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To: Smith Lewis CHBS; Breckenridge Charles USGR; John Tomenson; Berry Dave GBAP; Botham Phil GBJH
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Subject: Meeting with Michael Alavanja

I met with Michael Alavanja, Co-ordinator of the Agricultural Health Study, during the Biomonitoring Symposium in Beijing last week. He had indicated during his lecture that the AHS welcomed approaches from researchers with specific research questions so this was a good opener for a long and fruitful discussion. I gave him a brief overview of Syngenta's interest and a summary of the meeting we held in Alderley Park in August. He openly stated that in the present climate he could not foresee the governing bodies of the AHS entertaining a direct collaboration with industry on research projects. He also indicated that this was not his personal choice but a consequence of the current positions of the various governmental sponsors of the AHS.

On the other hand, if the research was proposed and conducted by an academic institute, a possible partial sponsorship of some of the activities through industry would not necessarily be a problem. However, this would need to be approved by the appropriate scientific and ethical review bodies for the AHS. The chances for approval would be greater if the research question was interesting and relevant to the interests of the AHS. The scientific review body of the AHS is currently chaired by Beate Ritz from California.

As far as neurodegenerative disorders are concerned this would be well within the interests of the AHS. He felt that case ascertainment was critical; currently, the AHS relies on self reported diagnosis. If one were to consider further work (e.g. nested case control studies) this would need to be done more objectively e.g. through specialist diagnosis according to defined criteria. He believes that the strength of the AHS lies in exposure information having been obtained prior to the onset of disease, thereby eliminating recall bias. It should also be possible to look at sub-populations of workers who report more acute 'high dose' exposure vs. those being exposed to low doses over long periods of time. For specific compounds it would also be interesting to look for evidence of exposure by focusing on other effects or disease which is considered typical for the compound in question.

The meeting was open and friendly and he appeared genuinely interested in the question, and willing to support research projects provided they met the above mentioned criteria. Naturally, he is very proud of the AHS and believes that it is doing the best possible research under the circumstances. His lecture focused on the quantification of exposure in the AHS, I have asked him for his slides which make interesting viewing. On one slide he presented some 15 pesticides which have been associated with various cancers in AHS publications. Paraquat was on that list with a reference cited 'in preparation'. I asked him about this and he said that the publication was held back by some data checking issues - he wasn't giving anything away about what type of cancer was involved, and what the association was!

Please let me know if you have any questions

Martin