for Ministers by March 2022 and welcomed input by the committee. It was agreed that a sub-group of both PRiF and ECP members would be assembled to put forward and explore suggestions. Defra agreed to liaise with the secretariat in the organisation of the meeting.

Action: Defra

Agenda Item 9: Any Other Business

9.1 Annual report

9.1.1 HSE discussed with members the structure of the PRiF Annual report for 2021 and HSE's regulatory obligations in regard to the publication of separate GB and NI survey results.

9.1.2 The contents of the report will be discussed further at the Communications Sub-Group meeting including suggestions for themes.

Action: Communication Sub-Committee

9.1.3 A committee member requested any available figures indicating the number of times PRiF data or publications were downloaded from the GOV.UK website. The HSE agreed to obtain these figures.

Action: HSE

9.2 PRiF meetings in 2022

9.2.1 The secretariat and committee discussed the future approach to holding PRiF meetings.

9.3 The Chair thanked the secretariat and HSE in appreciation of the work carried out in 2021 in maintaining the programme. She also congratulated the Committee members and staff on the streamlining of the quarterly report.

Agenda Item 10: Date of next Meeting

10.1 The next PRiF meeting will be held on 19 May 2022. The committee and HSE will confirm whether this meeting will be held remotely or at a COVID-19 secure site.