

SUMMARY PAPER

SUMMARY OF THE ACNFP'S CONCLUSION ON THE TRADITIONAL FOOD NOTIFICATION FOR FONIO (*Digitaria exilis*)

At the 133rd meeting of the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes (ACNFP) the traditional food from a third country notification dossier for Fonio (*Digitaria exilis*) was considered.

Fonio is a millet like grain cultivated as what and dark types. Fonio millets are small grained, C4 metabolism cereals with a short life cycle and medium height. It is touted as one of the oldest grains in Africa, with the applicant stating that it is used to make many traditional dishes including porridge, couscous, paste, etc.

The applicant intends for fonio to be consumed as an alternative to quinoa, amaranth, teff, and sorghum particularly for those avoiding gluten. The summary of the application can be found on the [Commission's website](#).

The advice of the Committee to the Food Standards Agency is summarised below. Please note the Committee did not consider any potential health benefits 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 considered that the information provided on the traditional use of the product provided a basis to conclude the product had been safely used in third countries for 25 years. Members commented that an opportunity had been lost in not providing a fuller evaluation of the traditional use of the product as this would have provided a basis to learn from other countries' experience in safely using the product in their diet.

The Committee noted there was a paucity of information on the production process and to what extent hazards would be managed. A specific example identified was around the quality of the water used during de-husking and the potential to introduce heavy metal contamination. It was recognised that food entering the EU would need to apply EU production standards and the application could have been strengthened by explaining how these standards would be achieved.

The Committee noted a potential risk from mycotoxin production. This related to the processing of the grains making the product vulnerable to growth of microbiological organisms.

Members identified the potential for condensation of water from seed respiration as the product was transported between different climates and temperatures in its journey from Africa to Europe. It was noted that packing the Fonio in polythene bags would exacerbate these effects promoting the growth of moulds and pathogens. As the applicant hadn't provided certificates of analysis for five batches of the novel food suggested in EFSA's guidance it was difficult to assess how well the microbial and mycotoxin risks would be managed for products reaching the EU market.

In the dossier the production processes were not fully described. Thus, it was not possible to establish how polyphenols and known antinutritional factors present in Fonio that could affect thyroid activity would be removed. It was also commented that the processing specified reduced the protein content in sorghum which may lead to nutritional issues if used as a staple food by those with a gluten free diet.

The Committee also noted a potential hazard from weeds growing with the Fonio crop and potential issues of contamination. The Committee had no data on the standards producers were using and what species of weed seeds were in the crop to assess the potential risk.

Conclusion

The Committee advised the FSA that they had significant concerns that the information provided in the dossier was incomplete and was not of a suitable quality to support a robust assessment of the traditional food and its safety when transferred into the European diet. Several areas were identified for further exploration. The evidence provided did not support the committee reaching a conclusion on whether the product would meet the criteria for authorisation under the Novel Food Regulation.