



Risk Insights **Food Newsletter**

Eurofins Food Testing UK Ltd
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In Focus

Emerging issues, trends and legislative changes

Emerging issues

Strawberry supplies | Methidathion pesticide new MRL adopted into legislation

Increasing issues

Climate change and effect of jelly fish blooms on farmed salmon | Lead & cadmium levels in dark chocolate | Cocoa prices

Highlighted food integrity issues in the news

Glen's vodka contamination with isopropyl alcohol

Summary of food integrity issues from around the world

Cheese theft, black market and 'Fromagicide' | Food fraud including olive oil, wine & meat | Modern-day 'Typhoid Mary'

Welcome to Issue 3 of our newsletter from the Eurofins Compliance and Risk Management Team. In here you will find a summary of recent food integrity issues and emerging risks to food safety from around the world. Our team is here to offer expert advice and support to help you manage the ever-evolving risks faced by food businesses.



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In the news...


Cheese theft - More than 22 tonnes of high-value Cheddar cheese truckles with a value of over £300 000 have been stolen from the premium cheese specialist, Neil's Yard Dairy.

Neil's Yard Dairy supplied the cheese to a wholesaler who posed as a wholesale distributor for a major French retailer, but later turned out to be a fraudulent and fake business.

The consignment was made up of artisan cheddars including Hafod Welsh, Westcombe and Pitchfork which all command premium prices.

Neil's Yard Dairy has taken on the cost of the fraud and paid the small dairies for the cheeses supplied to them.

Cocoa prices – cocoa prices are now three times higher than they were a year ago. A decline in exports from West African producers has contributed to this rise. As a result, there is a risk that some products might reduce their cocoa content without declaring it, or substitute cocoa from different origins or with different production standards.

 Vigilance is advised to ensure the cocoa beans are of the quality standard required – particularly with reference to lead and cadmium levels.



Devastating floods in Spain

Spain has recently endured the worst flash flooding the country has experienced in decades, with the tragic death of hundreds of people.


The torrential rain caused significant damage to Valencia, with other areas of Spain also experiencing red alerts for severe rain including Catalonia (northeastern Spain) and the Costa Del Sol (southern Spain).

The negative impact of these extreme weather events on food production is widespread – from damage to crops, land and infrastructure, to causing long-term supply issues.

The combined impact of these factors can lead to higher food prices, reduced availability of certain products and disruptions in the food supply chain and food security.

It is expected that supplies of citrus fruits, especially easy peelers, will be severely impacted. Lettuce varieties including Little Gem, Iceberg and speciality varieties will also be hit hard.

Brassica supply, although currently stable may be affected and tomato production could face supply irregularities.

 The possible impact of floodwater contamination should also be considered such as faecal contamination of crops with *Escherichia coli* (STEC) O157:H7, particularly in ready-to-eat foods such as lettuce.

Emerging issues

UK Strawberry prices are set to increase as domestic production in greenhouses and tunnels diminishes caused, in part, by the recent low levels of sunlight and dull weather conditions.

There is some availability of strawberries from The Netherlands and Belgium but prices are expected to increase with demand.

The Egyptian strawberry season is estimated to start mid-November and will take a few weeks to reach full capacity.

Morocco has planted less strawberries this season having chosen to increase blueberry and raspberries production.

There are concerns that the UK's quota on strawberry imports from Egypt will not be sufficient to meet UK demand for strawberries unless the quota is increased.



New Methidathion MRLs

Following completion of the notification process to the World Trade Organization (WTO), new Maximum Residue Levels (MRLs) at the limit of quantification for methidathion were adopted on 5 November 2024.

Methidathion is a pesticide whose harmful effects on human health cannot be excluded.

To allow trading partners and food business operators time to adjust to the new lower MRLs, the date of entry into force is 5 May 2025.



Tea prices

The price of both branded and own-label tea bags in supermarkets has increased by up to 30% year on year.

This rise is attributed to supply chain issues caused by conflict in the Red Sea and higher fertiliser costs due to the Russia-Ukraine war.

Additionally, tea harvests in Kenya and India, which supply half of the UK's tea, have been affected by extreme weather events including heatwaves, droughts and flooding. In May, tea production in India was down 30% compared to the previous year.



Due to these pricing pressures vigilance to food fraud is advisable.

Increasing issues

UK, Scotland

A report from Mowi Scotland attributes the rising sea temperatures caused by climate change to jellyfish blooms which, when they swarm around salmon enclosures are thought to be harmful to the salmon.

It is believed that the swarming jellyfish discharge stinging cells which upon contact with the salmon's gills, damage the gills and impair the fish's ability to breathe thereby increasing its mortality risk.

