

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), 16 October 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 51st meeting of the committee.

Those present:

Chair:

Ms A Davison

Members:

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

Representatives:

Ms H Cooke (HSE); Mr D Faulkner (Northern Ireland Executive); Ms A Gibson (Defra); Ms C McCartney Collard (FSA); Ms L Melton (Scottish Government); Dr S Nawaz (National Reference Laboratory) and Dr R Scrivens (HSE)

Apologies:

Ms H Kyle (HSE)

1. 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.

2. Agenda item 2: Action points from PRiF Meeting 17 July 2024

2.1 The secretariat provided an update on actions from the previous meeting and informed the committee that all of the actions were complete.

2.2 Members previously discussed the EFSA 2022 EU annual report on pesticide residues in food and how they present their data compared to the UK. Members asked if consideration of how UK data is presented will be discussed at the next communication sub-group meeting. The secretariat confirmed that presentation of the UK data is included in the Competent Authority Annual Report, rather than the Committee annual report therefore it is for Government to consider. The secretariat confirmed if there are any areas Government require advice on, this will be referred to the communication sub-group in the first instance.

3. Agenda item 3: Matters and forward business plan

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 paper 3.1 details a supplier response from a sample included in Quarter 4 2023. There has been ongoing discussion between the supplier and HSE about the sample in question which has led to the delay in the correspondence being seen by the committee. The secretariat noted that the relevant data has been published and this is being presented for members information.

3.3 Members discussed including guidance on good practice for suppliers responses to HSE enquires in the next PRiF annual report.

3.4 The chair requested an update on the outcome of the February workshop and the review of the PRiF. The secretariat confirmed discussions with relevant government departments are ongoing and they will update the committee on any further developments. The chair would raise the issue of confirming the public trust role of scientific advisory committees at the next meeting of chairs with the Chief Scientific Advisor in the Spring.

3.5 The secretariat confirmed the presentation by HSE on the Consumer Risk Assessment project is still planned for the January 2025 meeting.

3.6 Members discussed if the horizon scanning agenda item might benefit from more prioritisation and specific focuses on one area, to enable a deeper dive into any given subject. The secretariat confirmed they would consider this further.

4. Agenda item 4: Monitoring Programme update

4.1 HSE updated the committee on the status of the monitoring programme noting that the reports for quarter 3 and quarter 4 2023 have now been published. Sampling for quarter 3 2024 is complete and quarter 4 is underway. Work is progressing for the 2025 programme.

4.2 HSE confirmed the procurement process for engaging a laboratory for the Northern Ireland sampling is almost complete. HSE confirmed the backlog of Northern Ireland publications for 2023 is actively being worked on. The Chair thanked HSE for their work procuring a new laboratory.

5. Agenda item 5: Draft Quarter 2 2024 report

5.1 HSE presented the draft version of Quarter 2 2024 report. HSE had identified several areas that would require advice, though members could explore any aspects of the report they considered to be of interest.

5.2 Overall the findings in the report are similar to previous quarters. There were 12 GB samples with residues over the MRL and 3 NI samples. HSE has written to the brand owner or supplier of all these samples and will seek advice members on the responses that have been received.

5.3 HSE confirmed after work with the Defra contents team on the accessibility standards of the quarterly reports, the reports will now be published in a more accessible format. Members asked if there is any version control that would allow historic data to still be available. The secretariat confirmed that all reports are automatically copied and retained by the National Archives and are publicly available. HSE will look into whether links within reports would link to historic data (available at the time the report was published) or to the most up to date information.

ACTION: HSE

5.4 The committee was asked:

- If they 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 there were any other risk issues/suspected unapproved use they would like to discuss.
- If they were aware of organic straw being used in GB for growing organic mushrooms.
- For their advice on the testing of dried beans in 2025.

5.5 Members discussed:

- A finding of chlorpyrifos in a sample of dried beans, the finding of chlorpyrifos was within the MRL and was sent to the FSA for consideration, no acute risk was identified and an affect on short term health was unlikely. The committee asked if an amendment should be made in the report to say any residue that is genotoxic is undesirable, HSE confirmed the usual wording on genotoxicity will be added to the

report. Members also asked if a combined risk assessment should be considered. Although the example discussed represents a combination that is outside of the chemical groups that HSE typically consider, HSE reassured the committee that they have looked at the combined risk and consider that an effect on health would not be expected.

