NEWSMONTH

Our world-class services ensure FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY

Over 100 laboratories in 22 countries

April 2020

MARKET NEWS

MERIEUX NutriSciences

Hotline: 400-627-8088

Email: sales.china@mxns.com

www.merieuxnutrisciences.com

www.merieuxnutrisciences.com/cn

CONTENTS

Focus on China

Swine fever cases drop in China

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs has received 13 reports on African swine fever on the Chinese mainland since March, a drop from 24 in the same period last year, a senior official told a news conference on Sunday.

According to Wei Hongyang, deputy director of the ministry's animal husbandry and veterinary bureau, 1,313 infected hogs have been culled since March, compared to 240,200 during the same period last year.

Investigations showed that most cases were related to illegal trading and transportation, such as transporting hogs without quarantine inspection certifications in unregistered vehicles.

Overall, the African swine fever is under control, but the ministry remains on high alert.

Starting April 1, the ministry joined hands with authorities of public security and transport in a 60-day campaign against illegal transportation of pigs, as risks increased after enterprises nationwide gradually resumed operation, including hog-production companies.

"We have been monitoring online trading platforms for hogs and sent inspection teams to some southern provinces deemed as major places with the fever problem," he said.

Premier signs decree on agricultural plants

Premier Li Keqiang has signed a State Council decree and issued a regulation on preventing and tackling diseases that affect agricultural plants, as well as pests and weeds that undermine their health.

The regulation, which was published on the State Council's website on Thursday and will take effect on May 1, aims to safeguard the country's food security and the quality of its agricultural produce.

It divides the threats into three categories, according to the seriousness of their potential impact, and says central government departments in charge of agriculture and rural affairs should coordinate efforts to tackle class one disasters, which are the most serious.

Agricultural authorities at the county level or above should watch out for disasters and report information obtained during their monitoring to their superiors in a timely manner, according to the regulation.

It says governments at the county level or above should launch an emergency response when a disaster occurs, and requires agricultural authorities to make emergency plans, carry out training and drills and store necessary emergency reserves.

The country supports organizations which specialize in offering services to protect the health of agricultural plants, and encourages them to apply environmentally friendly techniques to treat diseases and tackle pests, the regulation says.

The regulation also lists different kinds of behavior that are punishable by law, such as covering up monitoring information or providing it to foreign organizations and individuals without approval.

International News

EFSA reveals data on pesticide residues in food in Europe

Table grapes and peppers were among products that most often exceeded residue limits in random testing, according to the annual report on pesticides in food in the European Union.

The report, published by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), is based on data from official controls by EU member states, Iceland and Norway and includes targeted and random sampling.

For the 11,679 samples analyzed in the EU - coordinated control program, which uses a randomized sampling strategy, 166 exceeded the maximum residue level (MRL) and 101 were non - compliant. In 58 percent of samples, no quantifiable levels of residues were reported and 4,743 had pesticide residues within permitted levels.

Reasons for non-compliances include use of non - EU - approved pesticides, contamination from previous uses so residues come from the soil and substances no longer used as pesticides but that are persistent in the environment.

Table grapes and sweet peppers/bell peppers were among items most often above MRLs.

2018 vs 2015 results

Non - EU - approved pesticides reported to exceed limits in samples of these two items produced in the EU included chlorfenapyr and triadimefon in sweet peppers and carbendazim (RD), omethoate and acephate in table grapes. Among samples grown outside the internal market, the non - EU - approved pesticides exceeding limits were carbaryl, fenitrothion, carbofuran (RD) and propiconazole in sweet peppers and acephate and carbendazim (RD) in table grapes.

In this program, the same group of items are monitored every three years. In 2018, 12 food products were considered: aubergines (eggplant), bananas, broccoli, cultivated fungi, grapefruit, melons, sweet peppers/bell peppers, table grapes, wheat grain, virgin olive oil, bovine fat and chicken eggs. Results were compared with those of 2015. Samples were analyzed for 177 pesticide residues.

The MRL exceedance rate increased from 2015 to 2018 in table grapes (from 1.8 to 2.6 percent), sweet peppers/bell peppers (from 1.2 to 2.4 percent), bananas

(from 0.5 to 1.7 percent) and eggplant (from 0.6 to 1.6 percent). It fell for broccoli (from 3.7 to 2 percent), virgin olive oil (from 0.9 to 0.6 percent) and chicken eggs (from 0.2 to 0.1 percent).

EU - harmonized MRLs are set for more than 1,240 pesticides covering 378 food products and groups. A default MRL of 0.01 mg/kg is applicable to nearly 690 of these pesticides, not mentioned in the legislation.

Overall findings

In 2018, 95.5 percent of the overall 91,015 samples analyzed fell below the MRL, 4.5 percent exceeded this level, of which 2.7 percent, or 2,478 samples, were non - compliant as they exceeded the MRL after accounting for measurement uncertainty. In total, 821 pesticides were analyzed and on average, 239 per sample.

The number of samples within the legal limit was similar to 2017. The amount that exceeded the limit was slightly higher than the previous report. Reporting countries analyzed 821 different pesticides.

National control programs are risk based, focusing on products likely to contain pesticide residues or for which MRL infringements were identified previously.

Of the more than 90,000 samples, 43,542 contained one or several pesticides in quantifiable concentrations. Multiple residues were reported in 26,461 samples which was slightly higher than in 2017. In one goji berry sample from China, up to 29 different pesticides were found.

As in 2017, the pesticides mostly quantified were boscalid (RD), imazalil, fludioxonil (RD), acetamiprid (RD) followed by fluopyram. Chlorate had the highest MRL exceedance rate at 10.3 percent compared to 6.4 percent in 2017.