Cadmium & lead levels in dark chocolate

An ongoing lawsuit brought against Lindt & Sprüngli (USA) could have wide-reaching implications for the chocolate industry and prompt regulatory bodies to scrutinise levels of heavy metals, including lead and cadmium in chocolate products.

Lindt's 85% cocoa Dark Chocolate Bar was alleged to contain lead at 166% above the California Maximum Allowable Dose Levels (MADL). Levels of cadmium in their dark chocolate is also brought into question.

The perceived health benefits of dark chocolate could be negatively affected by these findings.

Highlighted food integrity issues in the news

UK, Scotland

Counterfeit vodka bottles labelled as of Glen's Vodka 35cl (owned by the Loch Lomond Group) have been found to contain an industrial solvent (isopropyl alcohol) which is not suitable for human consumption and in severe cases could cause death. Symptoms include nausea, vomiting, and abdominal pain, intoxication, respiratory depression and coma. Cardiovascular collapse is also possible.

The FSA advised that the counterfeit vodka has a strong smell and different taste to genuine vodka. Genuine bottles of Glen's vodka have a laser-etched lot code applied to the bottle between the rear label and the base of the bottle.

Food Safety: Tomatoes and *Salmonella* Strathcona ST2559

Tomatoes have been identified as the vehicle for the prolonged multi-country outbreak of *Salmonella* Strathcona ST2559 in the EU/EEA and the UK.

From 1 January 2023 to 5 November 2024, 232 confirmed cases of *S.* Strathcona ST2559 have been identified in 16 EU/EEA countries, with 29 cases identified in the UK.

Laboratory genome testing suggests that the infective strain from multiple affected countries has a recent common origin.

Investigations following the outbreaks in Austria in 2023 and Italy in 2024 have confirmed that cherry tomatoes grown in Sicily were the vehicle in these cases.

It is advised that the food sector should monitor and conduct investigations to ascertain whether cherry tomatoes from Sicily are the vehicle in all cases of *S.* Strathcona ST2559 infections, or whether other foods could be involved.

The outbreak strain was also found in a farm animal in the region of Sicily therefore a possible connection to irrigation with contaminated water should also be considered.

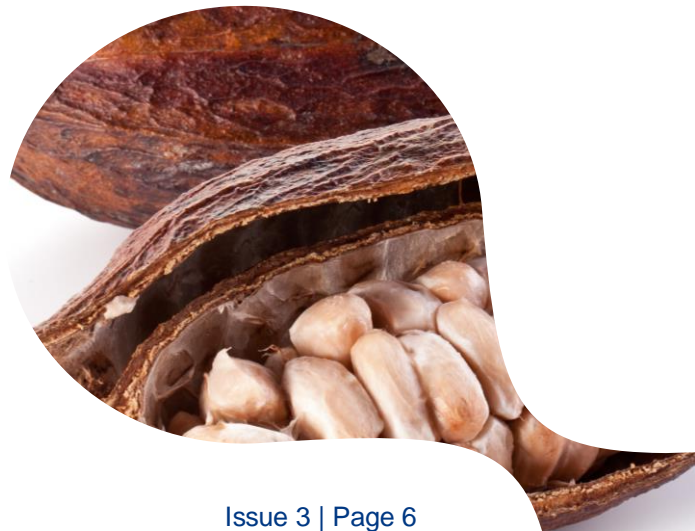
Summary of food integrity issues from around the world

Cocoa

GHANA

The National Intelligence Bureau (NIB) intercepted a large consignment of dried cocoa beans which were intended for smuggling.

The consignment was concealed as crates of minerals. A surge in cocoa smuggling activity has been reported, particularly from Ghana to Togo where marketing is largely unregulated. The smuggling is driven by favourable prices offered by Togolese buyers.



Olive oil fraud

SPAIN: Spanish police seized almost 3,000 litres of fraudulent olive oil with a value of over £17k. The police intercepted a vehicle from Portugal which was found to contain the oil along with adhesive labels and incorrect traceability documentation. The oil was found to be lampante oil, sunflower oil and an unclassified oil.

ITALY: Fraudulent olive oil – Greek olive oil falsely labelled as Italian Extra Virgin Olive Oil. False production dates were also used with older oil to suggest it was from more recent harvests. The value seized was estimated to be 940,000 euros.

SPAIN: A cooperative in Lleida is under investigation for fraudulently selling 105,000 litres of virgin olive oil as extra virgin (and using the Protected Designation of Origin PDO seal), resulting in an illicit profit of 40,000 euros. The investigation was prompted by a food fraud alert from Czech authorities which revealed that the oil was of much lower quality than labelled. The cooperative's manager and agronomist are facing charges of fraud, document forgery and offences against the market and consumers.



