

Expert Committee on Pesticide Residues in Food (PRiF)

Minutes of the meeting of the Expert Committee on Pesticide Residues in Food (PRiF), 13 July 2022

The meeting was held virtually.

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 43rd 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), Dr S Nawaz (National Reference Laboratory), Mr S Phillips (Defra), Dr R Scrivens (HSE), Ms S Willows (Defra) and Ms K Reid (Scottish Government)

Apologies:

Mr M Willis (FSA) and Mr G Stark (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 No conflicts of interest were declared.

Agenda item 2: Action points from PRiF meeting of 25 May 2022

2.1 The secretariat provided an update on actions from the previous meeting and informed the committee that all actions were complete, or progress would be discussed with the relevant agenda item within the meeting.

2.2 Members noted a communication sub-group meeting would be held prior to the October meeting to discuss the annual report.

Agenda Item 3: Matters Arising

3.1 No matters arising were raised.

Agenda Item 4: 2023 Monitoring Programme

4.1 HSE presented a proposed list of commodities to be surveyed in 2023. They explained this was based on a ranking model which incorporates previous surveys, the number of non-compliance cases identified and the products significance in consumers' diets amongst other data.

4.2 A sub-group meeting was held in June with three members of the PRiF and FSA representatives to discuss and finalise the list. The Committee noted the work of the sub-group and discussed products of interest such as tea and cheese. Members also raised the relative responsibilities of HSE's monitoring programme and other testing programmes overseen by the Food Standards Agency.

4.3 HSE agreed to further amend the table based on feedback and circulate the updated list.

Action: HSE

Agenda Item 5: Draft Quarter 1 2022 Report

5.1 Beans with pods: Detections of chlorpyrifos, quinalphos, dimethoate and omethoate

5.1.1 Discussion was held regarding a residue of chlorpyrifos at 0.04mg/kg (MRL of 0.01* mg/kg). It was noted any detections of chlorpyrifos are undesirable due to the uncertainty regarding genotoxicity, but no short-term risk was expected.

5.1.2 Discussion was held regarding a residue of quinalphos at 0.5 mg/kg (MRL of 0.01* mg/kg). HSE concluded any effect on health would be unlikely based on short term toxicity.

5.1.3 Discussion was held regarding a residue of dimethoate in two samples. These findings were of 0.04 mg/kg and 0.03mg/kg dimethoate (MRL of 0.01 mg/kg) and 0.05 mg/kg and 0.08 mg/kg omethoate (MRL of 0.01 mg/kg) respectively. It was noted any detection of dimethoate is undesirable due to the uncertainty regarding genotoxicity, though HSE concluded an effect on short-term health is unlikely.

5.1.4 Two combined risk assessments have been carried out for beans with pods, with respect to the short-term dietary risks. The first combined risk assessment considered omethoate and quinalphos in the yard long beans sample, and the second dimethoate, omethoate and chlorpyrifos in the guar bean sample. Both combined risk assessments identified the critical consumer group as infants and concluded a short-term health effect for the combined residues was unlikely.

5.1.5 Members discussed the reporting mechanism to the FSA, including the criteria and purpose of the reporting. They further noted the need to ensure information was being shared effectively.

5.2 Grapes: Detections of lambda-cyhalothrin and ethephon

5.2.1 Discussion was held regarding a residue of lambda-cyhalothrin at 0.07 mg/kg (MRL of 0.08 mg/kg). HSE noted the testing cannot differentiate between lambda-cyhalothrin and gamma-cyhalothrin. Therefore on a precautionary basis the ARfD for gamma-cyhalothrin was used for the risk assessment which concluded an effect on health would be unlikely. If the residue was from lambda-cyhalothrin an effect on health was not expected.

5.2.2 Discussion was held regarding a residue of ethephon at 1.6 mg/kg (MRL of 1mg/kg). HSE noted the risk assessment concluded an effect of health was considered unlikely.

5.3 Peach/nectarine: Detections of chlorpyrifos

5.3.1 Discussion was held regarding a residue of chlorpyrifos at 0.04 mg/kg (MRL of 0.01 mg/kg). HSE noted the same approach has been taken as with the chlorpyrifos residue found in beans with pods. The risk assessment concluded the risk of any adverse health effects are low, though any detection of chlorpyrifos is undesirable due to the uncertainty regarding genotoxicity.

5.4 Spinach: Detections of lambda-cyhalothrin

5.4.1 Discussion was held regarding a residue of lambda-cyhalothrin at 0.05 mg/kg (MRL of 0.06 mg/kg). HSE noted the same approach had been taken as with the lambda-cyhalothrin residue found in grapes.