Other findings for EU non - approved active substances were 44 samples containing nicotine, mainly in goji berries from China, cultivated fungi and kales; 88 samples with antraquinone, mainly in teas from China; 113 samples containing fipronil (RD) of which 63 were in chicken eggs mainly from Romania and tricyclazole in 109 rice samples.

Results by origin

Overall, 57,286 samples originated from EU reporting countries, 24,495 concerned products imported from third countries and for 9,234 samples no product origin was reported.

In samples from one of the reporting countries; 3.1 percent exceeded the MRL and 1.6 percent were considered non - compliant, taking into account measurement uncertainty. Samples from third countries had a higher MRL exceedance rate of 8.3 percent and non - compliance rate of 5.8 percent.

The highest exceedance rates from reporting countries were for products from Portugal, Cyprus and Malta with more or equal to 6 percent of samples above the MRL. The top exceedance rates of more than 15 percent of the samples were for Suriname, Jordan, Uganda, Pakistan, Vietnam, Dominican Republic, Thailand, China and India.

Exceedances remain higher for unprocessed food than processed food but the rate for processed food increased in 2018. A slight increase was reported in multiple residues compared to 2017. The rate of multiple residues is higher in unprocessed food than in processed products.

Some products exceeding the MRL were risk - based samples with increased import controls such as coriander leaves, pomegranates, chili peppers, pitahaya, basil, teas and yardlong beans. Almost 83,000 consignments were imported to

the EU in 2018 and 4.8 percent were non - compliant compared to 3 percent in 2017.

Organic and baby food plus fipronil

Countries analyzed 1,658 samples of foods for infants and young children. The MRL was passed in 22 samples and seven were non - compliant. As in previous years, the most frequently quantified compounds in baby food were chlorates in 80 samples followed by copper in 39 samples.

Chlorates are by - products of chlorine solutions used as sanitizing and disinfection agents in industry and as biocides. These uses are necessary to ensure good hygiene of products but lead to detectable residues of chlorate in food. Copper is an approved baby food nutrient.

The 5,735 organic food samples reported in 2018 was slightly lower than 2017. The rate of MRL exceedance fell marginally to 1.4 percent from 1.5 percent and 0.5 percent were non - compliant compared to 0.7 percent in 2017.

Similar to previous years, the main quantified residue in organic food was copper, found in 225 samples in 28 different food items, followed by dithiocarbamates (RD), bromide ion, chlorates and spinosad. Copper, spinosad, azadirachtin and pyrethrins can be used in organic farming.

Fipronil was found in 68 egg samples. Fipronil, is a veterinary medicinal product or biocide and presence in eggs is because of illegal use. Due to the fipronil incident in chicken eggs in 2017, EFSA recommends member states continue analyzing for acaricides in animal products.

FDA To Temporarily Conduct Remote Importer Inspections Under FSVP Due to COVID-19

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration announced today that it will begin requesting that importers send records required under the Foreign Supplier Verification Programs for Importers of Food for Humans and Animals (FSVP) rule electronically (or through other prompt means) to the Agency as it shifts to conducting these inspections remotely during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

The FSVP rule requires importers to perform certain risk-based activities to verify that their foreign supplier is producing the food in accordance with U.S. food safety standards. Until now, FSVP inspections to review FSVP records typically have been conducted at an importer's place of business. However, under the FSVP regulation FDA has the authority to make written requests for importers to provide records to the agency electronically or by other prompt means. Because of the travel restrictions, social distancing, and other advisories associated with the COVID-19 outbreak, the FDA has determined that most routine onsite inspections are temporarily impractical to conduct at this time. Therefore, the Agency will shift to temporarily conducting FSVP inspections remotely as practical until further notice.

The FDA will immediately begin conducting a limited number of remote inspections, prioritizing the inspections of FSVP importers of food from foreign suppliers whose onsite food facility or farm inspections have been postponed due to COVID-19. The Agency is also planning to continue to conduct previously assigned routine and follow-up inspections remotely during this time. Importers subject to the remote inspections will be contacted by an FDA investigator who will explain the process for the remote inspection and make written requests for

records.

In rare situations, such as in response to an outbreak of foodborne illness, FDA may still choose to conduct an onsite FSVP inspection. In these instances, an FDA investigator will make arrangements to conduct the inspection while practicing the social distancing recommendations provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

EU audits U.S. controls to ensure safety of food of non-animal origin

European officials have evaluated the way the United States controls microbiological contamination in food of non-animal origin that is destined for Europe.

The review by DG Sante, the European Commission's unit for food safety and health, found there are no specific microbiological hazard control procedures for exports of almonds, leafy vegetables and frozen soft fruits bound for the EU.

The audit in September 2019 included six farms producing almonds, leafy greens, strawberries, raspberries and blueberries, five companies processing and packing for exports to the EU and three EU exporters.

It assessed the system of official controls in food hygiene to prevent microbiological contamination during production of food of non-animal origin (FNAO), such as almonds, seeds for sprouting and fresh and frozen fruit and vegetables for direct consumption.

Seeds for sprouting sole shortcoming

The official control system for FNAO was in the first phases of implementing new requirements set in the Food Safety Modernization Act. Official controls at primary production on potential microbiological risks in non-sprout produce for EU export started in spring 2019, but inspections of sprout farms began in autumn 2017.

The system largely ensures FNAO were produced under conditions which meet the EU's hygiene rules for primary production and processing. Potential risks from lack of official controls are mitigated as most processors or exporters were part of producer groups; third party certified against international food safety standards and regularly received inspections and audits including some of primary producers from customers.

