



Risk Insights **Food Newsletter**

Eurofins Food Testing UK Ltd
Issue 06 | February 2025



In Focus

Emerging issues, trends and legislative changes

Rates of campylobacteriosis

Excessive Vitamin D in supplements

Issues in global blueberry industry

GB & EU import control changes

Tracing of a major UK outbreak to contaminated lettuce

FSA warning to dog owners for specific dog chews from China

Market fluctuations

Food Crime Amber Alert: Risk of document fraud in laboratory results

Welcome to the February 2025 newsletter from the Eurofins Compliance and Risk Management Team which includes health reports and the latest food risks from around the world.

We are here to offer expert advice and support to help you manage the ever-evolving risks faced by food businesses.

risk@ftuki.eurofins.com

Food Standards Agency expert elicitation exercise – why are rates of campylobacteriosis still high?

In the UK human campylobacteriosis cases have remained at a high level despite years of the FSA's and industry's work to reduce the levels of *Campylobacter* in chickens available at retail.

Reduction of levels of *Campylobacter* in chickens was a priority for the Food Standards Agency (FSA) from at least 2009, as *Campylobacter* has been identified as the leading bacterial cause of foodborne illness in the UK with cases frequently attributed to poultry, and high levels of the pathogen routinely found in raw poultry.

Targets were set in 2010, and subsequently met, to reduce the percentage of the most heavily contaminated birds at retail, i.e. those with levels of 1000 cfu/g and above on neck flap skin. However, there has been no corresponding reduction in cases of human illness.

The expert elicitation exercise aimed to refine the understanding of campylobacteriosis case rates in the UK and provide a basis for improved public health decision-making.

Opinions were sought from a range of experts in the fields such as microbiology, epidemiology, and public health to generate testable hypotheses that might explain why the reduction in highly contaminated chicken carcasses available at retail was not associated with a similar decrease in human cases.

Hypotheses raised and discussed in the report included:

- Wrong target selected. *Campylobacter* has a low infectious dose, so the target of less than 1000 cfu/g may not have been low enough
- Sampling from product not accurate, meaning real-life levels of contamination were higher than those measured
- Poor food hygiene practices in consumer kitchens causing high incidence of illness
- Other sources (foods) causing illnesses

The full report can be found [here](#).

Illegal American snacks & confectionary in UK

 The UK has issued further warnings about harmful additives in American snacks, with Devon County Council the latest authority to warn about the safety of American snacks, sweets and fizzy drinks. These products are manufactured for non-UK markets and do not comply with UK food standards.

They contains additives, such as certain artificial colours, EDTA, and

preservatives, which are banned in the UK due to health concerns but are still allowed to be used in the U.S.

The warnings highlight the potential risks of consuming these chemicals, especially for children, and call for better regulation and awareness about food safety standards.

Supplements recalled because of excess levels of Vitamin D3

✦ Dietary supplements were recalled earlier this year after it was found that they contained higher than the recommended levels of Vitamin D3, which could potentially pose health risks, particularly for individuals taking high doses over time.

Excessive intakes of vitamin D can cause various adverse health effects because of hypercalcaemia (high blood calcium level).

Symptoms and signs may include anorexia, nausea, vomiting, weakness, lethargy, constipation and non-specific aches and pains, as well as thirst, polyuria, weight loss and cardiac dysrhythmias.

Dietary supplements are commonly recommended as providing a health benefit. While issues with lower than claimed levels of vitamins and minerals are often thought about for some vitamins, overdosing is a more serious issue. The main concern is with fat soluble vitamins (A, D, E & K) as they can accumulate with serious health effects.

Excess Vitamin D has also been responsible for recalls of pet foods in the past. These issues can be exacerbated by pets' reliance on one source of food.



Plant disease threatens global blueberry market

A fungus is threatening the global blueberry industry, which is worth \$9.25 billion.

A recent study from the University of North Carolina has revealed that new highly virulent strains of *Erysiphe vaccinii*, which causes powdery mildew, are spreading rapidly and affecting blueberry production on multiple continents. Originally reported in North America the fungus has spread in recent years across China, Morocco, Portugal, Mexico and Peru.

The plant disease powdery mildew, is responsible for a white powdery coating on the surface of infected plants, which it weakens, reducing yields and affecting fruit quality, putting the entire blueberry market at risk.

