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Risk Insights
Food Newsletter

Eurofins Food Testing Ireland Ltd

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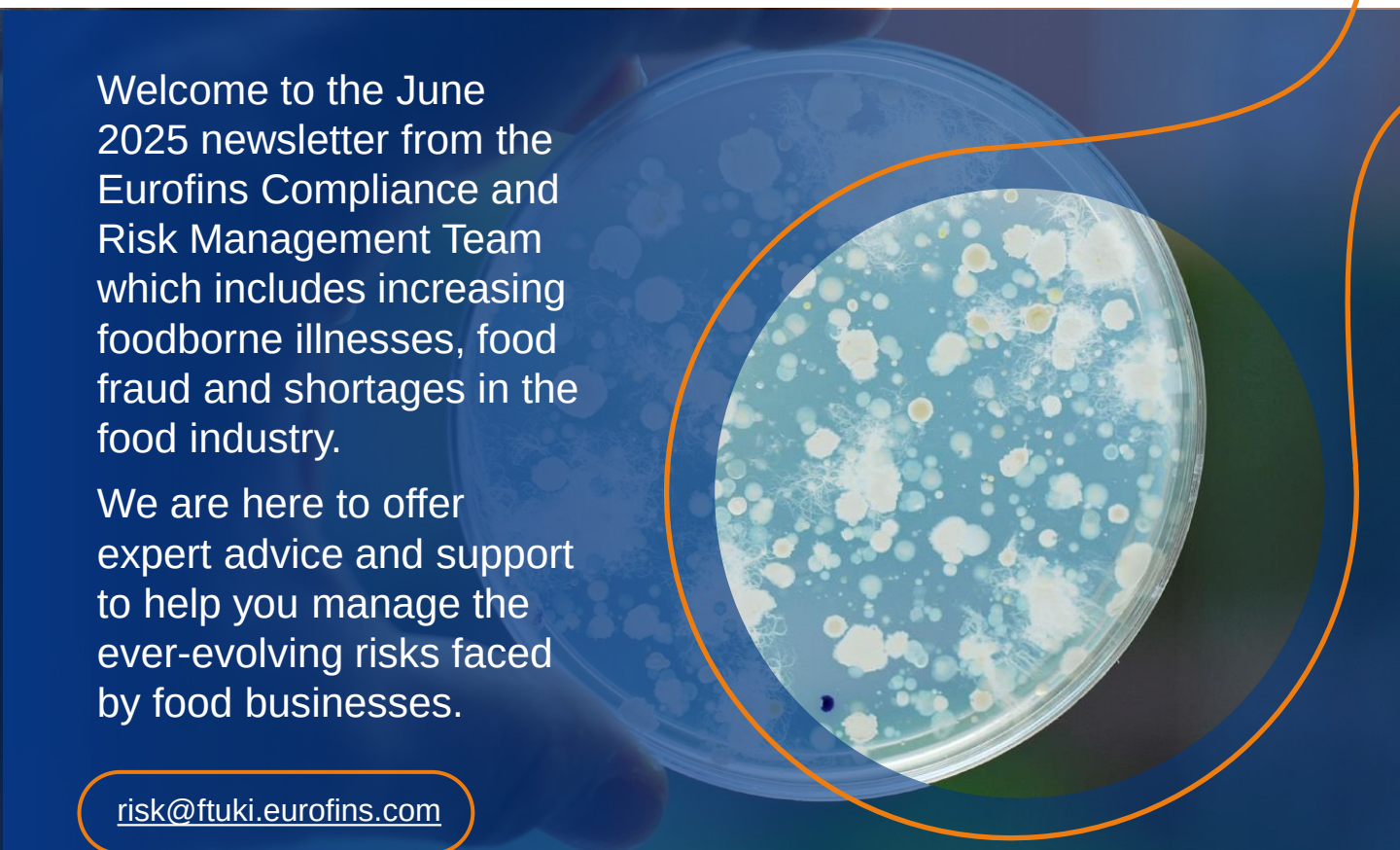
In Focus

Emerging issues, trends and legislative changes

Welcome to the June 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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STEC (Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli*)

Recent data indicates a significant increase in Shiga Toxin-producing *Escherichia coli* (STEC) infections in England, particularly involving non-O157 strains. From 2016 to 2023, cases of non-O157 STEC rose nearly tenfold, from 297 to 2,341 annually. While the rising number may be partly attributed to enhanced detection methods, such as PCR testing, it also indicates a genuine rise in infections.