Shortcomings were seen related to implementation of traceability and verification of Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) for seed growers on the spot which was not in line with EU requirements. This could lead to exports of seeds for sprouting that were not produced under conditions which comply with EU regulation and could be of higher microbiological risk, according to DG Sante.

The Seeds for Sprouting Export Certification Program destined for EU export is

overseen by the Agricultural Marketing Service of USDA. Audit requirements include a traceability exercise and mock recall reflecting EU regulations. Exporters of seeds for sprouting need to be approved and import certificates must be issued by AMS.

In 2017, exports of leafy vegetables from the United States. to EU was 3,042 tons and decreased in 2018 to 607 tons. The United States sent 658 tons of fresh strawberries to the EU in 2017, and 651 tons in 2018. For fresh cranberries, bilberries and other such fruit, exports were 1,683 tons in 2017, and 1,211 tons in 2018, according to Eurostat data.

In 2018, 264,000 tons of almonds were sent to the EU based on FDA and Almond Board of California statistics. Almonds sent to the EU without being treated to control Salmonella are labeled "unpasteurized."

Processors considered to be high risk have routine inspections every three years and low risk are every five years. There is a risk specific and HACCP based official control system for handlers and processors that leads to different inspection requirements and approaches for different commodities.

Examples of testing results

The audit team visited an almond handler involved in a Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) notification for Salmonella in untreated almonds. The previous inspection report from FDA indicated two shortcomings that were rectified. The processor implemented a HACCP plan, and took samples consisting of 20 incremental samples for microbiological testing of each consignment before shipping to the EU. After the RASFF notification, the food safety plan was revised to increase the size of the analytical sample from 25 grams to 350 grams.

The audit team was told that from 406 samples in the previous year, four were Salmonella positive. According to the firm, these consignments were pasteurized and not exported.

The auditors also went to a processor of leafy vegetables that is exporting to the EU and processes leafy vegetables from an estimated 250 growers. The processor has official controls every three years.

A microbiological sampling program of produce in the field before harvest tested for Salmonella, E. coli, enterohemorrhagic E. coli (EHEC) and E. coli O157:H7.

The processor took about 32,000 samples in 2015, with six positives; in 2016 about 35,000 samples with six positives; in 2017, about 25,000 samples with one positive, and in 2018 about 30,000 samples with five positives. About 62 percent of positive samples contained EHEC, a third had Salmonella and 4 percent contained E. coli O157:H7.

When a positive sample is found, the associated production plot is excluded from harvesting and a sampling campaign is performed at the plot to identify the root cause of contamination.

The audit team also visited a processor of frozen berries and frozen vegetables subject to official controls by FDA every three years. In a microbiological sampling program of incoming frozen produce and final product, samples were analyzed for Salmonella, E. coli, Listeria, Norovirus and Hepatitis A.

In 2018, about 70,000 samples were taken with one or two positive for non-pathogenic Listeria. FDA was informed about the result in time and the related batch and similar consignments were rejected at reception. The company told auditors that the supplier destroyed the batch.

France allows changes to raw milk regulations because of coronavirus

French authorities have eased rules around the sale of raw milk because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The country's Ministry of Agriculture has temporarily adopted measures making it easier for producers to market their unpasteurized, raw milk for direct sale. The agency also made it clear it was the operator's responsibility to ensure the safety of any product placed on the market.

Sale of raw milk directly to the consumer can happen by completing an online declaration. Normally, the cow, goat or sheep milk producer must request authorization from authorities to be able to sell raw milk and then be subject to an inspection. At the end of the coronavirus crisis, the producer will have to apply if they wish to keep this status.

Move welcomed

Two dairy groups had sent an assessment of the difficulties faced by producers to the Ministry of Agriculture and asked for regulatory adaptations to deal with the COVID-19 crisis.

The Fédération Nationale des Producteurs de Lait (FNPL) and La Fédération Nationale des Eleveurs de Chèvres (FNEC) welcomed the new measures, which will facilitate the sale of products from dairy farmers who are in difficulty because of the closure of their usual markets.

A formal response is not essential, but the return of the online form signed by an inspector makes it possible to clarify the operators' situations. The groups advised producers to request this counter signature by the inspector.

Producers must ensure a good state of health for the animals involved in the milk production and that they are free from brucellosis and tuberculosis if they wish to sell from the farm. They must use drinking water for cleaning and disinfecting equipment in contact with raw milk.

Products need to be cooled after milking and stored at between 0 degrees C and 4 degrees C (32 degrees F and 39.2 degrees F) unless the sale is done on the farm within two hours after the end of the milking. It must also meet all microbiological criteria for Listeria monocytogenes, Salmonella and E. coli.

Weekly volume limits have also been suspended. The operators must keep a record of the quantities sold during the emergency period. Normally, a producer has the right to sell to an intermediary within a radius of 80 kilometers, or 200 kilometers in remote municipalities, but with volume limitations. At the end of the crisis, a request for approval will have to be made if the producer wishes to keep higher volumes than what the rules allow in normal times.

Situation elsewhere

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has told dairy farmers who are not registered as raw drinking milk producers not to give away or sell raw milk straight from their tanks.

The warning comes as some farmers may be asked by friends and neighbors if they can buy milk from the tanks, with some supermarkets seeing milk shortages on shelves, according to the Royal Association of British Dairy Farmers (RABDF).

Italian politician Mara Bizzotto said the price of milk is falling sharply as compared to the 42 to 43 cents per liter in January, it was 22 to 28 cents in March.