It is hard to control and as the fungus becomes more resistant to treatments farmers are struggling, and there are concerns that the blueberry industry could face major losses or even extinction.

The researchers have developed a public database aiming to help farmers by identifying the strain they are dealing with and understand if it is resistant to commonly used fungicides.

⚠ With blueberry supplies already struggling to meet current demands the continued spread of the disease could severely impact blueberry costs and availability.



FDA inspection report makes grim reading for McDonald's supplier

American broadcaster CBS have seen the details of an inspection report carried out by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), in response to a Freedom of Information act request, at a McDonald's supplier linked to a recent Shiga Toxin-producing *E.coli* (STEC) outbreak in the USA.

In the outbreak 104 cases were reported in 14 states during September and October of 2024, although the true number of people sickened by the outbreak strain *E.coli* O157: H7 may have been much higher.

Epidemiological and traceback data identified that fresh slivered onions supplied to McDonald's were the likely

source. McDonald's stopped using the slivered onions.

Inspecting the supplier, who labelled their product as a "prep-less kitchen solution", the FDA found poor hygiene and dirty equipment. Investigations revealed that workers were not washing their hands properly, and equipment was not being cleaned well. Inspectors said they discovered "numerous equipment with apparent biofilm and large amounts of food debris." Quality control staff were found to be signing off cleaning even when inspectors could see "several food contact surfaces that were not visually clean and should have been marked as a 'Fail'".

Based on their findings, the FDA issued the supplier, Taylor Farms, Form 483, which is a list of citations for conditions that inspectors believed could pose a health risk.


GB & EU import control changes

The European Union is making changes to its import controls, with a focus on **pesticide residues**. These changes aim to improve food safety by tightening regulations on imported food, ensuring that pesticide levels do not exceed safe limits. The new measures will help better monitor and control the quality of food entering the EU, reducing potential health risks from pesticide exposure.

Temporary rates of official **controls and emergency measures** for certain high-risk food and feed of non-animal origin entering Great Britain were also implemented in December 2024.

- Sesame seeds, tahini, and halva from sesame seeds from Turkey and Syria will undergo *Salmonella* checks at a 10 percent rate.

- Shipments of sesame seeds from India will be sampled for *Salmonella* at a rate of 30 percent. The *Salmonella* inspection rate for black pepper from Brazil will remain the same as in Europe at 50%.
- Enoki mushrooms from China and South Korea will be checked for *Listeria monocytogenes* at a frequency of 20 percent.

 Hazards identified from these national sources should also feed into businesses own local hazard assessments.



Tracing of a major UK outbreak to contaminated lettuce

A study by scientists at the UK Health Security Agency has been published, providing fascinating detail into how investigation of a major Shiga Toxin-producing *Escherichia coli* (STEC) outbreak identified the most likely source as contaminated lettuce.

In May 2024, public health agencies and laboratories identified an increase in stool specimen submissions and patients testing positive for STEC. Whole Genome Sequencing (WGS) would ultimately identify 288 UK cases in this outbreak all caused by the same strain of *E.coli* O145.

Descriptive epidemiology and analytical studies identified consumption of nationally pre-packed sandwiches as a common food exposure, leading to a major recall of ready-to-eat sandwiches and wraps containing lettuce in mid-June.

Producers of ready-to-eat foods containing raw produce found their food safety management systems under renewed scrutiny as questions were posed about managing the safety of raw foods made with no 'kill step' prior to consumption. Produce is vulnerable to contamination prior to harvest and produce decontamination processes such as washing cannot guarantee removal of pathogens if they are present.

Alongside these concerns it is helpful to understand how the link to lettuce was made in the absence of any detection of the outbreak strain in the recalled food.

A root cause for the contamination of the lettuce has not been identified, but possible routes of contamination include a failure in control measures protecting the crop from agricultural run-off, contamination of water or growing materials used in lettuce production, or contaminated seeds.

The published study can be read [here](#).

Dogs experiencing 'werewolf syndrome'

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) is advising dog owners not to feed their pets specific dog chews from China following concerns from the European Union (EU) of a possible link to serious behavioural changes.

Relevant symptoms include sudden behavioural changes such as howling, crying, aggression, and epileptic-type seizures.

Reports from the EU suggest that these products are potentially linked to dogs experiencing what is known as 'werewolf syndrome'. Symptoms include panic attacks, aggression, spasms, epileptic fits and in some cases death.