- Residues above the MRL were found in samples of fresh green beans. These were sent to the FSA for consideration and an INFOSAN notice was issued by the FSA and any remaining beans withdrawn. HSE confirmed the usual wording on genotoxicity will be added to the report.
- A sample of grapefruit contained residue above the MRL but within measurement of uncertainty. The chair requested the removal of the word “however” in the report. HSE agreed this would be removed.
- HSE reported on low levels of chlorpyrifos that were found in samples of olive oil, these were below the MRL. HSE confirmed the reporting level for chlorpyrifos has been lowered to gain more information on the incidence of residues. HSE will be contacting the suppliers for further information. The committee discussed the possible reasons for these low levels. Chlorpyrifos is not permitted for use on olives in the EU so the finding appears unusual. The committee would prefer to see the supplier response before commenting further.
- Residue of an approved biocide product was detected in eggs, which HSE are following up. The committee expressed the need to be transparent in the findings once more information is received.
- One residue of chlorate found in melons. Members asked if all melons were tested for chlorate as it is not clear to them. HSE confirmed all melons are tested and will look into whether this can be made clearer in the tables.
- Residues above the MRL were found in mushrooms, HSE are following up. Members commented on the residue detected coming from the mushroom growing material. Members discussed the availability of organic straw and manure for mushroom growers. Members stated it is difficult for mushroom growers to source organic manure as organic farmers like to keep the manure, leaving mushroom growers to source from conventional farms. Members stated the residue is likely from straw treated as a crop and carried forward into the manure. HSE stated following this discussion the wording on the report will be considered further.

ACTION: HSE

- Members discussed a residue of beta HCH found in a sample of white fish. HSE suggested this was likely from historic use. The committee agreed and suggested HSE look at where the fish is sourced. The chair suggested the wording is amended in the report. HSE will consider the wording.

6. Agenda item 6: Rolling reporting update

6.1 The committee noted that the results of the June and July rolling reporting had been published. The results of the August rolling reported had been circulated for comment.

6.2 HSE confirmed the rolling reporting for September will be circulated to members shortly.

6.3 Members discussed contacting suppliers themselves in the capacity as PRiF members to discuss relevant findings. The secretariat confirmed as this could be a potential conflict of interest, contact should be routed through HSE and the secretariat.

7. Agenda item 7: Guidance documents update

7.1 The secretariat presented a paper on behalf of HSE to provide an annual update to the committee on guidance documents produced to facilitate the operation of Regulation No 1107/2009.

7.2 The committee discussed:

- That EU guidance would automatically be adopted in NI but queried the timescales for evaluating guidance for adoption in a GB context.
- If HSE has procedures in place to receive independent scientific advice on questions relating to the adoption or publication of guidance documents.

7.3 HSE noted that the evaluation of EU guidance documents for use within GB is prioritised on a case-by-case basis in agreement with Defra and the devolved governments. HSE further confirmed that they have received independent scientific advice in the past from the Expert Committee on Pesticides (ECP) on guidance documents and would seek the advice of either the ECP or PRiF as needed in the future.

7.4 HSE confirmed they intend to formally review the EU analytical quality control guidance when the next revision is done, which is anticipated to be in 2026/2027.

8. Agenda item 8: Update from Other Government Departments

8.1 Defra confirmed the National Action Plan is currently being updated and will be published in due course. Defra also confirmed the Active Substance Renewal Programme is still continuing.

8.2 The chair asked Defra if they had any further updates on the future of the PRiF in addition to what the secretariat had already provided. Defra confirmed they had nothing extra to add.

8.3 The Scottish government noted that since their last update Jim Fairlie had been appointed minister for Agriculture and Connectivity. The Scottish government continue to engage with stakeholders, through the pesticide stakeholder group meetings, Going forward the minutes will be publicly available. The Scottish government continue to work with others to progress the National Action Plan.

8.4 DAERA reconfirmed they are in the final stages of designating the new EU official lab for testing non animal-based products. DAERA also confirmed the EFSA submissions were sent before the deadlines of the end of August and were accepted by EFSA for 2023.

8.5 The FSA confirmed it was business as usual with a continuation to work closely with Defra, HSE and other government departments. The chair thanked all the departments for their updates.

9. Horizon Scanning

9.1 The chair asked members to raise topics they are aware of that may affect or have implications for the monitoring programme.

9.2 Members observed that since the completion of the Article 21 GB review of indoxacarb, pesticide products could be legally used for a time and could result in residues in crops with dietary intakes that exceed the new (GB) ARfD for indoxacarb, adopted 1st September 2024, whilst below the current GB MRLs. The MRLs for some commodities might therefore be lowered when the consequent GB MRL review is completed. However this work by HSE is in progress. HSE remarked considering the historical findings in past PRiF monitoring for some crops (for example crops such as grapes, apples, and pears which are consumed with peel on) and frequency of moderately high residue levels (below the MRLs) that there is a possible but low risk of ARfD exceedance in these commodities when considering the new toxicological reference value. If such an exceedance does occur in the future, then the relevant PRiF quarterly report will need to explain the situation clearly. A member declared an interest as it directly affects a company they work for.

9.3 A member asked if HSE should revisit the relevant section of the report regarding giving further information to laboratories on how to analyse complex residue definitions. HSE confirmed it would look into this further.

ACTION: HSE

9.4 The chair revisited gut microbiome and how subtle changes can affect health. The secretariat confirmed the Committee on Toxicology (COT) are running a workshop which HSE colleagues can attend and will update the committee at a later date. FSA also stated following the workshop there will be a report available.

10. Any other business

10.1 No other business.

11. Date of next meeting

11.1 29 January 2025