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), 29 January 2020

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 surveillance programme; this is the 35th meeting of the Committee.

Those present:

Chairman:

Dr P Brantom

Members:

Ms A Davison, Dr J Blackman, Mr I Finlayson, Dr S Freeman, Mr J Points, Ms D Winstanley

Representatives:

Mr G Stark (Health and Safety Executive), Dr R Scrivens (Health and Safety Executive), Dr L Dearsly (Health and Safety Executive), Mr D Faulkner (Northern Ireland Executive), Dr S Nawaz (National Reference Laboratory), Ms K Reid (Scottish Government), Dr D Mortimer (Food Standards Agency), Ms S Hugo (Defra)

Agenda item 1: Chairman’s introduction

1.1 The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting. He welcomed Debbie Winstanley back to the Committee after serving two previous terms. Ms Winstanley’s new role related to consumer interests. Her previous and current roles include communicating with consumers and stakeholders about food safety issues that are commonly raised in relation to pesticide residues in food.

Agenda item 2: Declarations of interest

2.1 Some changes to the interests that Committee members had previously declared as part of their annual declaration were reported. Specific declarations relevant to the reported information are made before the reports are discussed so that the Chairman can decide whether that Member can take part or should be excluded from discussion or from being present for that item. The Secretariat indicated that they would contact all members about updating their annual declaration.

Action: Secretariat
2.2 Ms D Winstanley gave a short summary of what was already in her annual declaration of interest as she was a new member.

2.3 Dr J Blackman wished to clarify that he does consultancy work for B&G Nurseries, which is a sister company of Ferryfast but this is only for the fruit that they grow (apples, pears and plums). He has no direct involvement with any other crop with B&G Nurseries or Ferryfast.

**Agenda item 3: Apologies**

3.1 No apologies were received.

**Agenda item 4: Action points from PRiF meeting of 17 October 2019**

4.1 **Minutes of the last meeting**

4.1.1 The Chairman confirmed that the minutes of the last meeting were agreed and would shortly be published on GOV.uk when the Quarter 2 report was published.

4.2 **Draft Quarter 1 2019 Report: reflection of market share in current sampling procedures**

4.2.1 A Committee member felt that the current sampling procedures did not reflect the national market share of supermarkets, particularly the three main national chains. The Secretariat had explained at the last meeting that whilst the sampling process took some account of market share across the full year, this was alongside a range of issues including consumer risk, compliance, geographic spread, consumer issues. The committee felt that there should be more transparency in this area and requested to be updated on issues that may affect the future programme.

4.2.2 The Secretariat explained that discussion of monitoring issues was an important part of the consideration of the controls required after EU exit in 2021. It is for this reason that it is not appropriate to just look at one issue (e.g. brand naming) in isolation. The initial priority for government was establishing the legal basis to continue to operate. The next phase is ensuring full operating capability. This is to ensure that all obligations post exit arising from MRL legislation, the Northern Ireland Protocol and incoming implications of the Official Control Regulations are considered. It is recognised that the monitoring delivery process requires modernisation and the systems are being mapped at the moment. Before operational changes are put in place it is necessary to determine the future priorities and requirements and this is also an ongoing issue. The Secretariat would report on progress with the mapping process at each future PRiF meeting and ensure that the PRiF are involved at the pivotal steps.

**Action: Secretariat**

4.2.3 The Secretariat said that for the 2020 collection they would re-instate more checks with the sampling contractors to ensure that a specific retailer is not significantly under or over-sampled in surveys where this is possible.

**Action: Secretariat**
4.2.4 The Secretariat explained that achieving diversity of surveys within existing sample numbers presented an additional challenge with market coverage. It was felt by committee members that more transparency was needed in the explanation of surveys and it was suggested that the nature of the targeted surveys be explained in the Annual Report. The Secretariat would consider this.

Action: Secretariat

4.3 Spinach

4.3.1 In the Q2 results there was a question over whether a sample which was labelled as baby leaf, with a residue above the MRL, was actually defined as a baby leaf crop in MRL legislation. Although it was initially thought that some growers may have been applying deltamethrin to baby leaf spinach, when no authorisation existed, this was not the case. The Secretariat raised this issue with the Grower Liaison Group (GLG) meeting. A Crop Consultant confirmed that there were 2 specific authorisations known as extension of authorisation for minor uses (EAMUs) which would cover this use. The Quarter 2 Report was amended appropriately. When checking which pesticides are authorised for use on spinach, HSE will also check whether there are authorisations for baby leaf crops.