ITALY: The Guardia di Finanza in Avellino seized over half a ton of olive oil during an operation to combat counterfeiting and ensure food safety. They found 660 litres of “extra virgin olive oil” in a car during a roadside check. The two individuals in the car could not explain the production, packaging or destination of the oil. The oil lacked the required EU labelling and stated “Extra Virgin Olive Oil” without the required details such as traceability, country of origin, and producer information. This operation is part of broader efforts to protect consumers and the market from counterfeit and unsafe food products.

Wine fraud

ITALY: In Brindisi, authorities seized over 21,000 bottles of wine from a winery. The wine lacked proper traceability information. The winery had previously been closed due to hygiene issues but had continued to produce and sell wine.

ITALY: The Carabinieri of the Anti-Adulteration and Health Unit in Palermo, with support from the Mazara del Vallo Company, conducted inspections in wineries in Marsala and Mazara del Vallo. They seized 980 bottles of untraceable white wine and 4,000 litres of bulk wine which lacked proper documentation. Additionally, they found issues with the winemaking records and the failure to update the customs agency about the winery's layout, resulting in administrative fines of around 5,000 euros.

Alcoholic Beverages

BANGLADESH: Illegally imported liquor has been seized by customs officials. The consignment had been declared on import documents as 'synthetic fabrics' from China.

INDIA: Police seize 12,500 litres of fraudulent liquor. The bottles, labelled for military canteens, were found to contain caramel, flavours, alcohol and water but were claiming to be rum, brandy and whisky branded as 'Old cask Rum', 'White field Brandy' and 'White field Whisky'.

MALAYSIA: Customs seize 5,476 bottles of branded liquor with suspected counterfeit duty stamps.

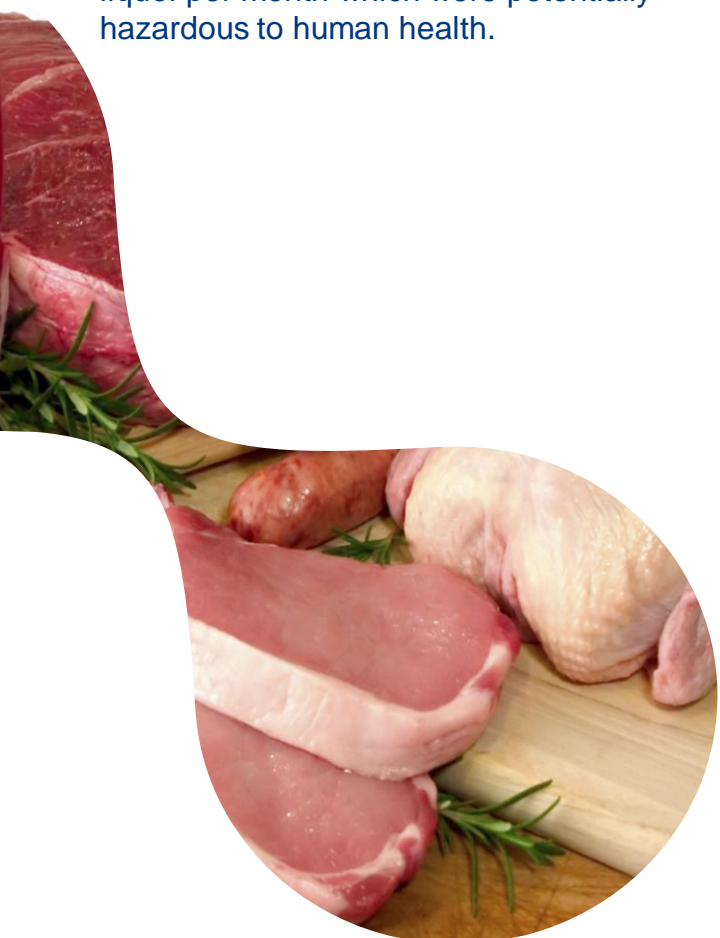
COLOMBIA: A family-run network producing adulterated liquor was disbanded and 16 people arrested. The group produced around 500 bottles of liquor per month which were potentially hazardous to human health.

Meat & poultry

ITALY: Insanitary, illegally imported meat. An inspection of an ethnic food store in Modena resulted in the confiscation of 16 kg of poultry meat and sausages. The products had been imported without the necessary food safety certification. Rodent droppings were found in food storage areas.

