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Results of the National Residue Control Plan and the Import Monitoring Plan 2020: Health Impairments Due to Residues and Contaminants in Food from Animals Are Not to be Expected

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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 shall 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 and to identify the causes of increased levels of residues and contaminants. Sampling is target-oriented.

The Federal Office of Consumer Protection and Food Safety has presented the results of the 54,674 samples examined by the competent authorities of the German federal states ("Laender") in the context of the NRCP 2020 as well as 1,188 samples of the 2020 ICP.

Out of the NRCP samples, 246 samples (0.45%) contained substances in amounts that rendered the samples non-compliant. The ratio has hardly changed compared to 2019 (0.43%). Under the ICP, the authorities identified five non-compliant samples (0.42%). This ratio has hardly changed compared to 2019 (0.73%).

The evaluation of these results by the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) regarding toxicological risks and risks of the selection of microbiological resistances showed that direct health risks are not to be expected for consumers with single or occasional consumption of food of animal origin which are contaminated with the reported levels. In order to estimate intake levels, the BfR used the data of National Nutrition Study 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 2020 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 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, mercury and copper. A health impairment through the intake of these heavy metals is not to be expected even with high consumption of food at the levels found.

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

<https://www.bfr.bund.de/cm/343/ergebnisse-des-nationalen-rueckstandskontrollplans-und-des-einfuhrueberwachungsplans-2020.pdf>