

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), 24 January 2024

The meeting was held as a virtual meeting.

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 49th 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:

Ms H Ainsworth (Defra); Ms H Cooke (HSE); Mr A Dixon (HSE); Mr D Faulkner (Northern Ireland Executive); Mr T Horgan (FSA); Ms H Kyle (HSE); Dr S Nawaz (National Reference Laboratory); Dr R Scrivens (HSE) and Ms K Viezens (Scottish Government);

Apologies:

Ms C McCartney-Collard (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 One member declared a non-personal, non-specific conflict and it was decided they could remain and participate in discussion on the relevant agenda item.

Agenda item 2: Action points from PRiF meeting 18 October 2023 [PRiF 1 Jan/2024]

- 2.1 The secretariat provided an update on actions from the previous meeting and informed the committee that the majority of actions were complete. A small number were still ongoing, and an update would be provided at a future meeting.
- 2.2 The members requested a copy of the commissioned survey on black-eyed beans, the secretariat will circulate.

Action: HSE and Secretariat

Agenda Item 3: Matters arising and forward business plan [PRiF 2 Jan/2024]

- 3.1 The secretariat introduced the forward business plan and invited members to suggest any additions/amendments which would be incorporated before the next meeting.
- 3.2 The secretariat noted that Members had been invited to a HSE workshop on the food residue monitoring programme in February 2024.
- 3.3 HSE requested a forward planning meeting prior to the May sub-group meeting, the members agreed.

Agenda item 4: Monitoring programme update [PRiF 3 Jan/2024]

- 4.1 HSE updated the Committee on the implementation of the 2024 monitoring programme for GB and NI, noting that sampling for 2024 has commenced.
- 4.2 HSE noted that GB laboratories are currently being used for the testing of NI samples, this is a temporary measure while a procurement exercise to secure a new laboratory for the NI programme is undertaken.
- 4.3 Members noted that they had met with HSE to discuss analytical testing and the NI programme and were assured by the robustness of the measures put in place by HSE.
- 4.4 HSE presented the updated guidance on frozen goods. They noted that 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. The intention of the guidance is to highlight which frozen samples are likely to have actually been grown in the UK.
- 4.5 Members advised there was a possibility some specific goods may be frozen when a surplus occurs in UK production, HSE agreed to update their guidance on frozen goods for the 2024 programme and liaise with members on the specific foods noted.

Agenda Item 5: Update from the Analytical Subgroup (ASG)

5.1 HSE and the National Reference Laboratory expert provided an update on the work of the ASG including any ongoing R&D projects.

5.2 The members asked about the analytical suite and how it is considered for the surveys. HSE stated the ranking tool explains the criteria for updating the analytes. HSE informed members they continually enforce any new mandatory requirements and look at any new advisory recommendations, liaising and sharing intelligence with other government bodies and devolved governments. HSE advised they are also looking at the Pesticide Usage Survey with a view to considering those widely used herbicides which have high MRLs in grassland, crops and fodder, which may also feed into the Products of Animal Origin control plan.

5.3 The members asked if there were any future plans to consider non-chemical pesticides. HSE advised that they are not currently tested.

Agenda item 6: Defra Update

6.1 HSE updated the committee on current measures HSE have taken in managing the active substance renewal programme. They have extended a number of substances due to expire for three years and are actively working on how best to prioritise their available resourcing during the pre-reform period, noting this work is happening alongside the approval of new active substances.

6.2 Defra presented to the committee on their ongoing work concerning regulatory reform. They noted this was being carried out jointly with the Devolved Governments, HSE and other relevant government bodies. The committee discussed the current draft proposals, noting that any future policy developments were subject to consultation and change.

Agenda item 7: Draft Quarter 3 2023 report [PRiF 4 and 5 – 5-2 Jan/2024]

7.1 HSE presented the draft version of the Quarter 3 2023 report and associated compliance correspondence received from the suppliers. HSE had identified several areas that would require advice, though Members could explore any aspects of the report they considered to be of interest.