FINLAND: Police seized 600 kg of brown bear meat, ears, bones and paws in a Helsinki-based firm's cold storage warehouse. Some of the products were believed to have been imported from other countries. The brown bear is protected by the EU Habitats Directive and the selling of bear products requires a permit.

UK: The FSA's National Food Crime Unit (NFCU) has carried out a joint operation with West Yorkshire and South Yorkshire police forces in relation to suspected food fraud, involving the creation of potentially fraudulent documents that enable movement of cattle and the likely adverse impact on the food chain.



Fish & seafood

ITALY: In Palermo, authorities conducted inspections on the fishing supply chain resulting in the seizure of 1,300 kg fish and fines totalling 23,000 euros. The inspections revealed issues with traceability and compliance with hygiene regulations.

IRELAND: The Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA) successfully wins two prosecutions of 'obstruction of, and provision of false information' to Sea-Fisheries Protection Officers in the course of their official duties. A spokesperson for SFPA commended the work of the officers saying: "Their work reflects the SFPA's role in the enforcement of food safety laws and underscores the importance of cooperation, and transparency in order to maintain Ireland's high standards and respected reputation in the global market."



Fruit & vegetables

USA: Slivered onions served on McDonald's Quarter Pounder burgers have been identified as the cause of an outbreak of *E.coli* 0157 which has affected more than 90 people. The cases were spread over 13 states in the USA.

PHILLIPINES: Smuggled vegetables exceed permitted levels for pesticide residues, heavy metals and microbial contaminants. The seized carrots, onions and tomatoes were found to contain organophosphates, organochlorines, and pyrethroids, as well as cadmium and lead which pose significant health risks. Tests also identified *E.coli*, *Listeria monocytogenes* and *Salmonella* spp.

ITALY: In Catania, inspection by authorities at a fruit and vegetable market resulted in the seizure of nearly 20 tons of products. The seized items lacked proper traceability documentation.

Coffee & tea

UGANDA: Uganda's coffee industry performed well at the 10th Paris Coffee Awards for 'Originally Roasted Coffees' winning three gold, one silver, three bronze and eight gourmet medals. The growing reputation of Uganda on the international coffee market is attributed to increased regulatory efforts to uphold quality and integrity standards across the supply chain.

MORINGA TEA: made from the leaves of the *Moringa oleifera* tea (also known as the "miracle tree"), this increasingly popular tea variety is caffeine free, high in antioxidants and is purported to lower cholesterol and blood sugar. The market share of this tea variety is expected to continue to increase as awareness of the variety grows.

Cheese crime and 'Fromagicide'

More than 22 tonnes of high-value Cheddar cheese truckles with a value of over £300 000 have been stolen from the premium cheese specialist, Neil's Yard Dairy.

Neil's Yard Dairy supplied the cheese to a wholesaler who turned out to be a fraudulent and fake business.

The consignment was made up of artisan cheddars including Hafod Welsh, Westcombe and Pitchfork which all command premium prices.

One man, who posed as a wholesale distributor for a major French retailer, has been arrested in connection with the case but the fate of the cheese is still under investigation.

The high value and strong overseas 'black market' for artisan cheeses has made them attractive to food fraudsters.

Following the sanctions placed on Russia in 2014 (which have been further tightened since the invasion of Ukraine), Russia banned the import of fresh food from countries behind the sanctions. Food from these countries was destroyed in what was called 'Fromagicide'.

There is a strong 'black market' for high-end foods in Russia including cheeses, wine, Scottish whiskey and Norwegian salmon. Sophisticated transport routes through Belarus and Georgia are used in attempts to overcome the sanctions.



Fruit & vegetables

SPAIN: There are warnings of disruption to Spanish fruit and vegetable supplies following the devastating extreme weather the country has endured over the last few weeks.

The torrential rain, hailstorms and flooding has destroyed thousands of hectares farmland and greenhouse crops. There has also been severe damage to the country's transport infrastructure (including the A-7 Mediterranean Motorway) and packhouses.

Herbs & spices

UK: The FSA and FSS have lifted their precautionary advice to people with a peanut allergy to avoid eating foods that contain mustard, mustard powder, mustard seeds or mustard flour both in the home and when eating out as these products are now considered to be safe to eat.

However, it is still important for people with a peanut allergy to continue to avoid products listed in the allergy alerts.

A precautionary allergen label (PAL) will now be used on some mustard-based products and consumers are advised to check whether products they might previously have purchased now have this label.

Modern-day 'Typhoid Mary'

CANADA: An asymptomatic food handler who worked at multiple locations in a grocery store chain in Ottawa since 2018 has been identified as the source of a four-year typhoid fever outbreak which involved seven confirmed cases from October 2018 to May 2022.