In 2024, a major outbreak linked to contaminated salad leaves affected 259 individuals across the UK, resulting in 75 hospitalisations. The implicated products were distributed by multiple supermarket chains, and lettuce was identified as the likely source.

Experts urge heightened vigilance and improved surveillance to address the rising threat of non-O157 STEC infections and prevent future outbreaks.

E. coli is a genetically diverse species that is normally found in the human intestines, where it lives alongside the host in a way that benefits both without causing harm.

While the majority of *E. coli* strains are harmless to us, some strains can cause foodborne illness, including ones that have caused major outbreaks of severe illness.

Foods associated with Shiga Toxin-producing *E. coli* outbreaks are meats, fresh produce, raw, or unpasteurised milk/dairy products and unpasteurised juices.

The earliest cases of illness due to STEC were caused by the strain *E. coli* O157:H7 and this strain still causes many outbreaks of severe illness while the incidence of illness due to other non-O157 strains continue to increase.

Recent UK product recalls associated with STEC:

- Grape Tree is recalling raw unsalted macadamia nuts because Shiga Toxin-producing *E. coli* has been found in a batch of this product.
- Recall of a batch of Loughpark Farms raw milk due to possible presence of Shiga Toxin-producing *E. coli* (STEC)
- Kenneth Hanna's Farm Shop is recalling Ken's Raw Jersey Milk because of possible contamination of product with Shiga Toxin-producing *E. coli* (STEC).

FSAI Reminds Businesses of Safety Practices for Poultry Products

The Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) is urging food businesses and retailers to implement strong food safety management systems for the production and distribution of chilled and frozen coated poultry products sold in Ireland. Manufacturers are also being instructed to provide clear cooking instructions on these products and to label them explicitly as not ready-to-eat.

This advice comes in response to a 2022 national microbiological survey of 382 chilled and frozen coated poultry items, which found *Salmonella* Infantis in five products available on the Irish market.

⚠ Since the survey suggested that imported poultry might be a source of contamination, the FSAI emphasises that manufacturers must maintain rigorous controls throughout the entire supply chain. This includes ensuring complete traceability of all raw materials used and compliance with legal microbiological standards for raw poultry in these products.

Consumers were also firmly urged to follow safe food handling and cooking practices when preparing chilled and frozen coated poultry products.

This reminder also follows on from a rise in cases of *Salmonella* linked to imported poultry products in recent years. *Salmonella* is a common bacterium that can cause food poisoning. *Salmonella* can be found in a variety of different foods but raw meat (processed and unprocessed), undercooked poultry, eggs and unpasteurised milk are the most commonly reported foods causing salmonellosis.

Future challenges for public health

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) started a foresight process in 2022 to consider a range of potential scenarios and to improve preparedness and resilience against public health threats. This initiative acknowledges the increasing volatility and complexity of the systems that influence public health.

Five common challenges were identified, including the potential worsening of climate change which could exacerbate the spread of infectious diseases through:

- Higher risks of zoonotic diseases.
- Higher incidence of food and waterborne infections.
- The emergence of novel pathogens.

The report outlined several possible future scenarios for public health professionals in Europe by 2040. In one scenario, there is an increased occurrence of foodborne illnesses due to production and supply chain challenges, as well as delayed detection of contaminated food illegally imported from outside the EU. Another scenario highlights heightened risks related to food safety and antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

Recommended actions include; strengthening surveillance of climate-sensitive diseases, raising awareness and knowledge about AMR, addressing gaps in disease monitoring, ensuring the accuracy and quality of epidemiological data, and use of innovative surveillance technologies.