"Furthermore, many producers are complaining about the failure to collect raw milk from the cowsheds, which means an unacceptable waste of a quality fresh product and, above all, a loss of earnings for producers," she said.

Copa and Cogeca had previously warned of "negative sentiment" on the dairy market, which is weighing prices down at a time that represents peak season.

Thierry Roquefeuil, chair of the Copa and Cogeca working party on milk and dairy products, said farmers and their cooperatives cannot bear the consequences of another crisis.

"The European Commission and the member states, have the responsibility to act now. Copa and Cogeca are calling for timely action to trigger the necessary measures and for private storage to be activated for all dairy products. Ensuring private storage for skimmed milk powder, all types of cheeses, butter, including for frozen storage of buffalo milk and/or buffalo curd would have a beneficial impact on ensuring year-round food security," he said.

"It is also important to assess the impact that the closure of schools has had on the delivery of milk and dairy products to children in schools and to avoid unnecessary restrictions stemming from competition law in this force majeure situation."

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) has helped develop guidance on what dairy producers whose milk is uncollected during the COVID-19 pandemic should do when disposal by land application at the farm where it was produced is necessary.

No food safety deficiencies found in Denmark's pork exports to the United States

Denmark's Ministry of Environment and Food has agreed to take corrective actions in two areas identified by a USDA audit of its food safety system for pork products exported to the United States.

During an in-country equivalence verification audit, USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Sevice (FSIS) found Denmark's Veterinary and Food Administration was not confirming acceptable testing results from livestock carcasses and parts subjected to routine government chemical residue testing before signing export certificates.

And the FSIS audit team found Denmark's chemical residue program has provisions in place that allow for chemical residue samples with violative test results to be re-analyzed, but a records review found no re-testing occurred for products shipped to the United States.

FSIS auditors visited Denmark last Nov. 4-15, 2010, and the final audit report was released on April 1, 2020.

Denmark exports to the United States include thermally processed, commercially sterile pork; ready-to-eat (RTE) pork fully cooked without subsequent exposure to the environment; RTE fully cooked pork; RTE dried pork; RTE acidified/fermented pork (without cooking); raw intact pork; raw non-intact pork; and not ready-to-eat otherwise processed pork.

Six pork slaughter and processing establishments and four pork processing establishments in Denmark were visited by the FSIS auditors along with two laboratories — one a microbiological unit and the other a chemical residue unit.

The 10 pork establishments were chosen from 24 facilities that export pork products to the United States.

USDA's audit of Denmark's food safety inspection system governing pork did not identify any deficiencies or any immediate threat to public health.

USDA audits of foreign meat production focus on six areas:

- Government Oversight
- Government Verification
- Government Sanitation Verification
- Government HACCP System Verification
- Government Chemical Residue Program
- Government Microbiological Pathogen and Process Control

"During the establishment visits, the FSIS auditors paid particular attention to the extent to which industry and government interacted to control hazards and prevent noncompliance that threatens food safety," according to the audit report.

Denmark promised to address the findings of the audit report with corrective actions where necessary during the audit exit meeting last Nov. 15.

USDA also subjected 230,265,137 pounds of pork exported to the United States from Denmark to 100 percent re-inspection from July 1, 2016, to June 30, 2019. For 20,385,674 pounds of Danish pork additional types of inspection occurred. These USDA inspections resulted in 129,310 pounds of Denmark's pork being rejected for public health reasons. For example, one lot or 9,735 pounds of pork bellies were rejected for fecal contamination.

Denmark adopts various European Union (EU) laws and regulations about the production of food of animal origins.

The previous audit before this one was completed in March 2018.

FSIS auditors confirmed that in-plant inspection personnel including

veterinarians and inspectors are full-time government employees paid by the Danish government. A Danish audit unit also exists to confirm that exports to the U.S comply with USDA requirements.

WHO and EU Commission publish coronavirus food safety advice

The World Health Organization (WHO) and European Commission have published separate guidance about coronavirus and food safety.

The WHO interim guidance for food businesses said it was "highly unlikely" that people can contract COVID-19 from food or food packaging. Coronaviruses cannot multiply in food as they need an animal or human host.

Earlier this month, the WHO held a webinar on the subject with Professor Alan Reilly, from University College of Dublin and former CEO of the Food Safety Authority of Ireland, and Peter Karim Ben Embarek, of the International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN).

Research has evaluated survival of the virus on different surfaces and reported it can remain viable for up to 72 hours on plastic and stainless steel, up to four hours on copper, and up to 24 hours on cardboard. This research was under laboratory conditions with controlled relative humidity and temperature and should be interpreted with caution in the real-life environment, according to WHO.

"It is imperative for the food industry to reinforce personal hygiene measures and provide refresher training on food hygiene principles to eliminate or reduce the risk of food surfaces and food packaging materials becoming contaminated with the virus from food workers," the organization says.

Industry should have Food Safety Management Systems (FSMS) based on Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) principles to manage food safety risks and prevent contamination. Prerequisite programs include good hygiene practices, cleaning and sanitation, zoning of processing areas, supplier control, storage, distribution and transport, personnel hygiene and fitness to work.

Protecting workers

The WHO said personal protective equipment (PPE), such as masks and gloves, can be effective in reducing the spread of viruses and disease within the food sector, but only if used properly.

The agency advised industry to introduce physical distancing and stringent hygiene and sanitation measures and promote frequent and effective handwashing and sanitation at each stage of food processing, manufacture and marketing.

