

Annual Report of the PESTICIDE RESIDUES COMMITTEE 2005

Directive 91/414/EEC governs the authorisation of pesticide products.

Pesticides are commonly found at detectable levels in all kinds of foods. The official report finds that in a small proportion of samples, levels exceed guideline values.

MRLs

Maximum residue levels (MRLs) are the maximum levels of pesticide expected in crops which have been treated in line with good agricultural practice. It is illegal to sell a food with residues above the MRL. MRLs will always be set below the level considered to be safe for people.

Main findings: Fruit and Vegetables

- "We didn't find any residues that we looked for in swede.
- We found residues in all the samples of oranges.
- We found residues above the MRL in green beans, speciality beans, exotic fruit, spinach, courgettes, lettuce, grapes, oranges, salad onions and potatoes. Where we found residues above MRLs, we told suppliers and relevant authorities.
- One UK sample of potatoes contained tecnazene. Tecnazene is no longer approved for use in the UK on potatoes. The farmer was traced and the remaining potatoes were destroyed.
- 3 out of 28 UK samples of courgettes contained residues of dieldrin which has not been approved for use for many years. This has arisen from contamination in the environment.
- A relatively high percentage of samples of exotic fruit and speciality beans contained residues above the MRL. However, the MRLs for these crops were set at the lowest level which can be routinely detected because no-one has supplied information to set a higher level. This is a particular issue with the developing countries these types of produce come from.



Starchy Foods:

- Out of 72 samples of bran, 65 contained one or more residues of chlormequat, chlorpyrifosmethyl, glyphosate, malathion, mepiquat, or pirimiphos-methyl. We checked for mepiquat (used to regulate plant growth) for the first time and found it in 43% of samples.

Among the 3787 samples we tested, 71 contained a residue that was:

- above the MRL; or
- of a pesticide not approved for use on that particular crop in the UK but was found in a UK sample; they do not automatically give rise to concerns about people's health."

Details of the country of origin of illegal levels of contamination are provided in Annex1. The great majority were of non-European non-USA origin.

Comment

Levels above the MRL were typically in excess by two or three times. Very little of this could be attributed to contamination during handling, the main reason for excessive contamination was not following the appropriate guidelines during the growing phase.

Given that safety margins are usually at least an order of magnitude lower than the lowest observed adverse effect level, it would not be safe to assume that product which contain more than the MRL would be described as defective.