ACM/1201

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL SAFETY OF FOOD

INFORMATION PAPER

Collaboration with Social Science Research Committee

Members will wish to see the attached paper considered by the FSA's Social Science Research Committee at their 28 September 2015 meeting.

Secretariat
October 2015

Update from the ACMSF

Summary

A meeting between Professor Sarah O'Brien (Chair of ACMSF), Joy Dobbs and members of the ACMSF and SSRC secretariat was held in August to reflect on a pilot project to improve cross SAC working. A summary of points is provided below for the Committee to note and discuss.

Background

1. A recommendation from the Triennial Review of the SSRC (2012) noted that 'further steps should be undertaken by the Secretariat to ensure that advice is being sought from the Committee as appropriate from across the FSA, including from the other scientific advisory committees'[1].

2. To improve cross SAC working, the SSRC implemented a pilot project to appoint an SSRC member to one of the other SACs. The Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Foods (ACMSF) was selected for this pilot given the overlap between the SAC work areas.

3. It was agreed that a member of the SSRC would attend ACMSF in an ex officio capacity on a trial basis, with the possibility of this approach being extended to other SACs if successful. The deputy chair of SSRC, Joy Dobs was appointed first ex office member in summer 2013.

4. On 10 August 2015, a meeting was held between Prof. Sarah O'Brien (Chair of ACMSF), Joy, members of the ACMSF secretariat and the SSRC secretariat to reflect on how the pilot has worked and ongoing and upcoming areas of joint Committee work. A summary of points is provided below.

Discussion

5. All agreed that the pilot had worked very well and recommended that it continue in its current form.

6. It was suggested that an extension to the pilot could be an ACMSF/ SSRC working group to take forward cross cutting areas of work. In line with the ACMSF work plan, it was also suggested that the SSRC Secretariat provide a short information paper for future ACMSF meetings on relevant FSA social research.

[1] Full details here: http://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/multimedia/pdfs/science-research/triennial-review-ssrc-2014-report.pdf

7. Ongoing areas of work include the ACMSF report on Viruses in the Food Chain, which contains a direct recommendation for the SSRC[2] as well as the FSAs Food and You survey[3]. Upcoming work was identified in the areas of genomics and campylobacter, notably around understanding and communicating risk.

8. It was suggested that the Food and You working group be extended to include a member of the ACMSF, to help inform future waves of the survey. Updates on Food and You, would continue to be provided at ACMSF meetings (written or verbal).

9. The proposed working group was considered to be one way to take forward the recommendation in the Viruses report as well as upcoming work. It was also suggested that a member of the SSRC attends a workshop on foodborne viruses in February 2016.

10. While other areas for joint working were noted in line with outcomes from the ACMSFs horizon scanning activity (see Annex A 'changes to the food system' and 'societal') work had not yet started in these areas, and it was suggested that once SSRC had completed its horizon scanning activity, there may be merit in the two Committees reviewing outcomes together.

Action

The Committee is asked to:

- Note the positive feedback from the SSRC/ ACMSF pilot
- Discuss and agree proposed activities to continue and extended SSRC/ ACMSF joint working
- Consider scope to extend this approach to other SACs (see Annex B for a list of SACs for which the FSA is sole or lead sponsor)

Helen Atkinson
Social Science Research Unit

[2] Recommendation 11.4 The Social Sciences' Research Committee should consider what further research is needed on public understanding of foodborne viruses. This might involve specific questions in the next FSA biannual public attitudes tracker. For full report see here: http://www.food.gov.uk/committee/acmsf/news-updates/news/2015/13765/acmsf-virus-report
[3] http://www.food.gov.uk/science/research-reports/ssresearch/foodandyou

Annex A. Outcomes from the ACMSF Horizon Scanning workshop, January 2015

ACM/1178

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL SAFETY OF FOOD

DISCUSSION PAPER

OUTCOMES FROM 28 JANUARY 2015 HORIZON SCANNING WORKSHOP

Issue

The purpose of this paper is for the Committee to discuss the outcomes of the January 2015 horizon scanning workshop where members identified current and emerging microbiological issues of concern and the ranking of these issues in terms of strategic priority and urgency.

