



Risk Insights **Food Newsletter**

Eurofins Food Testing UK Ltd
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In Focus

Emerging issues, trends and legislative changes

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Welcome to the May 2025 newsletter from the Eurofins Compliance and Risk Management Team which includes increasing foodborne illnesses, food fraud and shortages in the food industry.

We are here to offer expert advice and support to help you manage the ever-evolving risks faced by food businesses.

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Unfit meat entering the food chain


A criminal network has been convicted for diverting meat unfit for human consumption back into the food chain, following a joint investigation by Southwark Council and the Food Standards Agency's National Food Crime Unit (NFCU).

The group processed approximately 1.9 tonnes of Category 3 animal by-products (including whole chickens, lamb's testicles, and beef burgers at an illegal meat-cutting plant). These products were intended for disposal or for pet food but were fraudulently reintroduced into the human food chain.

The operation was uncovered after a report from the NFCU about suspicious illegal food activity. Investigators discovered the unfit meat at the illegal plant and traced it back to legitimate food businesses that had sent it for safe disposal. Once meat, fish or other material from animals are classified as animal by-products they cannot re-enter the human food chain, regardless of whether they are edible or not.

The case was heard at Inner London Crown Court, with sentencing details to follow in the coming weeks. Officials have condemned the offenders for putting public health at risk for profit and have vowed to use all available powers to prosecute food criminals. The NFCU emphasised the seriousness of the offences and the importance of the prosecution in deterring others from similar crimes.

Campylobacter and Salmonella on the increase in England

 Between 2022 and 2024, England experienced a significant rise in gastrointestinal infections, notably:

- *Campylobacter* infections increased by 27%, from 96.1 to 122.0 cases per 100,000 population.
- *Salmonella* infections rose by 20%, reaching 18.0 cases per 100,000 population.

There are likely multiple factors driving these changes, further analyses to provide insight are underway.

Additionally, in 2024, there was a notable outbreak of *Shigatoxigenic E. coli* O145 linked to contaminated salad leaves in pre-packaged foods, resulting in 211 cases, 67 hospitalisations, and one death across the UK.


Norovirus activity also surged during the 2024/2025 season more than doubling the five-season average.

In response to these trends, the UK government plans to enhance surveillance by making Norovirus and Yersinia notifiable diseases starting in April 2025, aiming to strengthen public health responses.



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New advice after refrigerator temperature study findings


 A recent study by the French Agency for Food, Environmental, and Occupational Health and Safety (ANSES) has prompted revisions in refrigerator temperature guidelines. Analysing data from nearly 10,000 homes across 16 European countries, researchers found that the average households refrigerator temperature was 6.4°C (43.5°F), exceeding both the Codex Alimentarius recommendation of 6°C (42.8°F) and the FDA's guideline of 4°C (40°F) or below. This discrepancy may affect the safety and shelf life of ready-to-eat foods, particularly concerning *Listeria monocytogenes*.

The study primarily aimed at food safety professionals, also serves as a reminder for consumers to monitor their refrigerator temperatures. Experts recommend setting refrigerators to 4°C (39.2°F) and using a dedicated thermometer to ensure food safety, especially for vulnerable populations such as pregnant individuals, those with weakened immune systems and other vulnerable groups.

In response, the European Union Reference Laboratory for *Listeria monocytogenes* has updated its guidelines to reflect these findings, adjusting assumptions for shelf-life testing to a more realistic average fridge temperature of 10°C (50°F).

In the UK, the recommended fridge temperature for optimal food safety is 5 °C or below. There is a legal requirement in England, Wales & Northern Ireland to maintain food at 8 °C or below. However, setting the fridge at 5°C or below ensures a greater margin of safety and allows for potential temperature fluctuations. (FSA guidance)

Erucic acid in mustard seeds

 Erucic acid is the common name of the fatty acid cis-13-docosenoic acid (a monounsaturated omega-9 fatty acid) that occurs at higher concentrations mainly in the seeds of the Brassicaceae (e.g. rape seed or mustard seed) species. Though natural varieties of rapeseed and mustard can contain over 40% erucic acid in their total fatty acid content, the levels in rapeseed grown specifically for food use are generally kept below 0.5%, within the legislative maximum limits for general foods and animal feeds in both Great Britain and the EU. Limits for infant formulae and follow-on formulae are set five times lower than for other foods. Higher levels of erucic acid have been linked to heart conditions.

