

Pesticide residues in food: risk to consumers remains low

Food consumed in the European Union continues to be largely free of pesticide residues or to contain residues that fall within legal limits, new figures show. The latest monitoring report published by EFSA reveals that more than 97% of food samples collected across the EU in 2015 were within legal limits, with just over 53% free of quantifiable residues. The figures are in line with those recorded in 2014.

- In 2015, the reporting countries analysed 84,341 samples for 774 pesticides.
- The majority of the samples (69.3%) originated from EU Member States, Iceland and Norway; 25.8% concerned products imported from third countries. The origin of the remaining samples was not reported.
- 97.2% of the samples analysed fell within the limits permitted in EU legislation. 53.3% of the samples tested were free of quantifiable residues while 43.9% contained residues not exceeding legal limits.
- Legal limits were exceeded in 5.6% of the samples from non-EU countries, down from 6.5% in 2014.
- For products from EU and EEA countries, legal limits were exceeded in 1.7% of samples, a slight year-on-year increase (from 1.6%).
- Of the samples of foods intended for infants and young children, 96.5% were free of residues or residues fell within legal limits.
- For organic foods, 99.3% were residue-free or within legal limits.
- The majority of samples of animal products (84.4%) were free of quantifiable residues.



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As part of its annual report, EFSA analyses the results of the EU-coordinated control programme (EUCP), under which reporting countries analyse samples from the same “basket” of food items. For 2015 the products were aubergines, bananas, broccoli, virgin olive oil, orange juice, peas, sweet peppers, table grapes, wheat, butter and eggs.

The highest exceedance rate recorded was for broccoli (3.4% of samples), followed by table grapes (1.7%). Rare exceedances were found for olive oil, orange juice and chicken eggs. No exceedances were recorded for butter.

EFSA also performed a dietary risk assessment based on the EUCP. For both

short-term (acute) and long-term (chronic) exposure the Authority concluded that the risk to consumers was low.

The same products were also analysed in 2012, since when the overall exceedance rate has fallen slightly from 0.9% to 0.8% in 2015.

In its report EFSA makes a number of recommendations for increasing the efficiency of the EU-coordinated and national control programmes.