



**Minutes of the 30th Meeting of the Veterinary Residues Committee,
Old Library, Veterinary Laboratory Agency
Wednesday, 02 December 2009,**

Members present:

| | | |
|---------------------|------------|-------|
| Mr Tim Brigstocke | (Chairman) | TB |
| Mr Jon Averbs | | JA |
| Mrs Sarah Buckley | | SB |
| Dr Gill Clare | | GC |
| Mr Andrew Grant | | AG |
| Mrs Susan Knox | | SK |
| Dr W John McCaughey | | WJMcC |
| Dr Shirley Price | | SP |
| Mr Declan O'Rourke | | DoR |
| Mr David Ralph | | DR |
| Prof Mike Roberts | | TMR |

Others:

| | | |
|--------------------|------|---|
| Dr Martin Illott | MI | Veterinary Medicines Directorate |
| Mr Eric Crutcher | EC | Veterinary Medicines Directorate |
| Mr David Webb | DW | " " " (Secretariat) |
| Mr Will Hollis | WH | " " " (Secretariat) |
| Mrs Sandra Russell | SR | " " " |
| Dawn Greener | DG | " " " |
| Mr John Points | JP | LGC Limited |
| Dr Glenn Kennedy | DGK | Agri-Food Biosciences Institute |
| Mr Matthew Sharman | MS | Food and Environment Research Agency (Fera) |
| Mr Andrew Spencer | AS | Food Standards Agency |
| Ms Modupe Ige | MIge | Food Standards Agency |
| Mr Rob Pettitt | RP | Animal Health |

Action Points

- 3.2 To investigate which body or committee is responsible for emphasising the safety of vaccines.
Action: MI
- 3.3 To summarise the views of the members regarding "skin-on" sheep feet and circulate this by e-mail for agreement before forwarding a response to the FSA.
Action: Secretariat
- 3.4 To contact a couple of retailers to try and get assistance regarding the results of their testing. Also to try and arrange a meeting with the British Retail Consortium.
Action: EC

- 7.1.6 To report the comparatively limited nature of the sampling and analysis for veterinary medicines residues carried out under the Veterinary Checks Directive in the VRC's Annual report.

Action: Secretariat

- 7.1.7 To invite the Defra official with responsibility for the Veterinary Checks work to the next VRC meeting.

Action: Secretariat

- 8.5 To pass views on the review of the VMD's Advisory Committees to the Secretariat who would pass them onto the review team.

Action: All members and Secretariat

- 9.3.1 To identify and contact a local veterinary practice specialising in pigs with a view to them giving a presentation at 2010 VRC Open meeting in York.

Action: DoR

- 9.3.1 To contact the quality manager of a major retailer local to York with a view to them giving a presentation at 2010 VRC Open meeting.

Action: Secretariat

- 9.3.2 To use links with the PRC to gain good local representation at the Open Meeting.

Action: Secretariat

- 9.3.2 To investigate registering the VRC Open Meeting for Continuing Professional Development for vets and others.

Action: Secretariat

- 9.3.3 To note the recommendations for future venues for the VRC Open Meetings and to investigate suitable venues in due course.

Action: Secretariat

- 10.3 To produce an information paper for the next meeting describing how the active substances in older veterinary medicines were reassessed for MRLs under later legislation.

Action: MI

- 11.7 To consider whether a discussion on Codex could be combined with the update by Dr Kay of the research work being carried out in the EU on hormones in farm animals.

Action: Secretariat

- 14.1 To produce a paper to go to the Advisory Committee on Animal Feedingstuffs (ACAF) asking it to take action on fusarium contamination of feed and the on storage and handling of feed that were major causes of residues in poultry.

Action: Secretariat

- 14.3 To include discussion on the usefulness of the FSA's Surveillance and Surveys paper on the Agenda for the March meeting.

Action: Secretariat

Declaration of interests

Members were reminded of their obligation to declare any interests the agenda items to be discussed.