Gloves may be used by workers but must be changed frequently and hands must

be washed between glove changes and when they are removed. Gloves allow bacteria to build up on the surface of hands, so handwashing is important when they are removed to avoid contamination of food.

Disposable gloves should not be used as a substitute for handwashing, which is a greater protective barrier to infection. Wearing disposable gloves can give a false sense of security and may result in staff not washing hands as frequently as required.

Disposable containers and packaging should be used to avoid the need to clean any returns. For reusable containers, appropriate hygiene and sanitation protocols should be implemented.

If an infected worker handles food it is possible they could introduce virus to the food they are working on, or onto surfaces within the business, by coughing and sneezing, or through hand contact. Infected people may be asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic and may not display signs or symptoms of disease or have mild symptoms that are easily overlooked.

EC FAQ advice

The European Commission published a Q+A on COVID-19 and food safety covering production, food in shops and food at home. The European Community of Consumer Cooperatives (Euro Coop) and Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) provided input.

The document states businesses cannot ask for virus-free certification guarantees from suppliers for COVID-19 as there is no evidence that food poses a risk to public health.

No information is yet available on whether the virus can be present on food, survive and infect people. However, despite the scale of the pandemic, there has been no report of transmission via food. The document advised consumers to wash fruits and vegetables with clean water but added The virus does not survive cooking.

Among good hygiene practices required at all stages of food production, of most relevance are cleaning and disinfection of food facilities and equipment between production lots, avoidance of cross-contamination between food types and food at different stages of the process such as raw versus cooked food, personal hygiene such as washing and disinfecting hands, wearing gloves and masks where required, use of dedicated hygienic clothes and shoes, or staying away from work when feeling ill.

The Commission has already adopted a regulation allowing countries to carry out controls despite movement restrictions to limit the spread of COVID-19. These measures apply for two months and will be reviewed based on information from member states.

Protocols to safeguard the health of employees include social distancing while at work, plexiglass when distance cannot be maintained, no contact between truck drivers and the food facility, more hand sanitizers, working in turns to ensure no more workers than strictly necessary in the facility, or where possible working from home.

There has been no report of transmission of the virus to animals via consumption of pet food or for feed for farmed animals and it is very unlikely the virus can be caught from handling pet food.

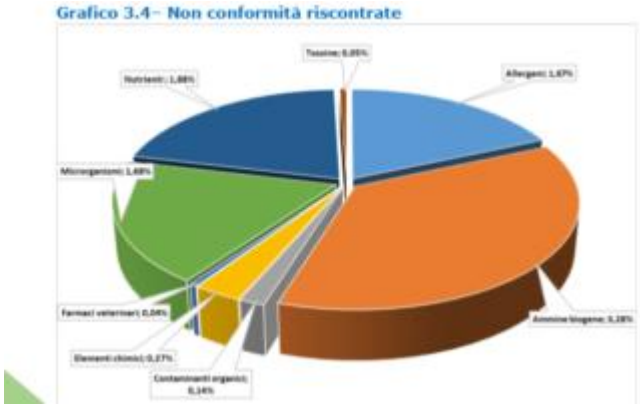
Italy reveals results of food and drink controls

Most issues with food and beverages in Italy involved products of animal origin and were microbiological, according to a recent report from authorities.

In 2018, almost 50,500 samples of food products were taken from all stages of the supply chain and nearly 130,000 analyzes conducted as part of official controls. From these analytical checks almost 1,500 had problems, revealing a non-compliance rate of 1.14 percent.

More than 78,000 checks were for microbiological reasons, mostly for Salmonella, followed by Listeria and E. coli, including Shiga-toxin producing E. coli (STEC). Vibrio, Campylobacter, norovirus, Yersinia enterocolitica and Cronobacter sakazakii were also part of tests. Activities were coordinated by the Ministry of Health (Ministero Della Salute).

A total of 1,314 non-conformities were found mostly for E. coli, including STEC, followed by Campylobacter, Listeria and Salmonella.



Types of issues detected

The highest percentage of irregularities involved microbiological issues in meat, fish and dairy products. The second category for microbiological irregularities was other food products such as composite dishes, including ready meals.

Out of 2,342 checks for allergens, 39 showed non-compliance.

Categories of foods with the greatest non-compliance are meats and derived products, cereals, composite dishes, confectionery products and spices.

Most testing for chemical elements concerned heavy metals with 59 of 21,518 analyzes irregular. For organic contaminants such as dioxins, PCBs, 3-MCPD and others, out of 20,161 analytical tests 29 were not compliant.

Almost 160,000 import consignments were subject to official controls, of which about two-thirds were food of non-animal origin. For this type of food, which concerned 106,116 consignments, 3,781 samples were taken and 214 were rejected. From these samples, 5,204 analyzes were carried out for Salmonella, aflatoxins and pesticides.

Checks on trade in products of animal origin led to 49 items being rejected out of 7,658 controlled lots. Rejections mostly related to bivalve mollusks for norovirus, fishery products for parasites, heavy metals or pathogenic microorganisms and poultry for Salmonella.

EFSA assesses health risks of aflatoxins in food

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has published a risk assessment on aflatoxins in food.

The report evaluates toxicity of aflatoxins to humans, estimates dietary exposure of the European Union population to these mycotoxins, and assesses the human health risks due to estimated dietary exposure. The risk assessment by the Panel on Contaminants in the Food Chain is an update of similar work in 2007 and 2018.

It covers aflatoxin B1 (AFB1), AFB2, AFG1, AFG2 and AFM1. More than 200,000

analytical results on occurrence of aflatoxins were part of the evaluation. Grains and grain - based products made the largest contribution to the mean chronic dietary exposure to AFB1 in all age groups, while liquid milk and fermented milk products were the main contributors to the AFM1 mean exposure.