The last quarter of 2024 and first quarter of 2025 saw a striking increase in the incidents of issues with mustard seeds particularly from Russia and Belarus. Making it an emerging safety consideration and an area of increased attention.

Eurofins is a world leading company in food testing and analysis, including fatty acid profiling (quantifying fatty acids including Omega 3 and Omega 6 & trans fatty acids)

Olive oil & honey fraud

Authorities in Thessaloniki, Greece, have broken up a criminal operation that was producing and distributing counterfeit olive oil labelled as “extra virgin.” The group blended sunflower oil with chemical dyes to imitate the appearance of genuine olive oil. They also used forged certificates to falsely attest to the oil’s quality and origin. Over 15 tons of adulterated oil were seized.

Criminals allegedly smashed up the laboratory that revealed widespread honey fraud in Serbia. Recently, the Serbian government appointed AnaLab the country’s official partner in identifying fake honey. Just weeks later, their lab was broken into, where irreplaceable, high-value equipment was stolen.

Tariffs and food fraud

The UK imports a range of food products from the US including wine, nuts, prepared foods, and spirits as well as branded chocolates, cereals, canned goods, and cake mixes. Even though volumes may be low, there is a risk of black-market operations targeting these items, especially amid tariffs and supply chain pressures.

✚ With global impacts, the threat is not limited to US goods. As businesses seek new or alternative suppliers, food safety risks increase, with falsified testing and traceability documents, hidden origins, and ingredient substitution all posing serious concerns. Heightened vigilance is essential.

Dubai and the Pistachio shortage

The global shortage of pistachios is the result of the popularity of Dubai chocolate. Dubai chocolate refers to a milk chocolate bar with a filling typically featuring a combination of shredded filo pastry (kataifi) & pistachio paste. The bar became an internet sensation thanks to TikTok in 2023. Originally launched by boutique Emirati chocolatier FIX there has since been many imitations from other chocolatiers and retailers. Leading to a shortage of pistachios and a surge in prices. Most pistachios come from the US or Iran, with shortages further exacerbated by last year’s poor harvest in the US and Iran exporting 40 per cent more to the UAE in the last six months.

The popularity of Dubai chocolate and the cost increases in raw ingredients make it a target for fraudsters. There is not only a chance of economic loss but there are also health and safety hazards, as substituted or adulterated ingredients can cause allergic reactions, food poisoning, or long-term health issues.



Market data

Vegetable oil prices rise

The prices of rapeseed, sunflower and palm oil have all increased in recent months due to climate pressures, exacerbated by tariff uncertainty. Weather conditions in Malaysia and Indonesia have driven palm oil prices to their highest since 2022. At the same time, poor growing conditions in the 2024/25 season have lowered rapeseed and sunflower oil production. This has led to an increased demand for soybean oil which is also leading to a rise in prices.

Frost hits Turkish crops

Turkey has experienced one of its most unseasonal severe cold spells in recent history, affecting 60 provinces. Temperatures plummeted to -15°C , severely affecting a range of crops including apricots, apples, grapes, vegetables, and nuts.

Notably, in Manisa province, a major grape-producing region, nearly 80% of vineyards suffered damage. Malatya, responsible for approximately 85% of Turkey's apricot production, reported widespread losses. Additionally, the Elazığ region saw significant harm to apricot, walnut, and almond trees due to frost and snowfall. In Isparta, 40–50% of cherry, peach, and apricot crops were affected. Authorities have raised concerns about potential damage to the country's agricultural output.