1. Apologies for Absence

Dorothy Craig, Stephen Lister, Mark Ranson

2. Minutes of the last meeting

2.1 These were accepted as a true and accurate record.

3. Matters Arising

3.1 **TB** thought that the Secretariat should be congratulated on the excellent arrangements for the very successful meeting in Cardiff.

3.2 All but two actions from the previous meeting had been completed. Despite efforts, it had not been possible to update the list of retailer contacts. The Committee responsible for emphasising the safety of vaccines had also not been identified. **MI** agreed to investigate.

Action: MI

3.3 **Action 4.3.1** – Members had made a number of observations with respect to the FSA report on 'skin-on' sheep carcasses. The Chair asked all members to make their thoughts known. It was agreed that the Secretariat would summarise the views and circulate this by e-mail for agreement before forwarding a response to the FSA.

Action: Secretariat

3.4 **TB** explained how he and **MR** had failed to get any response from retailers regarding their testing. It was agreed that **EC** should contact some retailers for assistance. The Committee also considered that a meeting with the British Retail Consortium would be helpful. It was acknowledged the PRC get a lot more responses than the VRC.

Action: EC

4. Statutory Surveillance Scheme

4.1 Great Britain

4.1.1 The plan for collection and analysis of samples was on track for successful completion, apart from samples of wild game. These were always more difficult to source, but became more abundant towards the end of the year.

- 4.1.2 **SR** pointed the Committee to the cattle liver sample that had tested positive for benzimidazoles. It was now thought that the wrong animal's details had been recorded at the abattoir when the sample was taken.
- 4.1.3 A further non-compliant result had been reported. A free-range egg sample had been found to contain DDE and DDT residues. These were old organochlorine insecticides that were no longer allowed to be used in the EU because of their persistence and tendency to bioaccumulate. An on-farm investigation was underway.
- 4.1.4 **RP** told the Committee that they had found the first nortestosterone positive in a non-pregnant heifer, a follow up investigation was under way.

4.2 Northern Ireland

- 4.2.1 The Committee heard that NI had recorded its first sample of broiler liver in 2009 that was non-compliant for nicarbazin residues. At 214 µg/kg, this had been just over the MRL of 200 µg/kg. An investigation was underway and a sample of withdrawal ration had been taken for analysis. A residue of thiouracil had also been detected; however, this was at a concentration associated with normal occurrence.

5. Non-Statutory Surveillance Scheme

- 5.1 **DG** reported that 1,116 samples had been delivered to Fera and 3,751 analyses had been completed. Since the paper for the meeting had been written, a non-compliant sample of warm-water crustaceans from India had been reported. This had contained the nitrofurans metabolite AOZ at a concentration of 6.9 µg/kg.
- 5.2 The FSA had been informed of the non-compliance. **Mlge** explained that the FSA had contacted local authorities (LAs) to arrange a product withdrawal. The LAs had also been asked to report on how much of the affected product had been withdrawn from the market.
- 5.3 **DoR** asked about the testing of imported food for antiviral medicines. The programme looked for residues of Tamiflu and Relenza. This was because there was intelligence that in some countries these medicines were being used in livestock. Some were quite cheap and dosing charts for animals had been found in some countries.
- 5.4 The Committee considered the sale of colostrum. It was concerned that this would be taken very early in the lactation cycle of an animal and could contain residues from intra-mammary medicines used in 'dry cows'.

6. Defra's surveillance for exotic diseases

- 6.1 Dr Sabirovic's presentation is available on the VRC website.