Action: Complete

4.4 Publication of the draft Quarter 2 2019 Report

4.4.1 The draft Quarter 2 2019 Report was due to be published on 30 January.

4.4.2 Action points arising from the Quarter 2 2019 Report were discussed at the meeting. The Secretariat confirmed that all outstanding actions were completed, apart from the actions relating to the finding of flonicamid above the MRL in a potato sample which is still ongoing with the Regulator.

Action: Secretariat To update on the flonicamid in potato issue when more is known.

4.5 Feedback from the 2019 Open Event

4.51 Feedback from the breakout groups and survey of all attendees from the event was added to Huddle on 11 November 2019.

Action: Complete

4.6 Consideration of alternative ways to expand awareness of the work of the PRiF

4.6.1 The Secretariat were asked to consider ways of expanding awareness of the work of the PRiF, including use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter. This would form part of considerations for future open meetings. At the open meeting the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) had been considered. Progressing these FAQ’s was discussed during the Communications Update agenda item at today’s meeting.

Action: Ongoing
4.7 Updating of the PRiF webpages

4.7.1 A Committee member requested that the PRiF webpages be updated, as some areas are out of date relating to members and their declaration of interests. The Secretariat confirmed they would progress these issues once the Q2 2019 report has been published.

Action: Ongoing

4.7.2 HSE informed the committee that there was a project to update the HSE website, as part of an IT modernisation project, which would include the CRD website.

Agenda item 5: Matters Arising

5.1 Appointments update

The Secretariat explained that recruitment to the PRiF Committee had been delayed by last December’s General Election. Recruitment packs had been refreshed and were now prepared. The Chairman pointed out that the PRiF was not on the published Gov.UK list of expert committees for recruitment of experts. The Chairman and Ann Davison had agreed to stay on for the January meeting and asked to be updated on progress of the recruitment exercise.

Action: Secretariat

Agenda item 6: Update from the Analytical Sub Group (ASG)

6.1 The Scottish official laboratory (Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture, SASA) explained that since the power failure of a small number of the freezers last year a new 24-hour system had been put in place to deal with any future power failures. This alarm system would ensure that any loss of function would be notified to the laboratory staff 24 hours a day so that appropriate action could be taken.

Agenda item 7: Current topics update

7.1 EU Exit

7.1.1 HSE said that there was no further news ahead of the planned EU exit on 31 January 2020. During the Implementation Period, which will end on 31 December 2020, there will be no changes to the current legal requirements. EU rules will be adhered to. During the transition period, the focus will be on bringing into force the operational change needed for the UK to operate independently and comply with the Northern Ireland (NI) Protocol. Whatever trading arrangements were agreed on, the work of the PRiF would still be relevant.

7.1.2 In response to a question the Secretariat confirmed that developing the mechanism for HSE as UK regulator to set MRLs nationally was an important part of exit preparations. The existing MRL database had been subject to a review to ensure that in the future it can function as the legal list of MRLs; this includes an improved interface.
7.2 Chlorate

7.2.1 The Secretariat explained that there were no developments with the setting of MRLs for chlorate. Further proposals will be discussed at the next Standing Committee meeting. Industry and HSE over the last few years had submitted information to the Commission about the levels found in food, this should have informed the levels set. The PRIF and the Advisory Committee on the microbiological safety of food had co-operated in trying to find out more about industry good practice and the problems faced but had received little information. The secretariat indicated that they are hoping to set up some informal discussions with parts of the industry to see if more information can be shared this way.

Action. Secretariat.

Agenda item 8: Draft Quarter 3 2019 Report

8.1 The Chairman observed that the Quarter 3 2019 Report contained some issues that would need more in-depth discussion, so those issues will be considered first rather than considering the report alphabetically by food.

8.2 Beans with pods and okra

8.2.1 Significant issues for residues of omethoate and dimethoate were found in samples of beans with pods and okra. The PRIF discussed the issues and considered the toxicological database supporting the EFSA and JMPR assessments for omethoate and dimethoate, taking account of genotoxicity, acetylcholinesterase inhibition and the concern regarding the possibility of developmental neurotoxicity. The meeting considered some additions and suggested alterations of the wording to both the okra and beans section and also the main risk assessment table of the report, seeking to tailor the conclusions to the potential for adverse effects that might be anticipated at the estimated dietary intake levels for both dimethoate and its main metabolite omethoate. Members agreed that there was a low risk of any adverse health effects for all consumer groups consuming okra with dimethoate and omethoate at the levels in this report.