The most frequently found aflatoxin in contaminated food is AFB1. Aflatoxin - producing fungi are found in areas with a hot, humid climate and aflatoxins in food are a result of pre - and post - harvest fungal contamination. Climate change is believed to impact their presence in Europe.

Possible health issues

In short - term studies of seven to 90 days, AFB1 had negative effects on rodents including inhibition of normal growth, liver and kidney damage, and sustained alterations in the intestinal microbiota. For AFG1, AFG2, AFB2 or AFM1, no new short - term toxicity or gut microbiota studies were identified.

AFB1 affects reproductive and developmental parameters and aflatoxins, especially AFB1, can produce an immunotoxic effect in rodents. The no - observed - adverse - effect - levels (NOAELs) for effects were around 30 µg/kg body weight (bw) per day.

There is evidence for genotoxic effects of AFB1 in pregnant mice, fetuses and young animals. It is not possible, based on available data, to make a quantitative comparison of the genotoxic potency of the other compounds. AFB1, AFG1 and AFM1 are carcinogenic when delivered orally via the diet.

The CONTAM panel said liver carcinogenicity of aflatoxins remains the pivotal effect for the risk assessment but in view of its genotoxic properties, it was not appropriate to establish a tolerable daily intake.

The highest AFB1 and AFT mean concentrations were for legumes, nuts and oilseeds, in particular pistachios, peanuts and other seeds. The top AFM1 mean concentrations were reported for milk and dairy products and milk - based foods in the category food for infants and small children.

Safety Alerts

Date	Brand Name(s)	Product Description	Product Type	Recall Reason Description	Company Name
04/22/2020	Royal International Trading Inc.	"TAINY BOCTOKA DRY FRUITS MIX COMPOT APPLE"	Food & Beverages, Allergens, Fruit/Fruit Product	Undeclared Sulfites	Royal International Trading Inc.
04/21/2020	Ocean Spray	Pink Lite Cranberry Juice Drink	Food & Beverages,	Undeclared Sulfites	Ocean Spray Cranberries, Inc.
04/21/2020	Buckhead Meat and Seafood of Houston, Inc.	Frozen Flounder Stuffed with Seafood	Food & Beverages,	Undeclared wheat, soy, milk, fish, and eggs	Buckhead Meat and Seafood of Houston, Inc., a Sysco Company
04/17/2020	Homestead Creamery	Unsalted Butter	Food & Beverages, Butter/Butter Product, Foodborne	Potential to be contaminated with Listeria	Homestead Creamery Inc.

			Illness	monocytogenes	
04/16/2020	Whole Foods Market	Queso Sauce	Food & Beverages,	Undeclared cashews	Whole Foods Market
04/14/2020	Sun Hong Foods	Enoki Mushrooms	Food & Beverages,	Potential to be contaminated with Listeria monocytogenes	Sun Hong Foods, Inc.
04/14/2020	Guan's Mushroom Co.	Enoki Mushroom	Food & Beverages, Foodborne Illness	Potential Listeria monocytogenes	Guan's Mushroom Co.
04/14/2020	H&C Food Inc.	Enoki mushrooms	Food & Beverages, Foodborne Illness	Potential to be contaminated with Listeria monocytogenes	H&C Food Inc.
04/13/2020	DSD Merchandisers, Inc.	Roasted/Salted Deluxe Mixed Nuts	Food & Beverages,	Undeclared peanut	DSD Merchandisers, Inc.
04/10/2020	Whole Foods Market	Minestrone Soup	Food & Beverages,	Undeclared milk	Whole Foods Market
03/26/2020	Whole Foods Market	Vodka Sauce	Food & Beverages,	Undeclared Milk	Winter Gardens Quality Foods, Inc.
03/24/2020	Huangfushanzen Huang Mountain Tea Mushroom	Dried Mushrooms	Food & Beverages, Allergens	Undeclared Sulfites	Tiffany Food Corporation

Enterprise News

Vibrio increase concerns lead to risk assessment

There has been an increase in Vibrio outbreaks and presence in seafood has been known to disrupt trade, according to FAO and WHO.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and World Health Organization (WHO) noted a rise in outbreaks and cases of foodborne disease attributed to pathogenic Vibrio species. As a result, there have been times where Vibrio spp. in seafood has disrupted international trade.

Food safety concerns with these microorganisms led to the need for a microbiological risk assessment to support risk management decision making for their control. Experts met to discuss risk assessment tools for Vibrio and seafood.

Vibrio outbreaks

There have been a series of outbreaks of Vibrio parahaemolyticus foodborne illnesses due to consumption of seafood. They have also occurred in regions where it was previously unreported, according to FAO and WHO.

Vibrio vulnificus can cause mild gastroenteritis in healthy people following consumption of raw bivalve mollusks. However, for those with chronic pre-existing conditions it can be a serious, often fatal, disease with one of the highest fatality rates of any foodborne bacterial pathogen.

In Asia, Vibrio parahaemolyticus is a common cause of foodborne disease. Outbreaks are normally small, involving fewer than 10 cases, but occur frequently. In Japan, from 2006 to 2008, there were 2,682 reported cases of infection. Boiled crabs caused one large outbreak, involving 691 cases.

Vibrio parahaemolyticus occurs in a variety of fish and shellfish, including clams, shrimp, lobster, crayfish, scallops, crabs, oysters and mussels.

When outbreaks of Vibrio parahaemolyticus and Vibrio vulnificus occur they are usually associated with seawater temperatures above 15 degrees C (59 degrees F) for the former and 20 degrees C (68 degrees F) for the latter.