7. Non-Statutory Issues

VRC/09/33

7.1 Options paper – case for future funding

- 7.1.1 **EC** reminded the Committee of the discussions in Cardiff over the tough financial climate and possible reductions in funding of the Non-Statutory Scheme. The Committee had sent a letter to Defra's Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO). His reply had not been reassuring. He could not guarantee that funding in 2010 would be the same or similar to 2009 in the very tough financial climate.
- 7.1.2 It was acknowledged that the UK imports a large proportion of its food. Any reduction in sampling caused by reduced funding for the Non-Statutory Scheme would imbalance in the testing of imports compared to those for domestic produce. Also, it had been demonstrated that in particular foods there were greater concerns for imports compared to domestic produce.
- 7.1.3 Other possibilities for funding the scheme were discussed. Contacts with the British Retail Consortium had not resulted in any offer to assist with the programme or the provision of retailer's own testing of imported produce. Higher charges to importers were also discussed. To recover £750,000 would require an average 5.8% increase in all fees on all imported animal sourced foods. If this figure was recovered from only those types of foods that were sampled, the increases would be much higher.
- 7.1.4 **JA** said that importers work on tight margins and any extra costs could distort trade. For example, when increased documentary checks were implemented in the UK, imports of Brazilian chicken into the EU moved to the Netherlands. They could then enter the UK without further checks because of the single EU market.
- 7.1.5 The Committee acknowledged that limited sampling of foods for veterinary medicines were also carried out on behalf of Defra as part of the Veterinary Checks Directive. It asked if consolidated results of this testing were available. It was thought that the results were not publicly available; however, some Rapid Alerts had been issued where particular residues had been detected.
- 7.1.6 The Committee agreed that the comparatively limited sampling and analysis for veterinary medicines residues carried out under the Veterinary Checks Directive could be discussed in the VRC's Annual Report.
- Action: Secretariat**
- 7.1.7 The Committee questioned whether the Veterinary Checks Directive would allow some samples currently used for testing for microbiological contamination or histamines to be moved to veterinary medicines residues. It was thought that this could be possible. The Committee asked that the Defra official with responsibility for the Veterinary Checks work be invited to the next VRC meeting.

Action: Secretariat

8. Review of the VRC and Veterinary Products Committee (VPC)

- 8.1 Defra has been looking at the future of all of its Non Departmental Public Bodies. As part of this, the VMD has been asked to review the terms of reference of the VRC and VPC and produce an options paper for their future structure and function.
- 8.2 **MI** explained that the Treasury had requested a review of all NDPBs. It wished to have concrete proposals early in 2010. For this reason, the internal review that is being conducted had to ask the Committees to respond by the 9th of December. This would allow the options paper to go forward to the Chief Executive by the end of December.
- 8.3 The Committee expressed concern that bringing the two Committees together could reduce the profile of the VRC. There seemed little synergy between their work. It was felt that the VRC had a major role in providing reassurance to consumers, while the VPC's focus was more on pharmaceutical companies and producers. A loss of independence could adversely affect the VRC's ability in relation to consumers.
- 8.4 The Committee also considered the confidential nature of some of the data considered by the VPC, this was in contrast to the openness that the VRC had strived to achieve. The VPC relied more on academic staff, whereas the VRC drew in a range of industry expertise to help deal with practical problems.
- 8.4 The Committee suggested that it could make more sense for the VRC to merge with Pesticides Residues Committee. Their work was closely related in advising on surveillance schemes for food contaminants and providing reassurance that there was independent scrutiny.
- 8.5 It was agreed that all members should send their views to the Secretariat who would pass them onto the review team.

Action: All members and Secretariat

9. Communications Subgroup Report**VRC/09/34****9.1 VRC Website**

The Committee agreed that a better electronic strategy was needed to get their information out and **SP** said they should look to the FSA as they did this very well.

9.2 VRC Annual Report

SP put forward the changes for the Annual Report made at the Communications Subgroup to the Committee. These were accepted, although there was concern about the added cost of having flaps or a loose pullout summary.

9.3 VRC Open Meeting

- 9.3.1 **Format** – It was agreed that the format of the VRC Open Meeting would remain the same as for 2009. There would be general presentations by Committee members and others on the work of the Committee and invitations would be sent to local industry representatives to talk about residue issues. **DoR** agreed to identify a local veterinary practice specialising in pigs and the Secretariat would contact a major local retailer.