There is no confirmed distribution of the chews to the UK and no cases have been detected in the UK.

Read more [here](#).

Outbreak of severe illness linked to raw milk product

Eleven people have been sickened in a severe Shiga Toxin-producing E.coli (STEC) outbreak in France linked to raw milk cheese.

Raw milk cheeses, which are cheeses made with milk that has not been pasteurised or heat-treated in any way, are often prized for their intense flavours.

Raw milk, and raw milk products in general have gained popularity in recent years among certain groups who believe it offers health benefits not found in pasteurised milk.

Advocates claim raw milk has superior nutritional value, better flavour, and may improve digestion and boost the immune system.

However, the safety of raw milk relies on the strictest requirements both for the milked animal's health, and for hygiene practices, consistent achievement of which may be beyond producers' capabilities. Even with high standards in place, there can be no guarantee of safety as these are products consumed without the application of a 'kill step' designed to deal with dangerous bacteria.

Consequently, these products are high-risk for contamination with pathogens such as STEC, *Listeria monocytogenes* and *Salmonella*, which can lead to serious illnesses especially in vulnerable populations like young children, the elderly, immunocompromised persons, and pregnant women.

Despite the risks, the demand for raw milk and raw milk products is growing, particularly in natural food markets and among people seeking more "natural" food options. Some regions, such as the U.S., have also seen a rise in legal raw milk sales as consumers push for more access.

Market fluctuations

Coffee

The price for Arabica beans, which account for most global production jumped more than 80% in 2024. The cost of Robusta beans, meanwhile, hit a fresh high in September.

Fruit Juices

There are still issues with supply of oranges. Brazil and USA have had reduced crops due to drought and disease. This has been further exacerbated by the flood in Spain putting additional stress on the market.

Olive Oil

Prices are beginning to ease on olive oil after record highs in recent year. Production for 2025 looks promising.

California Walnuts

The crop is down significantly (Reduced 20 - 30%), limiting export opportunities. There has been a combination of low chill hours, a hot spell in the summer, and some Pistillate Flower Abortion (PFA), which is the early loss of the nut-producing part of the plant. Quantity and quality of California walnuts may be affected.

Cocoa

Cocoa prices continue to rise. West Africa (Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Ghana) has been particularly affected by adverse weather conditions. Possible issue with less cocoa being added or inferior product being used.



Food Crime Amber Alert: Risk of document fraud in laboratory results

The national food crime unit has published an amber alert due to an increase in finding fraudulent laboratory results during their investigations.

Genuine lab documents have been altered, spreadsheets etc. have been presented that did not match certificates or omitted some results, and fake certificates have been made using the details of a closed laboratory.

The concern is that unscrupulous fraudsters may use these tactics in matters of food safety, supplier or product approval, or legal compliance.

Good advice to avoid being taken in is provided in the action recommended, including asking to see original documents, not relying on second-hand references for results where data may have been transferred from certificates, and if on site, reviewing information through the laboratory's results portal.

Eurofins customers can show their data both on Certificates of Analysis, and by viewing on Europortal.

Read more on the Food Authenticity Network's website [here](#).



OFFICIAL

Food Crime Alert: FSA-NFCU-A003-2025

Date of alert issue: 21/01/2025 Date alert updated: 21/01/2025

Risk of Document Fraud in Laboratory Results

Handling conditions: OFFICIAL: Information can be shared.

Rating – **AMBER**

SUBJECT OF ALERT

The National Food Crime Unit is asking businesses along the food supply chain to be conscious of fraudulent laboratory test results being used as a method to facilitate potential food crime.

