EFSA

https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/news

Fipronil: results of follow-up monitoring published

EFSA has published its analysis of food data collected following the widespread detection of fipronil residues in eggs last summer.

The detection of fipronil residues in eggs by Belgian authorities in July 2017 led to millions of eggs being withdrawn from the market in the European Union. The contamination was caused by illegal use of non-approved veterinary medicinal products in poultry farms.

Member States submitted to EFSA the results of more than 5,000 samples of eggs and chicken collected between 1 September and 30 November 2017.

The samples were analysed for fipronil and other active substances specified by the European Commission. The analysis showed that 742 of the samples contained residues in quantities exceeding legal limits, almost all related to fipronil.

The majority of exceedances were found in suspect samples – those derived from products or producers where illegal use was known or assumed. Products with exceedances of legal limits originated from eight Member States – the Netherlands, Italy, Germany, Poland, Hungary, France, Slovenia, and Greece.

The food products affected were mainly unprocessed chicken eggs and fat of laying hens. Some exceedances were reported for muscle of laying hens and egg powder. The report has been shared with risk managers at EU and Member State level.

Pesticides: pilot assessments on cumulative risk near to completion

EFSA is close to completing two landmark assessments of the risks posed to consumers by multiple pesticides.

They have been made possible by the Monte Carlo Risk Assessment (MCRA) tool, a software program developed by the Dutch National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) in close cooperation with Biometris, part of Wageningen University and Research. The tool has been adapted to perform assessments of cumulative exposure from pesticides as part of an ongoing partnership between EFSA and the RIVM.

The software will now be further refined and complemented with a data model which, when fully developed, will house all the information necessary to perform full regulatory cumulative risk assessments. A proposal for the data model is published today.

A data model describes the logical inter-relationships and flows between different data elements. It also defines the way data is stored and retrieved. A data model is crucial to building a database of standardised, compatible data.

The substances to be considered in the assessments of the thyroid and nervous systems were identified by EFSA's pesticide experts using a methodology specially devised for classifying pesticides into "cumulative assessment groups" (CAGs). Over the coming years, CAGs will be defined for other organs, tissues and systems, such as the liver, kidneys, eyes, and the reproductive and developmental systems.

The methodology rests on the assumption that pesticides causing the same specific effects can produce cumulative toxicity – even if they do not have similar modes of action.

The EU regulation on maximum levels of pesticides in food (MRLs) stipulates that decisions on MRLs should take into account cumulative effects of pesticides as and when the methods to assess such effects become available. In addition, the regulation covering the placing of pesticides on the market stipulates that pesticides should have no harmful effects – including cumulative effects – on humans.

Why is communicating scientific uncertainties important?

EFSA's scientists are introducing a more harmonised and transparent way of accounting for the limitations in scientific knowledge – the "uncertainties" – in their scientific assessments. Our proposed communications approach aims to help our different audiences to understand this information by providing it in a more accessible language tailored to their needs.

To test and improve their communications approach they would particularly like to hear from:

- Science communicators such as writers, editors, journalists, press and public information officers*: on Section 3 containing the practical guidance for communicating uncertainty – how understandable and easy to follow is it? Could you use such a document, and If not how could it be made more usable?*

– Social scientists and academics specialised in communication of scientific uncertainties: *is there any additional research on different audience understandings of probabilities, verbal vs numerical information, and hedging words, as well as on the use of visuals for communicating uncertainty?*

– Decision-makers, scientific assessors, stakeholders from the food safety and public health areas who use EFSA's communications *or those of other scientific advisory bodies at national, European or international level: do you have any insights or experience to help improve our approach? How can this approach be adapted to help you better understand or explain the results of an uncertainty analysis?*

Food Safety News

http://www.foodsafetynews.com/

FSIS set to begin dioxin analysis of U.S. meat, poultry

Federal agencies are set to begin a year-long testing program on U.S. beef, pork and poultry to measure the levels of a highly toxic group of chemicals called dioxins, which are best known for their use in Agent Orange and other herbicides.

The 2018 Dioxin Survey, headed by the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Services (FSIS), will be done in conjunction with the federal Agricultural Research Service (ARS), and the Red River Valley Agricultural Research Center in Fargo, ND.

This is the fourth such survey in a recurring five-year cycle. The FSIS collaborates with federal partners including ARS, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Food and Drug Administration. The previous dioxin surveys were done in 2003, 2008 and 2013.

Dioxins are a group of compounds that are of public health concern, according to the U.S. National Institutes of Health, the EPA, the World Health Organization and other public health agencies. The chemicals are widely found, but generally at very low levels, throughout the natural environment.

The EPA banned the use of dioxin in herbicides in 1979 after reviewing evidence of its danger to humans, particularly from the widespread use of it by the U.S. military in Vietnam. Also, herbicides containing dioxin were very popular with U.S. farmers to clear fields of broadleaf weeds, which increased crop yields and cleared the way for grass to grow.

Today, for people in the United States, the main exposure vehicle is food, according to the NIH and WHO. Dioxins are absorbed and stored in animals' fat tissues and, therefore, accumulate in the food chain, according to the National Institutes of Health. More than 90 percent of human exposure is through food, the health agency reports.

Contaminated animal feed is often the root-cause of dioxin contamination of food, according to U.S. and international health agencies.

ARS and FSIS will analyze the data collected to continue to monitor dioxin levels in animal fats and evaluate trends in dioxin levels in livestock and poultry. These data will be used to detect and identify possible sources of dioxin in the food supply and to determine whether regulatory actions by FDA and EPA are warranted.

The agency will advise management of various establishments that they may be selected for sampling, beginning June 1. Inspection program personnel will collect half a pound of fat tissue – and in some cases an equal amount of liver tissue – and record all animal identification information as part of the sampling task from the slaughter classes of steers, heifers, dairy cows, market swine, young chickens and young turkeys, as assigned.