The confirmed cases ranged in age from 8 to 50 years old, and six of the seven people infected required hospitalisation.

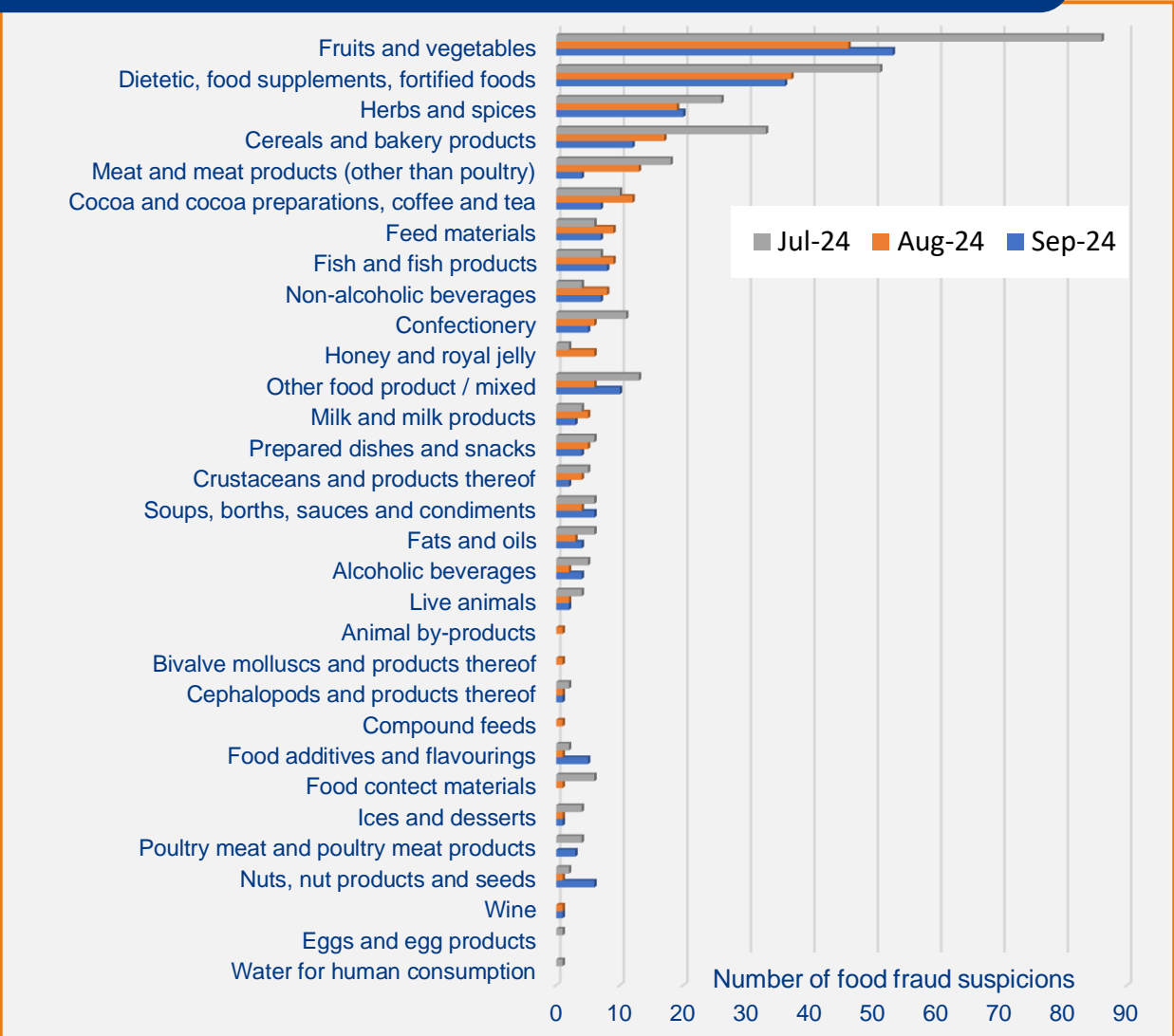
It is believed that the carrier picked up the infection prior to their immigration to Canada in 2017.

Genome sequencing (WGS) and social network analysis were used to make the link between the chronic carrier of *Salmonella typhi* and the confirmed cases.

The food handler, who themselves was a reservoir for the bacteria yet showed no symptoms of the disease, worked on the ready-to-eat counter of a grocery store.

This case highlights the need for thorough health screening and food safety practices including handwashing, especially when handling ready-to-eat foods.

Summary of Food Fraud Suspicions (IRASFF) July, Aug & Sept 2024





Risk Insights Food Newsletter

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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