Background

On 28 January 2015, the Committee held a horizon scanning workshop which preceded the plenary meeting that was held the following day. At the workshop the Food Standards Agency (FSA) gave a presentation on its Strategic Plan 2015 – 2020 and provided an overview on its Science and Evidence Strategy. ACMSF Members had completed a questionnaire before the workshop which had asked the following questions:

> Can you identify any emerging issues that might present a risk to the public?
>
> Is there any information that needs to be brought to the FSA's attention to help consumers make choices based upon current evidence?
>
> Are there any risks or opportunities associated with new food technologies not already considered by the ACMSF?
>
> Are there any risks or opportunities arising for consumers as a result of the changing landscape of food production?
>
> Is there anything else to bring to the FSA's attention?

Following group discussions at the workshop, the Committee identified five common themes based on the questions above:

Genomics: Identified as a significant emerging issue. Challenges included the volume, processing and meaning of data - how do risk assessors and risk managers adapt and respond to make full and proper use of genomics and the data generated from its application.

Changes in food system: Exotics and imports (illegal and personal imports), new sources of food/ingredients such as insects as an alternative source of protein for human use and for animal feed, globalisation of supply, internet sales and fresh produce (Hepatitis A where it is endemic in relation to products that come from those countries that supply the UK with produce).

Societal: Consumer information, use of the different social media channels and communicating through others. What difference has any of the FSA campaigns made to consumers (such as the annual FSA food safety week and the *Campylobacter* campaigns). Have these had any effect on consumer behaviour?

Climate: This relates to the way in which climate change may change microbiological hazards that we are exposed to. For example, *Vibrio* spp. and the impact of climate change on other microorganisms.

Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR): AMR in the food chain (a huge cross governmental issue). ACMSF is keeping a watching brief via its Working Group on AMR.

Members agreed with the suggestion for the ACMSF Chair to hold a teleconference with the group rapporteurs (Prof Rick Holliman, Dr Roy Betts and Prof Peter McClure) to prioritise the above themes and bring these to the June 2015 full Committee meeting for discussion on the way forward.

Summary of rapporteurs teleconference

Prof O'Brien and the rapporteurs met on 13 April 2015 and considered the above themes identified by the Committee. Following discussion the topics were prioritised/ranked and these are outlined below:

Priority 1 - Genomics

The group felt genomics needed immediate attention as it was noted that Public Health England (PHE) was in the process moving towards whole genome sequencing (WGS) for its *Salmonella* investigations which means they would stop doing phenotyping, serotyping and phage typing in the foreseeable future. The implications of relying solely on WGS in the detection and investigation of outbreaks including the inability to identify strain types, the difficultly to differentiate between *Salmonella* serotypes and phage types, and unclear turnaround time when using WGS, was underlined.

It was stated that PHE's proposal to enlist solely WGS for its *Salmonella* outbreak investigation may lead to a discontinuity between past and future *Salmonella* typing, in that comparison of data generated between methods may be difficult to compare.

Whilst the group noted the advantages of future uses of WGS, it was agreed that the management of the change between well-established typing methods (serotyping, phage typing, PFGE) and WGS needs to be carefully considered to ensure the continuity of information flow. The procedure to manage the change in typing methodology and to ensure the security and continuity of typing information was considered a high priority.

It was noted that Gary Barker is on the EFSA panel on genomics and may be able to share his expertise on how data from WGS is used in relation to food.

Understanding the implications of the genomics revolution was ranked as 1 (urgent) because this is already happening. Suitability of generated data and being able to derive useful information (in a risk assessment context) from data was flagged as a concern.

Priority 2- Changes in the food system

Although it was acknowledged that this is a very diverse topic, the group agreed that ACMSF may want to consider the potential of insects as food and feed. However, as EFSA is presently developing an opinion on insects, it was agreed to defer considering this issue until the opinion is published. It was noted that this is a cross cutting issue that would require collaboration with other Scientific Advisory Committees such as Advisory Committee on Animal feedingstuff and Advisory Committee on Novel Food and Processes.

