

CONSIDERATION BY THE ACNFP OF COCOA PULP AS A TRADITIONAL FOOD FROM THIRD COUNTRIES (NF 2019/866)

Background

At the 137th meeting of the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes (ACNFP), the traditional food from a third country notification dossier for *Theobroma cacao* L. fruit pulp was considered.

The applicant provides evidence that they suggest shows the food has extensive history of use in Brazil dating back to the second half of the 19th Century as well as use in other geographical areas. They highlight that fermentation of the pulp is part of the normal processing of other cocoa products so that there has already been some safe consumption of cocoa pulp in the EU.

The applicant is seeking authorisation to use cocoa fruit pulp in the traditional way as occurs in South America in the food categories: frozen fruit; fruit and vegetable preparations; jam jellies and marmalades; confectionery; fruit juices.

The summary of the application can be viewed on the [Commission website](#).

The Committee's discussion

The advice of the Committee to the Food Standards Agency is summarised below. Please note the Committee did not consider any potential health benefits or claims arising from consuming the food, as the focus of the novel food assessment is to ensure the food is safe, not misleading and not putting consumers at a nutritional disadvantage.

The Committee made several general comments, including that the overall dossier presented the information clearly and ensured the information was accessible. Furthermore, members noted positively the fact that a literature search was performed, and that the applicant described the literature search strategy.

Identity of the traditional food

The evidence provided supporting the traditional use of the food in third countries was found to be sufficiently complete and relevant for this application. It was noted that the traditional use was consistent with the proposed uses of the product.

Production process

The Committee commented that while cocoa pulp itself can be considered a traditional food given the evidence provided, the production process described by the applicant is not traditional but rather, a modern, industrialised process. The Committee reflected that this industrialisation of the process and application of HACCP protocols across the production process might better ensure the safety of the product. Members suggested it would have been clearer if a comparison had been made between the composition of the product produced by the traditional processes versus the proposed

production method, to understand if the product was similar and to understand any changes in the risk profile.

The Committee raised a question for risk managers to consider whether a significantly changed production process, that might improve the safety of the final product, would be consistent with seeking authorisation under the terms of the traditional food from third country route. This would inform the approach to the assessment of the production process.

Compositional data and specification

The Committee found the information within the composition and specification sections to be quite limited and noted that the applicant relied on a limited set of information derived from the literature. Concerns were raised that an assessment of potential mycotoxins other than Ochratoxin A had not been considered. Information obtained more widely across other databases or from the analysis of the applicant's own batches would have provided a more reliable source of data.

Where information had been identified to support a specification, this had been assessed against safe levels identified from EFSA opinions, without further consideration in the context of the product under evaluation. It was noted a similar approach had been taken for the information on stability and that further consideration of this would be needed to ensure the product would be stable over the proposed product lifespan.

Proposed conditions of use for the EU market

The main concerns of the Committee fell with the use of the product in the EU market when used as a fruit juice. The Committee commented that the product could be nutritionally disadvantageous if consumed as a replacement for fruit juices by certain subgroups of the population, such as children, due to the low vitamin and high sugar content of the product. It was suggested that the nature of the product is not consistent with other products associated with a fruit juice by the EU population. No concerns were found with the use of the food as a substitute for sugar or as a sweetener.

Consultation response

The Committee noted the concern raised in the public consultation about the environmental impact of potential increases in cocoa cultivation as a result of any authorisation. While this is outside of the scope for assessment for novel foods, it will be highlighted to risk managers. The Committee commented that the product seeking authorisation is a component of the cocoa beans already being cultivated for other purposes, and therefore unlikely to change existing agricultural practices.

Respondents also flagged the potential for negative impacts on populations in third countries if the product is authorised. Members noted that product is not a staple food and therefore less likely to negatively impact the diets of consumers in third countries. The Committee also acknowledged comments on potential risks related to

inappropriate labelling of cocoa pulp products. It was recognised that this is a potential risk management question that will be highlighted to Policy colleagues to consider when developing the UK position.

Conclusions

The Committee noted that, although there was sufficient evidence on the traditional use of the product in third countries, further information was needed on whether the changes to the production process altered the nature of the product as compared to that produced using traditional production methods. A comparison of this in relation to composition, metabolism and undesirable substances would strengthen the basis for assessment.

Minor concerns were raised regarding the excessive reliance on the literature for the identification of the novel food, mycotoxin levels and stability data.

The Committee raised concerns around the potential for nutritional disadvantage if used to replace other fruit juices given the low levels of vitamin C and the high levels of sugar compared to other fruit juices.

The Committee did not identify any further safety concerns.