5.4.2 If the ARfD for gamma-cyhalothrin was used the risk assessment concluded an effect on health would be unlikely. If the residue was from lambda-cyhalothrin an effect on health was not expected.

5.5 Avocado: Detections of prochloraz

5.5.1 Discussion was held regarding a residue of prochloraz at 1.5 mg/kg (MRL of 7 mg/kg). HSE highlighted it would require a consumption level in the 97.5th percentile and a large proportion of peel being consumed by the most critical consumers for there to be a risk to consumers. HSE highlighted that in the worst case form of the assessment, assuming all the peel is consumed an effect on health would be unlikely.

5.5.2 HSE reiterated that their assessments in such cases, which include results for both peeled and unpeeled fruit, were precautionary in approach.

5.6 Residues over the MRL

5.6.1 HSE note they had written to the relevant brand owners, sampling points and supplier for any samples with a residue detected above the MRL. They have yet to receive replies. Any replies received pre-publication will be shared with the committee.

5.6.2 Members discussed the growing conditions which could have led to the detection of prosulfocarb in a sample of apples. *Post meeting note there is an extension of use for this pesticide which can be used on non-cropping apples.*

5.6.3 Members also noted the detection of imazalil in a sample of potatoes which is only authorised for use on seed potatoes and suggested HSE liaise with seed potato grower bodies.

Action: HSE

5.6.4 Members noted the finding of chlorate in a Spanish cabbage was likely from water used in the production of the cabbage rather than post-harvest and discussed how best to represent this in the report. It was considered that the chlorate section of the report should be updated.

5.7 Organic samples

5.7.1 HSE discussed the residues found in organic samples, noting their current policy on reporting any residues found to Defra Organics even if the residue is of a pesticide which is allowed in organic farming. They informed members while they refer cases to the companies and Defra they do not investigate if the residues detected are in line with organic registration schemes. Following discussion with members, HSE will consider whether this is still the most appropriate approach.

Action: HSE

5.8 Chair's summary

5.8.1 It was agreed the HSE will amend the wording in the summary, to ensure the level of risk is not inadvertently overstated to lay readers.

5.8.2 Following discussion, it was agreed HSE would consider how the term 'cocktail effect' is defined in the report and whether this is appropriate.

Action: HSE

5.8.3 Members discussed the differences present between the supply chains of GB and NI, alongside the differences in consumer diets and the origins of produce.

5.8.4 It was agreed members would provide any comments on spelling or minor wording issues by correspondence.

Action: PRiF members

Agenda Item 6: Rolling reporting update

6.1 HSE introduced the survey of samples collected in April and May, noting no risks were concluded. The survey is awaiting publication.

Agenda Item 7: Communication update:

7.1 Final guidance leaflet

7.1.1 HSE presented an updated guidance leaflet, noting the changes based on comments received from the communication sub-group and from members at the May meeting of the PRiF.

7.1.2 The Committee provided feedback on the leaflet, it was agreed to review the proposed changes and agree if the changes required further consideration by the communication sub-group.

Action: Communication sub-group

7.2 Frozen foods – 2022

7.2.1 HSE introduced the item explaining many frozen goods labelled with the country of origin as the UK are in practice grown outside of the UK. When samples with residues not approved for use in the UK are detected additional laboratory testing and enforcement investigation occurs, which is disproportionate effort for samples unlikely to have been grown in the UK.

7.2.2 Members agreed to work with HSE in identifying the type of products unlikely to have been grown and frozen in the UK. They highlighted there would be products where there would be some limited UK production and freezing but the product is primarily sourced from outside of the UK.

Agenda Item 8: Defra update

8.1 Defra presented an update on regulatory reform, noting their work alongside HSE and the devolved administrations. They emphasised work remained ongoing despite changes at the ministerial level, as the Minister for Farming, Fisheries and Food and the Secretary of State will remain in post at least until the beginning of September

8.2 They updated the committee on the progress of stakeholder workshops discussing integrated pest management, measuring progress, bio-pesticides, active substance renewals, the enforcement systems in agriculture and amenity, and the proposals for taking a more proactive approach to the withdrawal of active substances.

8.3 Members queried the progress of the Official Control Regulations, and the estimated level of registration of users across the sectors. They further noted concerns within the potato industry over a lack availability of approved products.

8.4 The Committee noted they would support greater clarity between the regulation of pesticides and biocides, particularly when substances have multiple uses. They reiterated their support for the precautionary principle of assessing risk, and the maintaining role of independent advice.

Agenda Item 9: Any other business

9.1 The Chair offered her thanks to all those involved in delivering the Quarter 4 report.

Agenda Item 10: Date of next meeting

10.1 The next meeting will be held on 19 October 2022.