Market data

Frost impact

A series of severe frosts in early 2025 has significantly impacted Turkey's cherry production, particularly in the Afyon region; a key area for cherry cultivation. The frosts occurred in February, March, and April, coinciding with the critical flowering period for cherry trees, leading to substantial crop losses.

This situation may lead to increased cherry prices and potential shifts in export dynamics, with other countries like Spain possibly filling the supply gap in international markets.

The frost has affected not only cherries but also other crops like apricots, apples, grapes, and walnuts across multiple provinces.

Where alternative or new supply sources are used, consideration to extra monitoring should be considered; for example, contaminants and residue testing.

Hailstorm damage

Severe hailstorms have recently caused extensive damage to agricultural regions in eastern Spain, particularly affecting the provinces of Valencia, Castellón, and Lleida. These storms have impacted a wide range of crops, including citrus fruits, persimmons, almonds, olives, and various vegetables.

Cod prices

Norway and Russia have agreed to reduce their cod quotas by 25 percent for 2025. This allocation is the lowest since 1991.The significant quota reduction is expected to lead to tighter inventories and increased prices for cod throughout 2025.

FISH-FIT boosts authenticity in EU seafood

A consortium of European research institutions has launched FISH-FIT, a digital tool that combines genetic data with biological samples stored in a dedicated biobank to improve seafood authentication.

FISH-FIT offers authentic tissues of important European seafood species, including fish such as gadoids (which includes a variety of species, the most common being cod, haddock, hake, and pollack), tunas, molluscs and crustaceans. The tissue materials can be requested to ensure the correctness and reliability of measurement results.

In addition to the biobank, a DNA-sequence database of important seafood species is available. The sequences were jointly prepared by the partners of the SEATRACES consortium and include relevant information of how they were generated.

Currently, only public European control institutions can register for and access FISH-FIT. Access may be extended to other institutions and laboratories following the initial implementation phase.

https://www.fish-fit.org/

GMO

New EU authorisations for genetically modified maize

In April 2005, the European Commission (EC) granted new authorisations for three genetically modified maize events (MON95275, MON94804 and DP910521) for use in food and feed under Regulation (EC) No 1829/2003.

The authorisation of a genetically modified organism (GMO) in the European Union (EU) is a complex and lengthy process. Once an authorisation is granted, it is normally valid for 10 years. It then needs to be renewed to remain valid.

As different limits apply to individual GMOs in food and feed, depending on the current status of the authorisation, continuous monitoring of the authorisation situation is essential, especially for single GMO events. This ensures compliance with the applicable regulations and the safe handling of GMOs in production and trade.

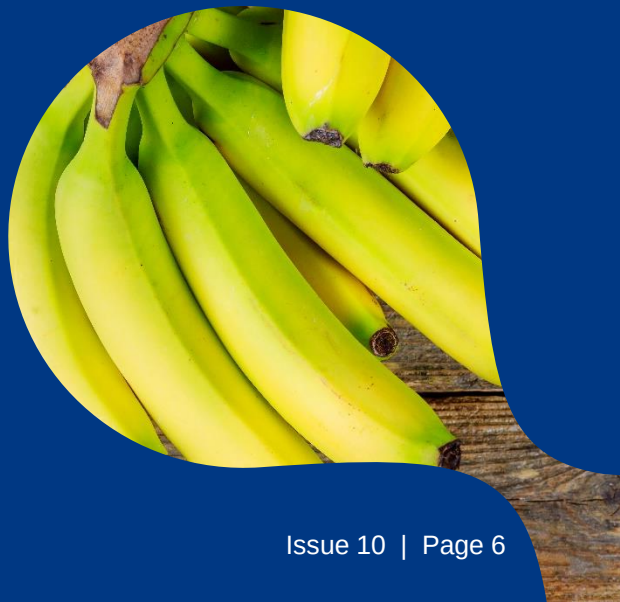
Genetically modified fruits

While genetically modified fruits are at various stages of development and commercialisation in different countries, these genetically modified organisms (GMOs) are not currently approved in the European Union (EU), nor are any authorisations pending that would allow such approval in the near future. This means that even traces of these GMOs in food and feed are not tolerated in the EU.