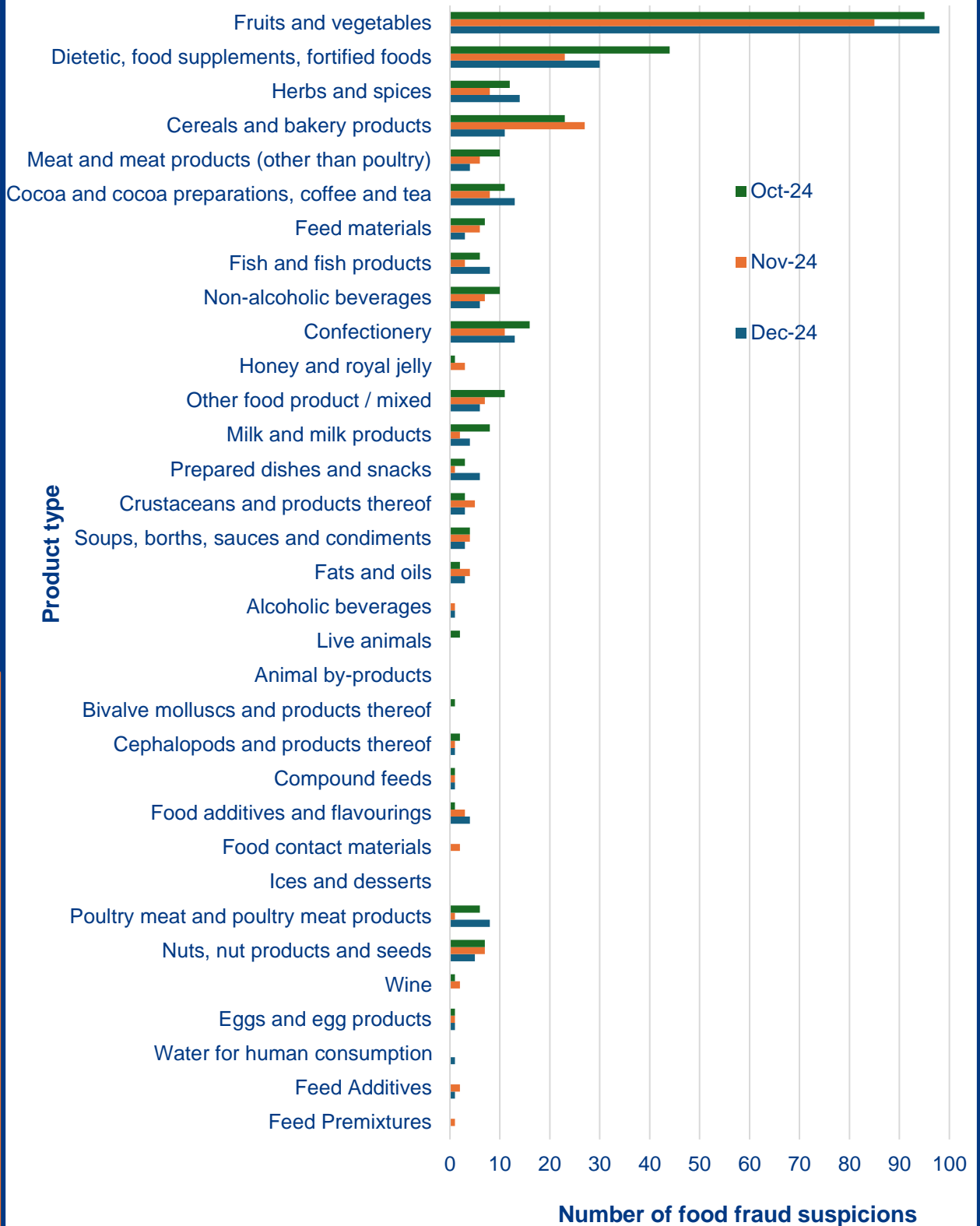
False results have been seen using the following methods:

- The adulteration of genuine lab documents where key information such as dates or results were changed
- Second hand sources of data being presented, such as spreadsheets where out of specification results were amended or omitted entirely and did not match the original results when checked against certificates.
- False certificates being created using details of a closed lab.

Image accessed 14 Feb 2025 [here](#).

Summary of Food Fraud Suspicions (IRASFF) Sept - Dec 2024

Summary of Food Fraud Suspicions



© Eurofins Food Testing UK Ltd. [2025]. All rights reserved. Any use of this material without the prior permission of an authorised representative of Eurofins Food Testing Ireland Ltd. is strictly prohibited.
FTUK048BR1 | Eurofins Risk Insights Newsletter Issue 6 | Due to the ever-changing regulatory landscape, information displayed in this document may be subject to changes after the date of issue. Please check with our Eurofins Food Testing experts or with the respective local Authorities for updates, prior to using these contents for your testing plan.



eurofins

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.



eurofins.co.uk/food



risk@ftuki.eurofins.com



+44 (0) 845 604 6740