ACM/1327

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL SAFETY OF FOOD

DISCUSSION PAPER

ACMSF Horizon scanning workshop 2020

Issue

The Committee held a horizon scanning workshop in January 2018. These workshops have been routine Committee business for many years and have played a key role in helping the Committee and FSA identify and respond to emerging microbiological food safety risks. The workshop was designed to gather Members views on a number of themes/questions considered important by the secretariat at the time and for the committee to provide the FSA with strategic direction on where to focus its emerging work in the area of microbiological risk assessment. The themes discussed and outputs from the workshop are detailed in ACM/1272. The Committee is asked whether it wishes to follow a similar format for its 2020 horizon scanning workshop (to be held in next few months) or suggest an alternative format.

Background

Previous format of workshops

1. Members were provided with a number of horizon scanning questions considered important by the secretariat/FSA in advance of the workshop and given the opportunity to submit comments electronically prior to the event.

2. At the workshops, committee members were divided into smaller groups (with as broad a range of diverse expertise as possible) to more fully discuss each question and provide a prioritised shortlist of important responses for each question. Each group was assigned an ACMSF member rapporteur to summarise the group's responses to the main Committee at the end of the day. Each group was provided with a secretariat/FSA representative as a facilitator to provide direction and ensure discussions kept to time.

3. The concluding session (led by the Chair) involved ACMSF rapporteurs summarising the responses of their respective groups to the Committee. At the end of the workshop, the Chair (in collaboration with members) provided a summary of high priority issues identified from the workshop.

4. An update of the workshop was provided at the ACMSF plenary meeting by the Chair or secretariat.

Emerging themes identified by Members in 2018

5. A number of themes arose from the 2018 workshop as emerging issues that might present a risk to the public. Members viewed that a reduction in packaging and a move away from plastics was important in terms of potentially reducing microbiological food safety reassurance. Members also stated that increased raw fruit and vegetable consumption was worth flagging in the context of outbreaks associated with fresh fruit and vegetables including bagged salads. Access to food via uncontrolled channels e.g. Internet shopping was also identified to be important as was the way in which populations/providers interact with the ageing population e.g. meals on wheels for the elderly produced in a pub. Members also identified risks associated with increasing use of raw pet food as important.

Key work undertaken as a result of outcomes from recent horizon scanning workshops

6. A number of key work areas have been taken forward by the FSA as a result of members prioritising them at recent horizon scanning workshops. The ACMSF *Campylobacter* subgroup for example was established following a recommendation from the Committee to review evidence in this area again. The report of the group and its recommendations have been recently published.

7. The ACMSF subgroup on representation of risks was established following a recommendation from members that an improvement was needed to the one-dimensional risk assessment framework that had been applied to ACMSF risk assessments since 2012. The subgroup has developed a new 2-dimensional risk assessment framework for ACMSF risk assessments which has significantly improved the way in which ACMSF risk assessments are evaluated. The group's paper has been published.

8. The *Clostridium botulinum* subgroup was established as a result of members questioning whether ACMSF risk assessments should have a life span and highlighting non-proteolytic *C. botulinum* in chilled foods as a particular example that would benefit from being re-visited. The group has produced a draft report.

Activities identified from ACMSF horizon scanning to be taken forward

9. During horizon scanning the Committee identified the need to establish a genomics risk assessment subgroup. The FSA will discuss this internally and give consideration to taking this forward. The scope of the group may need to be considered against today's background where whole genome sequencing (WGS) is now more frequently used in both diagnostics and outbreak investigations.

10. By way of background, this issue first came to light as members viewed it important to understand the longer-term implications WGS for *Salmonella* outbreak investigations and therefore a move away from phenotyping, serotyping and phage typing. The implications of relying solely on WGS in the detection and investigation of outbreaks including the inability to identify strain types, the difficultly in differentiating between *Salmonella* serotypes and phage types, and unclear turnaround time when using WGS, were underlined by the Committee as important areas to consider at the time. Members were concerned about whether data from these different methods would be difficult to compare and expressed that WGS needs to be carefully considered to ensure the continuity of information flow. Suitability of generated data and being able to derive useful information (in a risk assessment context) from data was flagged as a concern. Members are asked to note a recent opinion prepared by EFSA's BIOHAZ panel on "Whole genome sequencing and metagenomics for outbreak investigation, source attribution and risk assessment of food-borne microorganisms" (EFSA 2019)[i]. It is likely this area will be discussed further at the 2020 workshop.

11. The Committee is asked:

- If it is content with the general format of previous workshops and if so for a similar format to be continued for the 2020 workshop,

- If not, the committee is asked to make alternative suggestions for the 2020 workshop.

Secretariat
January 2020

[i] https://efsa.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.2903/j.efsa.2019.5898