Genetically modified, virus-resistant papayas have been grown commercially in Hawaii since 1998. It is estimated that they are grown on approximately 77% of Hawaii's papaya acreage. According to the USDA (United States Department of Agriculture), genetically modified papayas are also grown in China.

In addition to the genetically modified papaya, there are other genetically modified fruits that are at various stages of development and commercialisation. Examples include:

- Okanagan Specialty Fruits' "Arctic apples" have been modified to prevent browning when cut. These apples have been available in the US since 2017 and were approved in Canada in 2018. Arctic apples are sold in both retail and foodservice as pre-cut slices or dried apple snacks.
- The pink pineapple "Pinkglow" from Del Monte has a pink flesh due to genetic modification and is grown in Costa Rica. According to the manufacturer, it is currently available in the USA and Canada.
- In banana production, the so-called Panama disease, caused by the fungus *Fusarium oxysporum*, is causing significant crop losses worldwide. The Cavendish banana, which has the world's largest market share, is particularly affected. In Australia, the QCAV-4 genetically modified banana, which is resistant to this pathogen, is currently being tested in field trials.



US news

Synthetic dyes

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) have announced a comprehensive plan to phase out petroleum-based synthetic food dyes from the nation's food supply. This is part of the broader "Make America Healthy Again" campaign, aiming to eliminate potentially harmful additives and promote healthier dietary choices.

Though the FDA has said the food industry will be given time to transition from petrochemical-based dyes to natural alternatives, the initiative will begin with Citrus Red No. 2 and Orange B.

Six more synthetic dyes are to follow:

- FD&C Green No. 3
- FD&C Red No. 40
- FD&C Yellow No. 5
- FD&C Yellow No. 6
- FD&C Blue No. 1
- FD&C Blue No. 2

The UK & EU already have stricter regulations in place to control the permitted colours used in food. However, this has not stopped several American confections, cereals and drinks having to be recalled from the UK market due to containing unauthorised additives.

UK & EU recalls have included:

- Yellow 6 (E110); linked to hyperactivity in children.
- Carrageenan; not permitted in jelly confectionary because it causes a choking hazard
- EDTA; an additive prohibited in drinks, linked to developmental issues.

FDA unannounced inspections

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has announced its intent to expand the use of unannounced inspections at foreign manufacturing facilities that produce foods, essential medicines, and other medical products intended for American consumers and patients.

Historically, foreign firms often received advance notice of inspections, leading to preparation that could undermine the integrity of the oversight process.

This change builds upon the agency's Office of Inspection and Investigations Foreign Unannounced Inspection Pilot program in India and China.

It aims to ensure that foreign companies will receive the same level of regulatory oversight and scrutiny as domestic companies.

US news

Cyber threats to food safety

An alleged case of attempted sabotage on a poultry processing facility is currently before US courts. The accused is a former employee of a cleaning services provider, responsible for designing and maintaining chemical dosing systems for clients including the poultry plant. Prosecutors allege he used computer access after his employment ended to threaten safety and integrity at the poultry plant, including putting workers at risk by actions that:

Disabled safety alarms;
redirected alert/warning emails; and changed doses, flow rates and distributions of peracetic acid and sodium hydroxide through multiple stages of poultry processing.

No contamination or recalls have been confirmed, and the investigation has not disclosed whether any affected product reached consumers.

In related news, a former Disney World employee was sentenced to three years in federal prison after tampering with Disney's digital menu system.