Action: Secretariat to circulate a revised section before the report can be finalised.

8.3 Apples

8.3.1 No residues above the MRLs were detected in the samples tested. A residue of dithiocarbamates (under the MRL) was detected in 1 sample. HSE explained that if it was assumed that this residue arose from thiram the calculated risk to consumers was greater than if this residue arose from mancozeb application. The supplier has now confirmed from spray records that the residue arose from mancozeb which meant that there was no exceedance of the acute reference dose.

The National Reference Laboratory explained that before the spray records had been received, they had undertaken an additional analysis which had indicated that propineb and thiram were not present above 0.02 mg/kg. HSE explained that this information would have been helpful if a risk assessment was required.
During 2020 it has been agreed that where a dithiocarbamates residue is present at a level that could exceed the acute reference dose (based on the assumption that thiram is present) this additional new screening test will be used.

8.4 Curry leaves
8.4.1 Five samples contained residues above the MRL, all were from India, and 1 sample contained 21 residues.
8.4.2 One sample contained monocrotophos, which was not authorised in the EU. The risk assessment phrases for monocrotophos were agreed. A member indicated that the import of fresh curry leaves into the UK was effectively prohibited since February 2018 for plant health purposes. The secretariat will follow this up with Defra plant health.

Action: Secretariat

8.5 Spices - Turmeric
8.5.1 Twenty samples contained residues above the MRL. No risk issues were identified in any of the residues detected. Some companies had requested their own re-test as they were unsure why so many residues were detected.
8.5.2 The Secretariat would go through the results in detail and inform the companies of any issues raised.
8.5.3 The footnote will be extended to explain that the sulfoxide was also sought. Phorate sulfoxide is a breakdown product of phorate. Although it is not included in the definition for the MRL, it would under-represent the total phorate levels in these samples if this component were excluded.

Action: Secretariat

8.6 Chocolate
8.6.1 No residues above the MRLs were detected in the samples, and there were no risk issues. The MRL in the samples had been adjusted to take account of the declared cocoa content in the samples. A separate section to explain this had been added to the report. There were no risk issues identified.
8.6.2 The National Reference Laboratory would check that 2, 4-D had been included in the active ingredients that were analysed for.

Action: National Reference Laboratory

8.7 Processed potatoes
8.7.1 One sample contained a residue above the MRL, and none of the residues detected would be expected to have an effect on health. A detailed product breakdown of the ingredients was undertaken. HSE are in communication with the supplier to determine whether the residue could have arisen from the breadcrumbs rather than the potato.
8.8 Bread & pasta

8.8.1 Two samples of bread contained residues above the MRL. None of the residues detected would be expected to have an effect on health. There had been correspondence with the company about 1 sample. Another sample contained a residue of chlorpyrifos-methyl, which was thought to have been made from flour produced before the MRL for this substance changed.

Action: Secretariat

8.8.2 None of the pasta samples contained residues above the MRLs. None of the residues detected would be expected to have an effect on health.

8.9 Spinach

8.9.1 Six samples contained residues above the MRL. None of the residues detected would be expected to have an effect on health. Five samples of fresh spinach contained residues of chlorate.

Action: Secretariat

8.9.2 The Secretariat would consider and check the description of MRLs mentioned in this section. To make sure that baby-leaf MRL’s were applied when necessary.

8.10 Strawberries

8.10.1 None of the samples, which were mainly collected from the UK, contained residues above the MRL. Fifty of the samples contained multiple residues. None of the residues detected would be expected to have an effect on health.

8.10.2 One of the samples contained tebufenpyrad which is no longer authorised for use on strawberry. Although the last usage date was end of June the sample was taken in early July, so the residues found are not unexpected.

8.11 Cooked meat

8.11.1 Twenty-three samples contained residues above the MRL. Most of the residues were of BAC and DDAC, disinfectants used in food processing and butchery, which is thought to be where the residues were incurred. Chlorate was found in 7 samples of cooked chicken and 16 samples of ham. None of the residues detected would be expected to have an effect on health.

8.11.2 The Secretariat would make it clear in the report that the analysis was for chlorate and QACs only.

Action: Secretariat

8.12 Infant food (savoury)

8.12.1 Two samples contained residues of chlorate above the MRLs. None of the residues detected would be expected to have an effect on health.