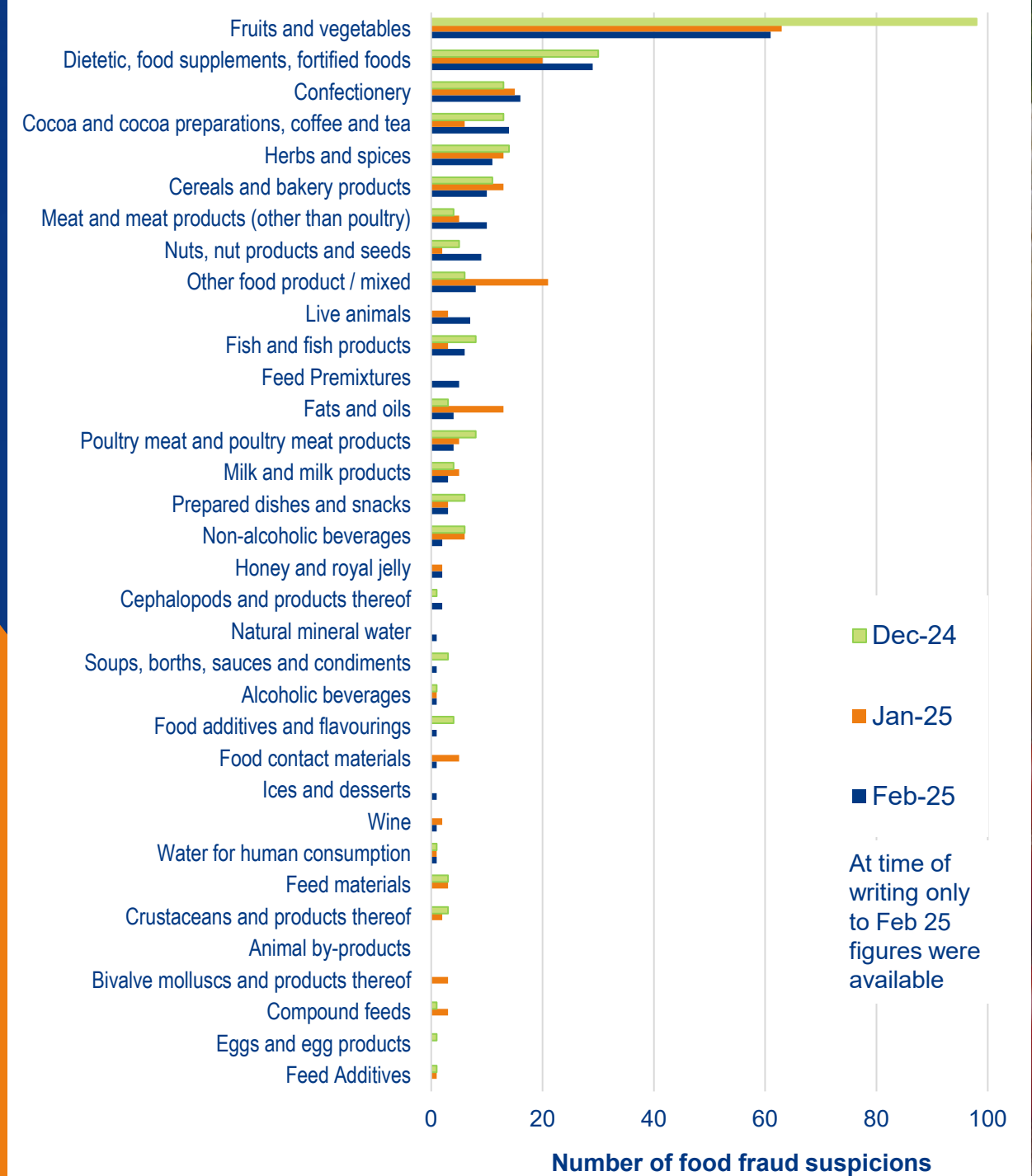
Matcha shortage concerns

✚ According to a Japan Times report, Japan, the centre of authentic matcha production, is grappling with declining tea yields due to droughts and its aging farming community. Low-quality matcha has been reported in U.S. markets. Although no comprehensive data confirms a widespread surge in tainted products, the growth of imports from less-regulated sources or unverified suppliers warrants caution.



Summary of food fraud suspicions (IRASFF) Dec 2024 – Feb 2025

Summary of Food Fraud Suspicions



Source: https://food.ec.europa.eu/food-safety/acn/ffn-monthly_en



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The Eurofins Compliance and Risk Management Team can work with you to identify and mitigate risks within your business, whether they be microbiological, contaminants, allergens, pesticides, authenticity (food fraud) or risks to your supply chain such as price changes or climate fluctuations.

We are here to work with you to protect your customers, brand and reputation.



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