

Expert Committee on Pesticide Residues in Food (PRiF)

Minutes of the meeting of the Expert Committee on Pesticide Residues in Food (PRiF), 27 January 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 surveillance programme; this is the 38th 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 Gill Hart.

Representatives:

Dr R Scrivens (Health and Safety Executive), Mr D Faulkner (Northern Ireland Executive), Dr S Nawaz (National Reference Laboratory), Ms C Nichols (Defra); Mr G Stark (Health and Safety Executive) and Dr M Taylor (representing Scottish Government)

Apologies received from Dr D Mortimer (FSA).

Agenda item 1: Introduction

1.1 The Chair reminded the meeting of the confidentiality 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. None of the members had anything to declare relevant to this meeting.

1.2 Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic the meeting is being held via a teleconference.

1.3 The Chair asked that all relevant matters and correspondence be brought to the attention of Foods Standards Agency post meeting as their representative was unable to attend. The Secretariat confirmed that they had a resilience plan in place for future attendance.

Action Secretariat:

Agenda item 2: Action points from PRiF meeting of 14 October 2020

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 points from Q4 2019

2.2.1 Members had previously asked for an update from Defra's Organic Team on findings of chlormequat in organic oats, specifically what level of residue is acceptable in organic products. The Secretariat reported they were aware of previous guidance as to how low levels of pesticides are considered by organic regulators; however, they were seeking an update from Defra. Due to restructuring within Defra's team, the Secretariat have taken further steps to obtain this information from Defra and will keep Members up to date.

Action: Secretariat

2.3 Chlorate & Biocides (Quaternary Ammonium Compounds, QAC)

2.3.1. A paper circulated before the October meeting of the PRiF summarised the current chlorate and wider position of QAC biocides. This paper drew on and reflected information prepared by the HSE alongside industry. The HSE worked with trade bodies - including the Food and Biocides Industry Group, which represents 20 UK trade and professional organisations - to disseminate information concerning the updated chlorate MRLs and the impacts on processed food. The information has been widely circulated within the food industry as well as having been published on the chilled food website in October 2020 www.chilledfood.org/FBIG, an open website providing detailed practical support and guidance needed for the trade on biocide use.

2.3.2 The Committee indicated it would be important to ask the ACMSF for an update on their consideration of implications for food microbiological safety of pesticide MRLs for substances used as biocides. Draft minutes of this meeting are available on: [Draft ACMSF minutes October meeting \(food.gov.uk\)](https://www.food.gov.uk/publications-and-resources/publications/minutes). The Chair of the Adhoc advisory Group on biocides in food reported that over the summer the position with regard to the chlorate MRLs had stabilised and MRLs were now established at levels acceptable to the food industry and arrangements in place for consideration of processed food. In addition, the industry was reassured that there was not a move to lower the QAC MRLs. HSE's engagement with the Food and Biocides group was recognised.

2.3.3 The Committee suggested reviewing the approach to chlorate and QAC monitoring and reporting. The main source of chlorates and QACs is likely to be from treated drinking water or the use of legitimate biocides rather than pesticide use and other parts of government dealt with the microbiological safety aspects.

2.4 Handling of Quarter 2 data report

2.4.1 The committee had requested clarification of how the data for Quarter 2 2020 would be reported. The Secretariat reiterated that any detailed risk assessments and all appropriate follow up actions were taken for these samples and included in the Quarter 3 report which will be published in March 2021.

2.4.2 The Committee voiced concerns that additional lines of communication would be required to more widely disseminate how the publication of the Quarter 2 2020 samples were being handled and why. The Secretariat drafted a short statement clarifying the situation and this was added to the Gov.UK site on the appropriate page when the data was published.

2.5 Q2 Dried Fruit

2.5.1 Committee Members suggested that context be given to the range of residues in the dry fruit sample, clarifying that samples will consist of fruit from more than one source or grower. This has been addressed in a comment inserted in the Quarter 3 draft report.

2.6 Q2 Grapes.

2.6.1 The Committee previously noted that a sample of grapes from Italy contained a residue of ethephon which resulted in a RASFF published on the EU portal, however felt it was not made clear when the sample was published in the rolling reporting. The Secretariat confirmed that wording will be included with the rolling reports for this scenario to identify which quarterly report the detailed risk assessment will be included in. Details of the RASFF will be included in the quarterly report.

2.7 Q2 Infant Formula

2.7.1 The Committee noted a lack of own brand infant formula in the 2020 Infant formula survey. The Secretariat advised that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the infant formula survey was carried out through online shopping which limited the range of brands that were available. If online shopping is still being carried out when the 2021 infant food survey is sampled, further research will be undertaken to ensure that as many brands as possible are included.

2.7.2 The Committee agreed the importance of liaison with ACMSF, DH and FSA on infant food.

2.8 Style guide

2.8.1. At the October meeting, Members were asked to provide the Secretariat with comments on the style guide and layout of the quarterly report. A number of comments were received and will be picked up with agenda item 9.