Action: DoR and Secretariat

- 9.3.2 **Attendance** – The Committee had been pleased at the attendance at Cardiff and wished to maintain or improve this for York. The secretariat indicated that it wished to use its links with the PRC to gain a good local representation. A range of other organisations were suggested, as well as registering the event for Continuing Professional Development for vets and others.

Action Secretariat

- 9.3.3 **Venue** – The Subgroup considered that going to ever smaller regions of the UK could result in low attendances. It was suggested that after the meeting in the East of England in 2011, the Committee could return to visiting the capitals of the home countries, giving an itinerary of:

- 2011, **East of England**
- 2012, **Edinburgh**
- 2013, **London (invitation for a CVMP speaker)**
- 2014, **Belfast**

This was agreed.

- 9.3.4 **Date of future Communications Subgroup meetings** - The Communications Subgroup agreed that in future, it will meet in November. This is to fit in with the cycle of reviewing the VRC Annual Report and planning the VRC Open Meeting.

10. Other Communications Issues

- 10.1 The Committee considered that a single Annual report might not be enough to get its message across to a wider audience. It was acknowledged that more frequent shorter publications were better for this. It was suggested that regular targeted updates could be prepared for different sectors.

- 10.2 **Assurance schemes and on-farm training** – this item was remitted to the March meeting.

- 10.3 **Communication with pharmaceutical companies** – there are potential benefits of working more closely together, e.g. companies are likely to have data on their substances which is not in the public domain, which may be helpful, e.g. where no MRL had been set. **MI** offered to produce an information paper for the next meeting to describe how the older substances

were reassessed for MRLs under later legislation.

Action: MI

- 10.4 **Significance of less hazardous substances** – The Committee thought that where, for example, a substance was carcinogenic, the significance of residues was clear. However, for other substances, the significance of MRL exceedences, it might not be so clear. It heard that for the majority of cases the VMD relied on previous risk assessments. For a particular substance where an MRL exceedence had been assessed, there would only be a new assessment if new data became available or a higher concentration than previously found was detected. The Committee considered there should be closure for each case, describing the significance of the findings with the farmer.
- 10.5 **GC** asked whether positive residues of more serious chemicals are taken more seriously than a more frequently occurring less hazardous one. **SR** explained that any non-compliant results in a follow up investigation and that there is now closure for each case.

11. Regulatory Environment

- 11.1 **Hampton Review** – In 2004 the Chancellor asked Philip Hampton, the Chairman of J Sainsbury plc, to lead a review into regulatory inspection and enforcement with a view to reducing the administrative cost of regulation. The final recommendation for the VMD was that it would remain as a stand-alone agency. However, it had led to the combining of the Health and Safety Executive and the Pesticides Safety Directorate, to form the Chemicals Regulation Directorate (CRD). This was now a major player in chemical risk assessment.
- 11.2 The way VMD's processes fit with the Hampton principles was being reviewed by the Better Regulation Executive. Three Members of the VRC had been interviewed by the Hampton team. VMD hoped to receive the draft report this month. **MI** reported that the VMD had brought its Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) inspectors and the Animals Medicines Inspectorate into a single post-authorisations unit. Inspections by the AMI were being re-arranged to be more risk-based, rather than time based.
- 11.3 **Directive 96/23/EC** – this is the Directive that controls the National Surveillance Scheme. The Commission is working on a scoping exercise and it is hoped that a draft Impact assessment will be issued in early 2010. It will be brought to the March meeting if it is available. The Impact Assessment is expected to set out in general terms what the new Directive will hope to achieve and suggest the effects it could have on stakeholders.
- 11.4 **Veterinary Checks Directive** – this requires certain checks of animal-based products as they enter the EU. This Directive was still under review. However, there was little progress to report.