7.2 The Committee were asked to advise on:

- If members were aware of any information that could provide HSE with additional understanding on how any of the residues detected over the MRL may have occurred

- If members were aware of any information that could provide HSE with additional understanding on how any of the residues detected in organic samples could have occurred
- If members had any comments on the supplier's responses provided, after considering HSE's view which is provided after each response?
- If Members are aware of any information that could help inform HSE follow-up actions when considering the findings of spinosad in peas and pirimicarb in apples.
- If members had any further information around the use of linuron in domestically produced carrots that could be relevant to findings in this survey.

7.3 Members discussed that:

- This is the first time a risk assessment for a finding of glufosinate (found in oranges) will be published. Members discussed the use of glufosinate to control root suckers and the possibility of exposure via spray drift.
- HSE have consulted the FSA on the risk assessment and advised even if all the flesh and peel is consumed there would not be any adverse effect on health expected, though the risk assessment had been included for transparency.
- Organic carrots are often packaged alongside non-organic carrots and it may be difficult to establish a clear chain for the residues found.
- That the wording of the comments concerning yard long bean was unclear on how a conclusion had been drawn and needed to reference the underlying toxicological assessment more clearly. Members agreed to refer the discussion to the communication sub-group for consideration.

Action: Communication sub-group

- The growing conditions for carrots were difficult last year and drilling had been delayed due to weather conditions. Members noted that they would not expect to see a residual finding of linuron from the soil after such a long period since the product had been withdrawn.
- HSE noted the soil data submitted as part of the data package for Linuerion had show wide variations in the rate of degradation. The worst-case data indicates there is potential for persistence and long-term accumulation to occur. When results are flagged the relevant product and country of origin will be noted by FSA as part of their considerations for regulatory action. The Committee noted they would be interested in exploring cross-government links on capacity building in exporting countries.

7.4 Member discussed a number of possible minor wording changes and agreed to refer them to the communication sub-group for consideration.

Agenda item 8: Rolling reporting update

8.1 The committee noted the results of the September and October rolling reporting. HSE confirmed the rolling reports for November will be circulated to members shortly.

8.2 Members commented on delays publishing the rolling reporting and a change to a phrase used “ill-health effects”. HSE responded that a delay had occurred due to awaiting responses from other sources. HSE confirmed it will check any new wording with the style guide.

Agenda item 9: Draft Ways of Working Document [PRiF 6 Jan/2024]

9.1 The Secretariat introduced a draft Ways of Working (WoW) document, noting it was a requirement under the revised Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Councils. The WoW document is intended to detail the working procedures of the committee and would be reviewed annually as a standing agenda item.

9.2 The members welcomed documenting the committee’s ways of working and suggested including further detail on the role of lay members, the independence of members and the work of the committee to help support clear communication of results. They requested further time to review the document. The Secretariat agreed to include further discussion on the agenda for the May meeting.

Action: Secretariat

Agenda item 10: Pesticide Usage Survey report 2022 [PRiF 7 - 8 Jan/2024]

10.1 Members noted that the Pesticide Usage Survey reports for ‘Soft fruits’ and ‘Arable Crops’ in the UK had been published. The members reviewed the two documents, noted their usefulness and discussed the rate of insecticides used on arable crops.

Agenda item 11: Any other business

11.1 The Secretariat invited members to note the following meeting dates for 2024:

- 22 May 2024
- 17 July 2024
- 16 October 2024
- 29 January 2025

11.2 Members discussed out of date and no longer approved pesticides being held by growers and the mechanisms for safe disposal. Members noted there were industry led schemes in place to support farmers and other growers, including through the water companies. Members advised that they would support greater use of amnesty schemes.

11.3 HSE noted that wider questions of amnesty schemes and chemical disposal policy would come under the Defra remit. Defra agreed to feed back the comments to the relevant policy teams.

11.4 Members suggested including a standing review of the EFSA Annual Report. The Secretariat agreed to circulate the report when published.

11.5 Member made comment that most countries are reporting to two significant figures and requested clarification from HSE regarding the UK position. HSE confirmed that no decision had been made yet and HSE were in the process of gathering more information. HSE confirmed a definitive decision would be made for the Quarter 1 2024 survey, noting for technical reasons no changes could be made midway through a survey.

Agenda item 12: Date of next meeting

12.1 The next meeting will be held virtually on 22 May 2024.