2.9 Other communications

2.9.1 Following discussion of the use of wider communications including social media tools to broaden access to PRiF data, the Secretariat has explored with Defra what information could be put out on their social media platforms. The Secretariat reported that social media focus remains strongly on high priority announcements, led by Government, to disseminate critical public information like COVID -19 guidance and Transition information for the public and businesses. The Secretariat agreed they would explore possible options with other relevant Government departments.

Action: Secretariat

Agenda Item 3. Matters arising

3.1 The committee drew attention to the importance placed on maintaining the high levels of confidentiality required surrounding the monitoring programmes results to ensure none of its ongoing investigations into exceedances are compromised. This includes the confidentiality which is also afforded to the correspondence received from suppliers in response to HSE notifications and the manner in which HSE publish these on their reports.

Agenda Item 4. Current Topics Update

4.1 A PRiF member had requested clarity as to how the GB MRL regime will proceed in regard to NI, following the conclusion of the Transition period post EU Exit. The committee noted a brief paper which had been circulated to the members before the meeting. The paper broadly set out the regulatory situation which the programme will have to navigate as a result of a separate GB/EU MRL regime. The Secretariat are currently liaising closely with Defra colleagues in strategic policy and a Defra representative will be present at future meetings to update the committee.

Action Secretariat:

Agenda Item 5. 2021 Monitoring Programme Update

5.1 The Secretariat informed the committee that the sampling programme for 2021 had commenced in both GB and NI. It was reported that contracts have been finalised with the retail collection agency and warranted inspectors. The HSE outlined changes to programme and procurement which could start in 2022. The Secretariat will keep the committee updated in all developments.

Action Secretariat:

5.2 A committee member raised the issue of reported findings of ethylene oxide in samples of sesame seeds processed in India, which had resulted in an alert by FSA and Border Control. The member enquired what was in place regarding testing for this and whether the monitoring programme would test for this residue in sesame seeds as part of its ongoing surveillance. The NRL representative noted that there had been recent developments and improvements in the method of testing for this residue. The laboratory was currently validating a method. HSE confirmed that edible seeds (including sesame seeds) were in the monitoring programme for 2021 as they had been identified with other foods to be sampled by its Ranking tool. HSE reiterated that the programme was a surveillance programme and was not designed or intended to be reactive. There is a small amount of flexibility in deferring lower priority surveys.

5.3 The Secretariat agreed that some wording would be added to clarify the role of the surveillance programme to the 2020 Annual report.

Action Secretariat

5.4 The FSA provided a post meeting note on the controls now imposed as a result of the findings: Following the findings of unauthorised residues of ethylene oxide in sesame seeds from India in October 2020 Regulation 2020/1540 added ethylene oxide in sesame seeds to Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/1793 which sets enhanced controls at imports. Since this legislation was in place at the end of the transition period it forms part of retained EU law.

Agenda Item 6. Draft Quarter 3 Report

6.1 Handling of report

6.1.1 The draft quarter 3 PRiF 2020 report, which will be published in March 2021, was circulated to the members before the meeting. The committee and Secretariat agreed in advance to consider those issues which concern the wider content style of PRiF report publications including quarterly reports through the Communications Subcommittee.

6.1.2 The HSE noted the committee's direction on a number of areas of the introduction to the report which needed clarity and further detail.

Action Secretariat:

6.1.3 A discussion was held about the implications of chlorate MRLs that came in to force in June 2020 and how these changes would be reflected in future PRiF quarterly and annual reports. HSE agreed to consider how to do this and update the committee.

Action: Secretariat

6.1.4 The committee discussed areas of wording within the risk assessment for several surveys which they considered required amending. HSE agreed to look at suggestions and update the committee via the communication subcommittee.

6.1.5 The committee had provided written comments on the draft report prior to the meeting. The Secretariat had provided a response on the various issues raised and how they would be addressed. Significant issues were discussed in the meeting in more detail.

Action: Secretariat

6.2 Avocado

6.2.1 The committee noted a detailed risk assessment for a residue of prochloraz in survey of avocado. A suggestion by a member to review the wording in risk assessment to be addressed in the next communication subcommittee meeting.

Action: Subcommittee

6.3 Bread (Speciality).

6.3.1 The committee noted an exceedance in a sample of speciality bread. Discussion was held around the calculation of an MRL applied to a product where no designated processing factor exists. It was clarified by the NRL representative that in law processing factors can be adjusted. HSE informed the committee that further information is sought by them from the supplier so they can refine their conclusions. HSE also informed the committee that they are in dialogue with the supplier of the samples and will keep the committee updated.

Action: Secretariat

6.4 Courgettes

6.4.1 The committee noted four organic samples in the survey containing residues of dieldrin. It was observed that dieldrin had not been approved since the 1980s however can be present as a pollutant in the environment, from historical use, remaining in the soil.

HSE confirmed they had as routine written to the suppliers of the samples as well as to the appropriate organic body. However, further involvement is beyond the remit of the programme.