Although thorough cooking destroys these microorganisms, oysters, mussels and other filter feeding shellfish are often eaten raw or lightly cooked.

Water temperature and salinity

Experts looked at monitoring options but noted final decision on the method selected will depend on purpose of the monitoring activity, cost, speed with which results are required and technical capacity of the laboratory.

Monitoring seawater for Vibrio parahaemolyticus and Vibrio vulnificus in bivalve growth and harvest areas has limited value to predict the presence of these pathogens in bivalves, according to the report.

Looking at seafood for these pathogenic vibrios was considered the most appropriate way to get insight into the levels of the pathogens in these commodities at the time of harvest.

Ongoing monitoring could be expensive, so a year-long study could be used to establish a relationship between total and pathogenic Vibrio parahaemolyticus and Vibrio vulnificus in seafood and factors such as water temperature and salinity. Once such a relationship is created for the harvest area of interest, measuring these factors may be a more cost-effective way of monitoring.

Quantitative risk assessments were developed in 2011 for Vibrio parahaemolyticus in oysters, finfish and bloody clams and for Vibrio vulnificus in oysters by FAO and WHO in 2005.

Post-harvest treatment technologies may reduce pathogenic vibrio but

effectiveness will vary according to conditions of use, and there may be a need to balance getting the maximum possible reduction in bacterial content and retaining consumer-acceptance of the product or process.

Such methods include depuration, refrigerated storage, freezing, high pressure processing and mild heat treatment.

Experts considered the Joint FAO/WHO expert meetings on microbiological risk assessment (JEMRA) growth model for Vibrio vulnificus and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration model for Vibrio parahaemolyticus were appropriate for estimating growth in the American oyster but cannot be applied across all shellfish.

There are many variables for seafood such as practices during harvest and post-harvest and consumption that need to be considered in future modelling.

If a risk assessment model is to be commissioned it would be useful to have a database to compile information from worldwide on the variables relevant for the model.

U.S. lacks sufficient aflatoxin checks on peanuts destined for Europe

The United States has limited controls to manage aflatoxin contamination in peanuts for export to Europe, according to findings from an audit carried out because of regular detection of non-compliances.

Officials from DG Sante, the European Commission's unit for food safety and health, said there was scope to develop and improve good practices across the industry to help reduce levels of aflatoxin in peanuts.

The audit assessed if the systems to control aflatoxin contamination in peanuts sent to the European Union comply with, or are equivalent to, EU laws to ensure limits for contaminants are respected. It found the legal framework primarily addresses peanuts for the domestic market and imports. There are no specific standards for peanuts intended for the EU.

It is possible for processors to export a lot to Europe which has, in the analysis of another sample from the same lot, had a result exceeding EU limits, according to DG Sante.

Scale of the problem

European maximum levels for aflatoxin contaminations in groundnuts and processed products for direct human consumption are 2 micrograms per kilogram for B1 and 4 mcg/kg for the sum of B1, B2, G1 and G2. If they are subject to sorting, or other physical treatment, before consumption or use as an ingredient in foodstuffs the limit for B1 is 8 mcg/kg and for the sum of B1, B2, G1 and G2 it is 15 mcg/kg.

The FDA has established an action level of 20 mcg/kg or parts per billion for total aflatoxins (B1, B2, G1 and G2). In practice, industry voluntarily applies a limit of 15 mcg/kg total aflatoxins for peanuts.

The audit was due to regular Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF)

notifications in recent years for aflatoxins in peanuts imported from the U.S. There were 85 notifications concerning aflatoxins in nut products and seeds in 2018. So far this year, there have been 17 alerts.

The visit in October 2019 reviewed controls on the primary production, processing and export of peanut products. Three laboratories — two private and one government lab — involved in issuing certificates of aflatoxin analyses, four processors involved in blanching, shelling and processing of peanuts and one farmer as well as a buying point and interim store were visited.

Data from the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service shows the U.S. exported more than 30,600 tons of groundnuts (peanuts) in shell to the EU in 2018, almost 110,000 tons groundnuts shelled, nearly 7,500 tons of groundnuts otherwise prepared or preserved, and 310 tons of processed peanuts. There is a minimum of 10 percent physical and identity checks on consignments imported into the EU.

Industry initiative

The American Peanut Council (APC) has developed a voluntary pre-export program and most companies exporting to the EU have agreed to comply with it. It includes a system of official sampling and aflatoxin analysis of raw peanuts intended for the EU. At the time of the audit, 10 shelling companies, one blanching firm with various sites and one lab with several sites had signed up to the program.

No official controls are done to verify compliance and there is no supervision of consignments destined for the EU for aflatoxin contamination. Compliance with the voluntary pre-export program is not a requirement to export peanuts to the EU.

There is no time limit on validity of aflatoxin analysis results conducted prior to export to the EU. One processing plant visited said they considered such results would be valid for up to a year prior to export.

The voluntary pre-export program allows peanuts exported to the EU to be tested for aflatoxin prior to blanching in a separate plant and not re-tested after blanching before export.

Plant inspection reports and checklists reviewed by the auditors indicated state inspectors do not do a detailed or consistent assessment of the processing plants' hazard analysis critical control point (HACCP) plans. The audit team reviewed a number of HACCP plans which did not include a comprehensive assessment and documentation of the management of pertinent risks related to aflatoxin along the processing steps.

The audit team found there was considerable variation in how samples for aflatoxin analysis of peanuts destined for the EU are taken.

