

Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food

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Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food

Annual Report 2020

Advises the Food Standards Agency on the Microbiological Safety of Food

The Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food (ACMSF) was established in 1990 to provide the Government with independent expert advice on the microbiological safety of food.

The Committee's terms of reference are: -

to assess the risk to humans from microorganisms which are used, or occur, in or on food, and to advise the Food Standards Agency (FSA) on any matters relating to the microbiological safety of food.

The various issues addressed by the Committee since its inception are detailed in this and previous Annual Reports¹⁻²⁸ and in a series of subject-specific reports.²⁹⁻⁵²

Foreword

1. In 2020 (except for the January 2020 plenary meeting) all our activities were carried out remotely due to COVID-19. This report summarises the work of the full Committee and its subgroups for calendar year 2020. Details of meeting agendas, minutes and papers presented at plenary meetings are available on [ACMSF's webpage](#).

2. The subgroup we setup in June 2019 to review the evidence on key aspects relating to the risk of non-proteolytic *Clostridium botulinum* and vacuum and modified atmosphere packaged foods delivered a well-received report (at our January 2020 plenary meeting). This was produced within 6 months despite hectic schedules. We approved the report together with all the recommendations. Key recommendations include the group agreeing that there is evidence from the British Meat Processors Association study and the survey from Food Standards Scotland (FSS) to support a change in the guidelines on the shelf life of lamb, beef, and pork from ten days to thirteen. This change applies only to lamb, beef, and pork without added ingredients or further processing beyond cutting, packing, chilling, freezing, and quick-freezing. The need to review the Committee's 1992 report on "Vacuum Packaging and Associated Processes" was highlighted.

3. At the request of the Food Standards Agency (FSA) we reviewed a risk assessment on tick-borne encephalitis virus (TBEV). The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) requested for an opinion from the FSA on the risk to the public of infection with TBEV via the consumption of unpasteurised dairy products or of rare or undercooked meat from potentially infected animals in some areas in England where the virus had been detected in ticks. We discussed and commented on the risk assessment which was welcomed by the FSA.
4. On research priorities, the FSA asked for our views on its proposed Areas of Research Interest. We were asked to consider whether the proposals fully reflect the FSA's research and development needs in the area of microbiological safety of food. Our input was welcomed. FSS presented us with their Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* (STEC) research programme. We noted that since FSS was established in April 2015 understanding the transmission of STEC has been one of their research priorities. We endorsed their research approach, provided comments for consideration, and asked to be updated on findings of ongoing research.
5. We were provided with the findings of Wave 5 from the FSA's Food and You Survey. This is the FSA's flagship social survey of consumer's reported behaviours, attitudes and knowledge relating to food safety and other associated topics. We found the presentation useful and gave our support for the next wave and identified issues for the FSA to consider.
6. In June we had a horizon scanning workshop that identified emerging issues around a series of specific questions. We agreed a prioritised list of recommendations that could be seen to have the greatest impact on reducing foodborne illness. We noted that FSA's newly developed risk analysis framework for all Scientific Advisory Committees will guide how the workshop's recommendations will be progressed.
7. The Committee was updated on the activities of the Epidemiology of Foodborne Infections Group (EFIG). EFIG updates included: reports of *Salmonella* from livestock species, *Salmonella* National Control Programme, and trends in laboratory reports for *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter*, *Listeria monocytogenes* and *E. coli* O157 in humans.
8. As the Committee marked its 30 years as an independent non-statutory body, we discussed the Committee's original terms of reference and agreed that as it has been serving the Committee well in the carrying out of its functions no

changes were needed at present.

9. Subgroups that provided expert advice to the FSA on a number of issues include the groups on Surveillance and Antimicrobial Resistance.

10. Members of the subgroup on incidents helped write/review risk assessments on the risk of food or food contact materials and surfaces being a source or transmission route of SARS-CoV-2.

11. Looking to the future, we will be interested to hear how FSA Policy are taking forward the recommendations in the Ad Hoc Group on non-proteolytic *Clostridium botulinum* and vacuum and modified atmosphere packaged foods report and the outputs of the horizon scanning workshop.

12. I should like to thank members of the Committee and its subgroups (including co-opted members), without whom the ACMSF would not operate effectively in 2020. May I also commend members for their flexibility in embracing virtual meetings.

Professor Bill Keevil

Chair



Professor Bill Keevil Chair Advisory Committee on Microbiological Safety of Food (ACMSF)