6.5 Grapes

6.5.1 The committee noted the risk assessment on grapes, one sample contained a residue of ethephon at a level that resulted in a RASFF being raised by the FSA. The committee asked for more detail of how a RASFF is raised. HSE to provide details of procedure.

Action: Secretariat

6.6 Herbs

6.6.1 The committee noted there were three MRL exceedances of chlorpropham, they commented this could be as a result of its use as a herbicide on and around growing herbs. Chlorpropham is no longer authorised, however was authorised at the time of application.

6.7 Milk

6.7.1 The possibility of testing for chlorates in milk was discussed by the committee. HSE explained there would be difficulty to trace the source of any residues found due the practice of milk being pooled in a dairy after it has been collected from individual farms. A committee member clarified that milk could however be traced to the individual dairy successfully as identification codes are used. It was added by the NRL representative that when testing has been carried out previously very little chlorate residue in milk has been seen.

6.7.2 HSE indicated that it would be most efficient to test chlorate when other single residues method analytes were being sought as part of the 3 year rolling co-ordinated programme. Milk forms part of that programme in 2022. HSE note that additional consideration would be needed as to how to ensure sampling represented the different dairies.

Action: Secretariat

6.8 Orange Juice

6.8.1 The committee noted the prevalence of supermarket own brands in the survey for orange juice. It was noted that this survey was part of the quarter 2 sample collection where the HSE adopted a more restrictive method of collection in order to comply with government guidance during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The Secretariat confirmed that the protocols given to the collection company ensured no bias was placed on any particular brand.

6.8.2 It was clarified by the committee that the concern was not regarding brand or non branded juice but to achieve an even representation of concentrated or fresh juice as these come from different sources and it was advised that the differing processing methods for producing juice from concentrate or fresh can have a bearing on the residues found. The Secretariat agreed to examine how to address this in future surveys of fruit juice.

6.8.3 It was noted that oranges represented an example of a commodity where a risk assessment is presented for 'all of the peel consumed with the fruit' as well as 'consumption of flesh only (without peel)' It was agreed that this form of complex risk assessment would be good to consider in the within the remit of the next communication subgroup meeting to review the forms of wording used in PRiF reports.

Action: Secretariat

6.9 Potatoes

6.9.1 The secretariat explained to the committee that a sample seen in the Quarter 2 results in October, was published with the Quarter 1 survey in error. This was due to the date the sample was collected being at the end of March 2020. It fell after the cut off for Quarter 1 samples so was not initially included in the report when Members first reviewed it, however when the report was amended for publication it was included. The sample contained a residue of chlorpropham at 4.2 mg/kg which required a detailed risk assessment. Members saw this risk assessment at the October meeting and were content with it. The risk assessment was not published in Quarter 1 2020, however, there was a risk assessment included in the report for a residue of chlorpropham found at a higher level. The secretariat assured the committee this is an anomaly caused by an isolated issue with collection dates and has not been repeated in any other samples.

Agenda Item 7 Draft Quarter 3 Report-

7.1 All issues were taken under item 6.

Agenda Item 8. Rolling reporting update

8.1 The Committee had no comments to make on the rolling reporting.

Agenda Item 9. Communication update

9.1 A paper prepared by the Secretariat was circulated to the PRiF members before the meeting which outlined proposed changes to the Style Guide for PRiF publications. A communication subgroup meeting will be held in March 2021 to discuss the layout and content of the PRiF quarterly reports.

Action: Communication Sub-committee

Agenda Item 10. Defra consultation on draft revised National Action Plan for the Sustainable Use of Pesticides

10.1 The UK Governments have produced a draft revised National Action Plan for the Sustainable Use of Pesticides. The document detailing a consultation on the draft was circulated before the meeting to the members.

10.2 A representative from Defra outlined the invitation to the committee, amongst a range of stakeholders, to comment on the revised draft via a set of questions covering five key areas. Defra will act as the main point of contact. However, the committee members were asked to submit their comments to HSE by 10 February who will collate these and respond on their behalf.

Agenda Item 11.Any other business

11.1 Quarter 4 2019 Potato Survey follow up report by CIPC (chlorpropham)

11.1.1

The committee noted an MRL exceedance of chlorpropham identified in sample 4400/2020 potato survey (chlorpropham found at 13 mg/kg, MRL 10 mg/kg) the result and associated risk assessment having been previously reported in Q1 2020 ([link to Q1 2020 report](#)) . A response was received from the farming manager for the store and an audit report provided by AHBD. Following discussion the PRiF agreed with the proposal that treatment air flows could have been impacted, affecting the homogeneity of the fogging, as the applications were made to a large box store that was not filled to capacity at the time of each application. Chlorpropham is no longer approved for use in the UK following the renewal assessment of this substance.

11.2 Chair's comments

11.2.1 The chair thanked everyone for their hard work under difficult circumstances.

The next meeting of the Expert Committee on Pesticide Residues in Food (PRiF) will be held remotely on 19 May 2021.