Following his termination in June 2024, Scheuer used unauthorised access to alter allergen information on menus, falsely labelling items as safe for individuals with peanut, tree nut, shellfish, and milk allergies; a potentially life-threatening risk. He also inserted offensive content, such as profanity, changed fonts to unreadable symbols, redirected QR codes to activist websites, renamed wine regions after mass shooting locations, and embedded offensive graphics.

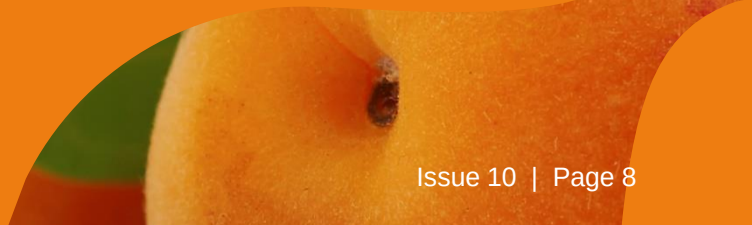
Both incidents raise significant concerns about the vulnerability of automated food processing systems to insider threats and cyberattacks.

Vulnerability Assessment and Critical Control Points (VACCP) and Threat Assessment and Critical Control Points (TACCP) are designed to prevent deliberate food contamination and food fraud, complementing HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points), which is aimed at unintentional contamination.

New powers for the FSA's National Food Crime Unit

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has announced that its National Food Crime Unit (NFCU) in England and Wales has been granted enhanced investigatory powers under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE). These new powers allow NFCU investigators to apply for and execute search warrants, enabling more direct and effective responses to food fraud.

Additionally, under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (CJPOA), NFCU officers can issue special warnings to suspects during questioning, and draw inferences in certain situations. However, these powers do not include the authority to make arrests.



EU measures for MOSH / MOAH

At the end of 2023, the European Commission presented a first Draft Regulation to establish maximum levels for mineral oil aromatic hydrocarbons (MOAH). The aim is to integrate these maximum levels into the European Contaminants Regulation (EU) 2023/915.

The proposed maximum levels have already been extended and adjusted several times. In the current draft further product groups have been included and exceptions for coffee and tea have been added. Coffee and tea are not consumed in direct form therefore these products are excluded from the proposed maximum levels.

The planned adoption of the draft legislation has been postponed from 2026 to 2027.

Current status of the discussion on proposed maximum levels for MOAH

The maximum Limits of Quantification (LOQs) mentioned in 2022 in the Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed (SC PAFF) report for foods with certain fat contents have been proposed as "general maximum levels" for MOAH (C10-C50) since the end of 2023. These serve to harmonise the evaluation of MOAH findings among the European official food control labs:

- Products with a fat content ≤ 4 % fat/oil; 0.5 mg/kg
- Products with a fat content > 4 % fat/oil and ≤ 50% fat/oil; 1.0 mg/kg
- Products with a fat content > 50 % fat/oil; 2.0 mg/kg

The drafted Version 3.5 with specific maximum levels for MOAH (C10-C50) includes the following product groups, several of which were newly added (*):

