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Evaluation Report on the Results of the National Residue Control Plan and the Import Monitoring Plan 2017

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The National Residue Control Plan (NRCP) is a programme for monitoring food of animal origin, e.g. meat, milk or honey for residues and contaminants. Animal products from non-EU states are examined on the basis of the Import Control Plan (ICP).

For residues of pharmacologically active substances and for environmental contaminants such as heavy metals or dioxins, maximum limits or maximum levels are often set for food of animal origin, which must not be exceeded. The objective of food monitoring under the NRCP and the ICP is to verify compliance with those limits, to detect the illegal use of prohibited or unauthorised substances or to identify the causes of increased levels of residues and contaminants. Sampling is target-oriented.

The Federal Office of Consumer Protection and Food Safety (BVL) has presented the results of the 58,382 samples examined by the competent authorities of the German federal states ("Laender") in the context of the NRCP 2017 as well as 1,065 samples of the 2017 ICP.

Out of 58,382 NRCP samples, 385 samples (0.66%) contained substances that exceeded maximum residue limits or maximum levels or were undesirable in food of animal origin. The ratio is slightly lower than in 2016 (0.79%). Under the ICP, the authorities identified four samples (0.38%) in which residues and contaminants exceeded the maximum residue levels or maximum levels or contained prohibited substances. This ratio has hardly changed compared to 2016 (0.27%).

The evaluation of these results by the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) showed that there was no direct health risk for consumers with single or occasional consumption of food of animal origin. In order to estimate intake levels, the BfR used the data of National Nutrition Study II (NVS II), among others. These data were supplemented by data from a survey on the frequency of consumption of rarely eaten food.

The public interest occasionally focuses on food that are contaminated with dioxins and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). Within the NRCP 2017 study, only very isolated exceedances of the maximum levels for dioxins and PCBs were found. However, from the point of view of consumer health protection, efforts should continue to be made to further reduce levels of dioxins and PCBs in (animal-based) food as a whole. Exceedances of maximum levels have been reported in isolated cases for the heavy metals cadmium, lead, mercury and copper. With the exception of lead, the intake of these heavy metals is unlikely to be harmful to health at both average and high intakes at the levels found.

According to the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), no intake levels of lead can be derived that are considered safe. The levels in food should therefore be as low as can be achieved with reasonable technical effort (ALARA).

The full version of this BfR opinion is available in German on
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