Aggregate samples are often not weighed or mixed upon being taken or upon arrival in the testing lab where they are divided into sub-samples. There is a lack of monitoring, supervision or verification to ensure official sampling instructions are followed to ensure the method of sampling consignments is equivalent to EU regulation.

"Given the availability of multiple official samples from individual lots and limited official supervision in the processing of results for exported consignments, it is possible for processors to export a lot to the EU which has, in the analysis of another sample from the same lot, given a result exceeding EU limits."

Belgian experts assess risk of Listeria growth in cheese

Experts in Belgium have said the risk of Listeria monocytogenes growth in fresh cheeses is low if the pH value is below a certain level by the end of the production process.

The Scientific Committee found, based on challenge tests, the growth of Listeria monocytogenes in soft and semi-hard cheeses cannot be excluded. Soft cheeses are a known risk product. Semi-hard cheeses present a potential risk for growth and this should be assessed on a case-by-case basis, according to the committee. These products are potentially unsafe for high-risk consumers such as pregnant women, young children, the elderly, and people suffering from certain underlying medical conditions.

A durability test with feta showed no growth but a single test is not sufficient to conclude that all feta cheeses are a low risk product, said the experts.

Advice to include pH controls in HACCP plan

The Scientific Committee provides advice on risk assessment and management in the food chain for the Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain (FASFC) in Belgium.

Correct implementation of Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) and an adequate Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) plan remain essential.

The committee recommended that pH controls at the end of the production process of fresh cheeses are included in the HACCP procedures as a control measure, so that the operator can ensure a sufficient pH reduction of below 5 has occurred at this stage.

In advice from 2016, the committee made recommendations for challenge and durability tests for Listeria monocytogenes in cheese. On this basis, a study collected data from Belgian cheeses. The committee was then asked to evaluate the growth potential of Listeria in these cheeses.

Producer survey and market study findings

Production processes of Belgian cheeses and their characteristics were examined by a survey of 142 producers and a market study of 65 different cheeses. Growth of Listeria in 32 cheeses was studied by challenge tests.

In the producer survey, 424 different cheeses were identified, most made in Wallonia but some in Flanders. Most Belgian farm cheeses are made from unpasteurized, raw milk but Flemish producers use pasteurized milk more frequently.

No growth was observed for fresh cheeses in the durability tests. Shelf life varied from seven to 19 days. The maximum pH value at the start of growth tests

was 4.93 but a maximum pH of 5.5 was detected during the market study.

For soft cheeses, there was growth in seven of the eight. In two tests growth was significant at 3 to 5 log colony forming units per gram (cfu/g). The high pH values of these products may explain the development of Listeria.

For the semi-hard variety, there was a lot of variation in growth potential of Listeria between products and between batches of the same cheese.

Experts advised that future durability studies with low initial concentrations of Listeria less than 10 cfu/g should also collect semi-quantitative data by doing isolations on smaller quantities such as 10-gram and 1-gram or by determining the most probable number of Listeria.

They also proposed use of an initial contamination level below 1,000 cfu/g for durability tests to be able to effectively assess growth potential.

The committee has also published an opinion on the analysis program for phycotoxins (marine bioxtoxins) in food.

It focuses on matrices posing the main risk to the Belgian population such as oysters, mussels and scallops. The committee recommended that attention should be paid to the sampling of crab and urged vigilance on emerging phycotoxins such as ciguatoxin and tetrodotoxin.

Experts recommended that the distribution and catering sector should also be included in sampling sites and studies on the identification and occurrence of phycotoxins in algae-based food supplements should be carried out.

FDA reopens comment period on milk rule for some cheeses

The FDA is reopening the public comment period on a proposed rule that would allow the use of ultrafiltered milk in certain cheeses and cheese products. The move will give consumers and others an additional 120 days to file comments.

Although the current comment period is set to end on March 30, the new comment period may not begin the following day. The new comment period will begin on the day the FDA's notice is published in the Federal Register.

The public, industry and all other entities will have 120 days from the publication of the notice to file their comments with the Food and Drug Administration.

"The agency is reopening the comment period to solicit any new information on current industry practices regarding the use of fluid UF (ultrafiltered fluid) milk and fluid UF nonfat milk and on labeling of UF fluid milk and fluid UF nonfat milk when used as ingredients," according to an FDA announcement March 26.

"The proposed rule, which was issued on Oct. 19, 2005, would amend the definitions of 'milk' and 'nonfat milk' for cheeses and related cheese products in FDA's regulations on food standards — often referred to as standards of identity."

Ultrafiltered milk, according to the FDA, is raw or pasteurized milk that is mechanically filtered to concentrate proteins. In the process, some of the lactose, minerals and water-soluble vitamins are lost, along with water. The resulting protein concentrate is easier and more cost effective to ship. This same process applies to UF nonfat milk, except that raw or pasteurized nonfat milk is used.

The reason behind the new comment period is to give the FDA time to solicit any new information on current industry practices regarding the use of fluid UF milk and fluid UF nonfat milk and on labeling of UF fluid milk and fluid UF nonfat milk when used as ingredients.

"In 2017, FDA issued guidance to industry indicating that it is exercising enforcement discretion regarding the use and ingredient labeling of fluid UF milk and fluid UF nonfat milk in the manufacture of standardized cheeses and related cheese products while it considers rulemaking," according to the FDA's announcement.

"FDA has seen the marketplace evolve and believes it is appropriate to give interested persons another opportunity to comment on the issues raised by the rulemaking."

MARKET NEWS - REPLY

If you have any views or comments on the articles in the marketing news please feel free to contact us on the following email address: sales.china@mxns.com