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Results of the National Residue Control Plan and Import Control Plan for 2016

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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 58,962 samples examined by the competent authorities of the German federal states ("Laender") in the context of the NRCP 2016 as well as 1,132 samples of the 2016 ICP.

Out of 58,962 NRCP samples, 465 samples (0.79%) contained substances that exceeded maximum residue limits or maximum levels or were undesirable in food of animal origin. The ratio is slightly higher than in 2015 (0.74%). Under the ICP, the authorities identified three samples (0.27%) in which residues and contaminants exceeded the maximum residue limits or maximum levels or contained prohibited substances. This ratio has hardly changed compared to 2015 (0.25%).

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 is contaminated with dioxins and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). Within the NRCP 2016 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 and mercury. A health impairment through the intake of these heavy metals is unlikely with average and high consumption of food at the levels found.

During an investigation for dyes in fish, residues of crystal violet and malachite green were detected in 3 out of 335 samples. Both dyes are prohibited for use in food-producing animals. On the basis of these individual findings and the determined contaminations, the BfR considers health impairments for consumers unlikely.

The full version of this BfR Opinion is available in German on <https://www.bfr.bund.de/cm/343/bewertungsbericht-zu-den-ergebnissen-des-nationalen-rueckstandskontrollplans-und-des-einfuhroeberwachungsplans-2016.pdf>