8.12.2 The Secretariat pointed out that industry was researching how to remove residues of chlorate from food. The FSA and the Department for Health and
Social care are the policy lead and will also be contacted as part of the follow up process.

8.13 Unapproved use updates

8.13.1 Details of a sample of spinach containing clothianidin, from Quarter 2 2019, were passed to HSE. As this use was approved for use on treated seed until the end of 2018, it is possible that the treated seed could have been planted in 2019. The Secretariat will check details of the enforcement information received from the supplier but this effectively is no longer an enforcement issue and this section will be updated.

Action: Secretariat

8.14 Follow-up from previous reports

8.14.1 The Secretariat explained that all but one item on the list had been dealt with. They confirmed that the only outstanding issue was the sample of spinach containing clothianidin that was discussed at Agenda item 8.12.1.

Agenda item 9: Rolling Reporting update

9.1 The Secretariat explained that November and December 2019 rolling reporting contained a sample of potatoes with a residue of chlorpropham of 13mg/kg. A RASFF would be drafted for this sample.

Agenda item 10: 2020 Monitoring Plan

10.1 The Secretariat reported that the 2020 Monitoring Plan had started. Samples were being collected and contracts had been agreed with the laboratories.

Agenda item 11: Communication update

11.1 Updated FAQs

11.1.1 A Committee member said that breakout groups at the 2019 Open Event had suggested updates to the PRiF FAQs. These had included questions about the regulation of biopesticides, how individual samples are chosen as well as shopping locations, and questions about the details of which residue are considered for combined effects.

11.1.2 A Committee member suggested amending the wording on page 70 to include that other combinations of residues were checked for when requested. The Secretariat explained that the wording about testing for multiple residues had been changed in the previous 2 reports and this may now address this issue, but they would check. Also, the wording on how residues of organophosphorus (OPs) and carbamates and their combined effect on health would be clarified.

Action: Secretariat
11.1.3 The Secretariat would upload the proposed changes to the FAQs on Huddle, for consultation.

**Action:** Secretariat

11.2 Annual Report 2019 production plan

11.2.1 The Secretariat explained that work had started on preparing the 2019 Annual Report for publication. The Quarter 4 figures were needed to complete the report and would be available in the next 4 weeks. They aimed to publish the Report in mid to late June, before the summer Parliament recess on 23 July. A working timetable had been drawn up, and key dates in the publication process would be published on Huddle.

11.2.2 The Secretariat would update the list of members list, and their declared interests so they could be referenced in the Annual report

**Action:** Secretariat

11.2.3 The Secretariat asked for contributions to the 2019 Annual Report to be sent to them as soon as possible.

**Action:** Secretariat, All Contributors

11.3 Outline plans for next Open Event

11.3.1 The Chairman felt that having a Communication Subgroup was an important part of the organising and running of the Open event. The reconstitution of the Subgroup should be placed on the agenda for discussion at the next meeting.

**Action:** Secretariat

11.3.2 The Committee noted that using Open Meetings as a way of maintaining transparency and confidence in the monitoring programme was important. However, as a result of uncertainties arising from EU exit and medium-term resource demands on the Secretariat it was considered appropriate to postpone the next Open Meeting until Spring 2021. The Committee would revisit this issue later in the year.

**Action:** Secretariat

11.3.3 A Committee member observed that it can be difficult to get outside speakers, due to clashes in commitments. To avoid this, the Secretariat should release the date of the event as early as possible, when it is known.

**Action:** Secretariat

**Agenda item 12: Any other business**

12.1 The Secretariat said that an email had been received from the Pesticides Action Network (PAN) UK about their joint report with the Soil Association, “The Cocktail Effect”, published in October 2019. This was mentioned at the Open Event. The committee noted this document for information.

**Action:** Secretariat
A Committee member wondered whether any economies could be made in the analytical testing that would release funds to extend the range of commodities that could be tested. There was some discussion about the testing of QAC’s and chlorate. The Secretariat explained that new MRLs would come into force for these substances later this year, so it was not appropriate to stop testing but once the MRLs for chlorate are agreed it will be pertinent to review further testing in this area for 2021. All participating laboratories had invested in new equipment to look for these compounds and other polar pesticides such as glyphosate so several tests can be run consecutively.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their contributions, then closed the meeting.

The next meeting of the Expert Committee on Pesticide Residues in Food (PRiF) will be held in York on 13 May 2020.