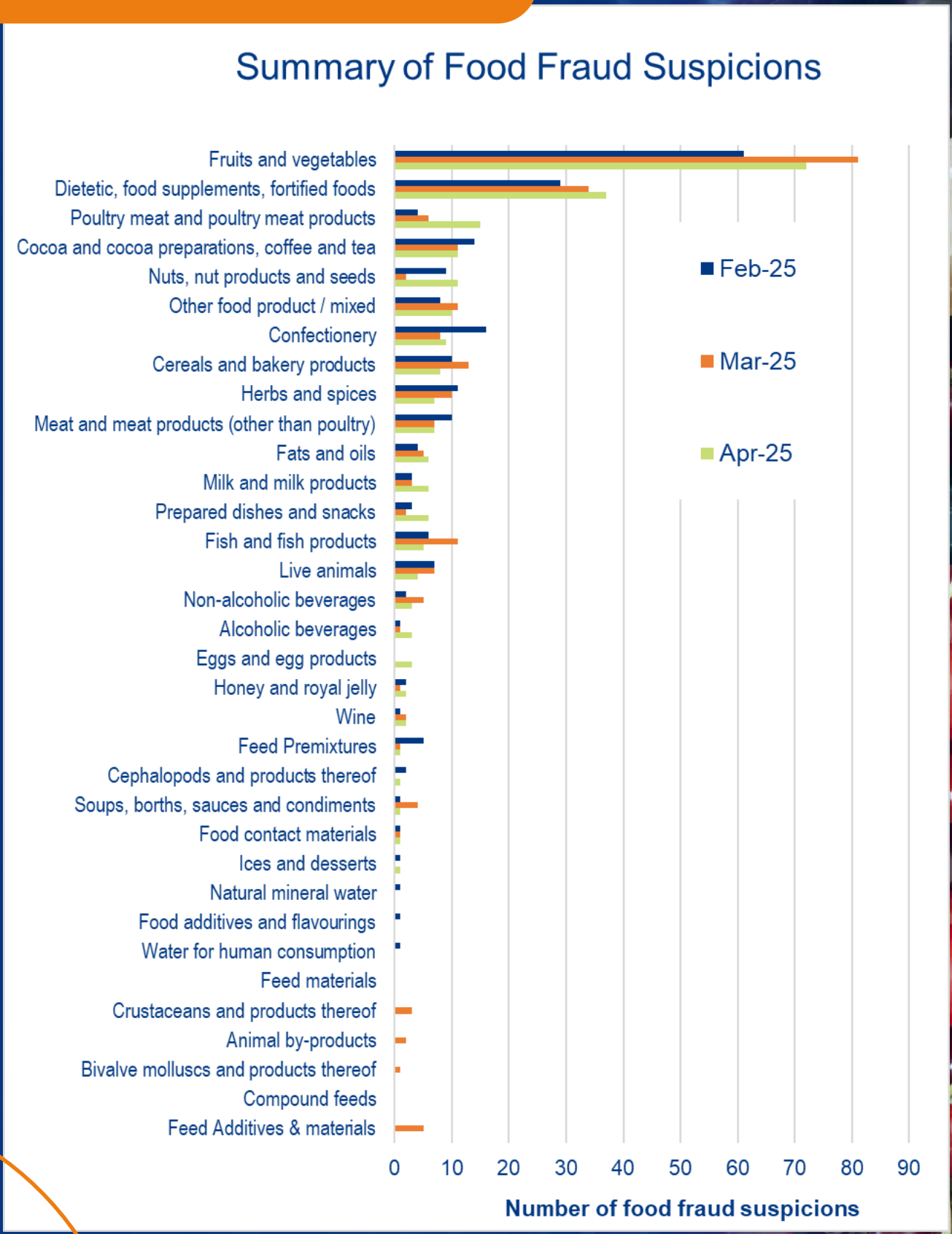
- Oilseeds and oilfruits
- Animal and vegetable fats and oils other than produced from cocoa and milk
- Tree nuts
- Pulses
- Cereal grains
- *Products derived from cereals (min. 80%)
- Milk
- *Dairy products
- Cocoa beans
- *Cocoa nibs, cocoa mass, cocoa powder
- *Confectionary
- Spices and dried herbs
- Baby food
- Food supplements
- *Essential oils

For those raw materials for which no maximum level is proposed above, the following "general maximum levels" shall be considered in order to calculate maximum levels for dried, diluted, processed and compound foods in accordance with Article 3 of Regulation (EU) 2023/915:

1. Ingredients with a fat content of < 4 % fat/oil: 0.5 mg/kg
2. Ingredients with a fat content of ≥ 4 % and ≤ 50% fat/oil: 1.0 mg/kg
3. Ingredients with a fat content of > 50 % fat/oil: 2.0 mg/kg

There are also currently discussions to lay down a maximum level for MOAH into the specifications for food additives.

RASFF latest quarter's report



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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