With respect to online purchasing the group felt it would be helpful to obtain figures/data regarding internet sales and imports (authorised and unauthorised) before deciding how these issues are tackled.

Fresh produce was highlighted as an issue that needs attention as it was noted that a recent report from the United States identified fresh produce to be a key contributor to foodborne disease in the US. It was considered useful to have an idea of the contribution of fresh produce to foodborne disease in the UK.

Priority 3 - Climate change

It was noted that this is a huge area where a lot of material has been published on climatic change and food supply and the effect of climate change on foodborne disease. Areas mentioned that may be of interest to the Committee included the impact of climate change to our food supply and the associated risks from a microbiological food safety perspective.

It was indicated that the above issues could be considered by looking at available information and identifying areas to focus on.

Priority 4 - Societal

Members agreed that there was value in considering how social media is used to communicate with consumers from a risk assessment perspective and evaluate its effectiveness. Other areas identified for consideration included ways of using communication methods to gather intelligence for the FSA on assessing risk and how useful the various social media options are as a means of communication in relation to risk assessment.

Priority 5 - AMR

It was recognised that the Committee has a watching brief on AMR and an active subgroup on AMR which regularly considers AMR issues referred to it by the FSA. It was noted that the above mentioned subgroup commented on the FSA's research proposal for a systematic review on the contribution of food to the problem of AMR, the ACMSF should be asked to comment on the findings of the study and identify any gaps when it is published. The report is expected to be published in 2016. AMR was ranked as priority 5 because there is an ongoing ACMSF working group keeping a watch brief on it.

Other topics considered

Campylobacter

The group discussed *Campylobacter* as reducing *Campylobacter* in chicken is a key strategic priority for the FSA and it was recognised that it is ten years since the ACMSF's *Campylobacter* report was published. It was viewed that the Committee should revisit issues relating to *Campylobacter* in the food chain by assessing progress made in addressing the Committee's recommendations in their *Campylobacter* report published in 2005.

Understanding impact

At the workshop members noted that understanding the impact of the Committee's work and the use of the advice in risk management was important. The group's view was that when the Committee or a subgroup is considering a new topic there should be an indication of what they wish the impact of the output to be and try and build into the report how the impact would be measured.

Action

Members are invited to:

- Comment on the format employed for the horizon scanning workshop. Is this a preferred approach for considering horizon scanning?
- Consider whether to involve other relevant Scientific Advisory Committees in future ACMSF horizon scanning workshops. Would this help identify possible cross-cutting issues?
- Comment on whether the ranking of the topics is reasonable and indicate what topic(s) they would like to include in the ACMSF work plan.
- Consider whether it would be timely to establish an *ad hoc* group to consider one of the topics.

Secretariat
June 2015

Annex B. SACs for which the FSA is sole or lead sponsor

The FSA is sole or lead sponsor of six Scientific Advisory Committees (SACs), which provide independent expert advice to FSA and in some cases to other parts of government.

The six SACs are:

- The Advisory Committee on Animal Feedingstuffs (ACAF)

ACAF advises on the safety and use of animal feeds and feeding practices, with particular emphasis on protecting human health, and with reference to new technical developments.

- The Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food (ACMSF)

Set up in 1990, this non-statutory committee provides expert advice to Government on questions relating to microbiological issues and food.

- The Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes (ACNFP)

The Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes (ACNFP) is a non-statutory, independent body of scientific experts that advises the Food Standards Agency on any matters relating to novel foods (including genetically modified foods) and novel processes (including food irradiation).

- The Committee on Toxicity (COT)

The Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COT) is an independent scientific committee that provides advice to the Food Standards Agency, the Department of Health and other Government Departments and Agencies on matters concerning the toxicity of chemicals.

- The General Advisory Committee on Science (GACS)

The General Advisory Committee on Science (GACS), established in December 2007, provides independent advice on the FSA's governance and use of science.

- The Social Science Research Committee (SSRC)

Details of other independent committees and working groups that advise the Food Standards Agency can be found at: http://www.food.gov.uk/science/ouradvisors