- 11.5 **Review of distribution categories for veterinary medicines** – Following the Marsh review and the Competition Authorities, there had been a move to review the distribution categories of various medicines. This was being done by a Working Group of the Veterinary Products Committee. This had not, so far, made many changes. The Committee asked if there was any link between the level of control of distribution and the incidence of non-compliant results. No link had been established.
- 11.6 There had been some publicity in the veterinary press over a proposed new distribution category (POM EA). The VMD had contacted some veterinary organisations as part of an informal consultation. However, it had become public, with some concerns being expressed. The VMD would rethink its proposals before consulting again.
- 11.7 **Codex Alimentarius** – this international body also sets MRLs for veterinary medicines. Following the adoption of Regulation 480/2009, any new MRLs set by this body will be automatically adopted within the EU, where the EU supports the science. It was thought to be helpful if the Committee could understand the way Codex worked. The Secretariat agreed to consider whether a discussion on Codex could be combined with the update by Dr Kay of the research work being carried out in the EU to determine between natural occurrence of hormones in farm animals and where illegal administration had taken place.

Action: Secretariat

12. How to deal with persistent offenders

- 12.1 **WJMcc** asked about the actions taken on farmers where continual non-compliant results were discovered. **DGK** explained that a few people had a total disregard for the procedures regarding veterinary medicines, and that the only option was to take them to court. **SR** made the point that once a farmer had lost income by having some of his livestock destroyed this often acted as a deterrent against future mistakes.
- 12.2 The Committee asked if an analysis had been made of where nicarbazin residues had originated. It was reported that usually the non-compliant results were from different farms each time, with little evidence of repeat non-compliant results.
- 12.3 The Committee heard that the residues surveillance was coming under the system of CAP cross compliance. This system replaced payments to farmers for production with compliance with payments linked to certain agri-environmental conditions and compliance with a range of legislation. Non-compliant results would in the future be reported to Defra's Rural Payments Agency and could result in a loss of part of a farmer's CAP payments.

13. Alternative sources of contamination

VRC/09/36

- 13.1 **AS** explained that the paper produced by the FSA on alternative sources of contamination was for information, and was not something the FSA were planning to take any action on. If the Committee had any views on the issues brought forward they were invited to e-mail **AS** and the Secretariat.
- 13.2 **DR** mentioned the fact that the paper highlighted the difficulty of controlling veterinary residues when contamination can occur in unpredictable circumstances. This was something that many people were perhaps unaware of.

14. AOB

- 14.1 **Liaison with the Advisory Committee on Animal Feedingstuffs (ACAF) –** The Committee considered that some issues it had considered could be moved further forward with ACAF assistance. One was nicarbazin, where feed storage and handling were major causes of residues in poultry. Also, the surveillance scheme detected zeranol residues in produce, where on investigation were shown to have been caused by fusarium being present in the feed¹. It was agreed that a paper should go forward to ACAF requesting that they take action on these issues.

Action: Secretariat

- 14.2 **Oxytetracycline in Scottish bees –** There had been a serious outbreak of foulbrood in beehives in Scotland. The authorities there were to treat affected hives with oxytetracycline, which was acknowledged to be an effective treatment. Staff from the VMD and FSA were travelling to Scotland for a meeting with officials from the Scottish Government on 3 December. They would discuss what withdrawal period and testing would be appropriate to ensure the honey for human consumption did not contain unacceptable concentrations of residues.

- 14.3 **FSA Surveillance paper –** For each meeting, the FSA normally produced a paper summarising its research and surveys on food contaminants. It was noted that this did not generate much discussion at most meetings. **AS** asked if the paper continued to be of use to the Committee. If a different format would be more helpful he could make the necessary changes. It was agreed that the paper would be included on the Agenda for the March meeting.

Action: Secretariat

¹ Post-meeting note: It was suggested that as the production of maize silage appears to be increasing on cattle farms this source could be examined when non-compliant results occur in cattle products