

Final Minutes - Item 5: Working Group on plant-based drinks: Draft report (reserved) - TOX/2025/11

The item was previously being treated as reserved.

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1. Dr Meera Cush declared that she had been involved in a project for a manufacturer, where she had provided toxicology information on the safety of isoflavones for use in medical foods for the elderly; the company concerned had commented on the draft WG report. It was agreed that she could contribute to discussions but should not participate in formulation of the conclusions. No other interests were declared.
2. A joint Working Group, comprising Members of both the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) and the COT was established to conduct a benefit: risk assessment considering both nutritional and toxicological aspects associated with the consumption of plant-based drinks by the UK population.
3. The activities of the joint Working Group (WG) follow SACN procedures, which means that meetings are held in closed session and the working papers are not published. However, the draft report “Assessing the health benefits and risks of consuming plant-based drinks: A Joint Report from the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition and the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in food, Consumer products and the Environment” was published for peer review of the scientific content: this process ended on the 17th of September 2024. The comments received from the peer review were shared with the COT at their meeting on the 10th of December 2024.
4. The aim of paper TOX/2025/11 was to allow the COT to review the proposed responses to the comments received, some of which had resulted in amendments to the draft report. Members were asked to focus in particular on

the toxicological sections and the final recommendations. Members were also encouraged to provide the Secretariat with any other comments that they might have on the final report overall and to ensure that the responses or arising actions had been accurately reflected.

5. Members were informed that the report was to be considered as a snapshot of consumption patterns, and hence no further review of the literature or updating of the nutrient substitution analysis would be performed. This would be clearly stated in the report.

6. Several minor editorial amendments were suggested.

7. Members noted that it was important to consider who had made specific comments so the context was clear and the appropriate response could be made.

8. COT Members reviewed the tables relevant to the toxicological sections in Annex A of paper TOX/2025/11.

9. Regarding the use of iodine as a teat dip (Table 7; reference 7.1), a suggestion was made that additional input on this be sought from the Health and Safety Executive. as this application of iodine might be considered to be as a biocide, and hence come under their remit.

10. For Table 19 (reference 19.25), it was noted that since there was no mention of overage in the report, the possibility that vitamin A concentrations were being under-reported in plant-based drink products was discussed. Overage was where nutrients were added by producers at levels higher than declared on the label to ensure that the declared levels were still correct at the end of the product's shelf life; overage can be as high as 30%. It was important to consider overage due to the known adverse effects of excess vitamin A. Comments received from a stakeholder noted that the European Food Safety Authority recommends against vitamin A fortification, due to concerns regarding potential high intakes in young children and the uncertainties when estimating the exposure.

11. It was further noted that different methods were used for measuring vitamin B12 (mass spectrometry versus microbiological method) creating inconsistency in results. The COT agreed with the proposed responses to address these concerns.

12. For reference 19.30 in Table 19, it was noted by Members that the cited article by Nørskov et al., 2019 on isoflavones in cows' milk had been reviewed in the COT's risk assessment of cows' milk and thus this point was considered resolved.

13. It was noted that cows' milk or other allergies were out of scope of the report and this was explained in the text, however, it was proposed that consideration of other immune mediated disorders associated with milk which were not IgE dependent could be included.

14. The Joint Working Group will be meeting on the 29th of May and the report would be brought back to the SACN and COT for final review at their June and July 2025 meetings, respectively. It is hoped that the report will be finalised and published this year.