

# **Risk Insights** **Food Newsletter**

**Eurofins Food Testing UK Ltd**  
**Issue 02 | October 2024**



## In Focus

Emerging issues, trends and legislative changes

### Emerging issues

Fibreglass in shellfish | Furan in baby food | GM rice | Benzoyl peroxide in flour | Ingredients banned in EU

### Increasing issues

Pesticide residues in rice | Aflatoxin B1 in peanuts | Lead in cinnamon | Vibrio in seafood

### Highlighted food integrity issues in the news

Mustard ingredients contaminated with peanuts | Transportation of food products in contaminated tankers

### Summary of food integrity issues from around the world

Food fraud including olive oil, honey, wine | Milk contamination | Falsification of food testing certificates | Seafood traceability

Welcome to our new style newsletter from the Eurofins Compliance and Risk Management Team in which you will find a summary of recent food integrity issues and emerging risks to food safety from around the world. Our team is here to offer expert advice and support to help you manage the ever-evolving risks faced by food businesses.



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## In the news...

In the UK, the need for vigilant food safety, particularly concerning allergen risk-management, has been underlined by the recent potential peanut contamination of mustard ingredients which has impacted on takeaways, shops and major retailers.

England is expected to record the third worst harvest ever. The Energy & Climate Intelligence Unit have reported that the impact of the bad weather would make the UK more dependent on imports.

Butter prices in Europe have reached record highs due to strong demand, tight stocks and milk availability for butter production. This will add to the pressure on bakery and pastry manufacturers as they prepare for Christmas and who already face high chocolate and sugar costs.

A ring of food suppliers in Grenada, Spain fraudulently exported non-organic fruit and vegetables which they passed off as organic. In six months, over 2 million kilograms of the fraudulent produce was exported across Europe has been uncovered by investigators as part of the Opson XI operation.



### Olive & fish oil

A prolonged drought has seen prices for olive oil rise to record levels over the past couple of years which has fuelled the rise in olive oil fraud crime. However, prices are expected to fall significantly in the coming months as the Mediterranean's largest producing region, Andalusia, has recorded a bumper harvest.

A campaign by 39 organisations, including groups from West Africa and Norway, is urging the Norwegian government to ban its farmed salmon producers from using fish oil from West Africa. The fish used to make the oil could feed millions of people in West Africa where food insecurity is has hit a 10-year high. Norway is the world's biggest farmed salmon producer.

### Safety

Red yeast supplements manufactured by a pharmaceutical company in Osaka, Japan have been linked to five deaths and at least 266 hospitalisations in Japan as of early May 2024.

Climate change impact and altered environmental conditions are expected to increase mycotoxin contamination in cereals and grains. Effective sampling, testing, proactive measures and scientific collaboration are crucial for managing mycotoxins.

## Emerging issues

**Fibreglass particles in natural bivalve population** – a study conducted by the Universities of Brighton and Portsmouth has found fibreglass or glass reinforced plastic (GRP) particles in oysters and mussels, raising significant health concerns. It is the first time that fibreglass particles have been identified in the natural bivalve population and the findings raise both environmental and health concerns. The GRP particles are believed to originate from the degradation of fibreglass used in boat manufacturing.

**Tara flour** identified as a potential chemical risk due the presence of baikiain which has caused approximately 470 cases of illness in the USA since June 2022. The flour is not approved for human consumption and is an unapproved food additive. The EFSA (European Food Safety Authority) has identified tara flour as an emerging risk.

**Furan in baby food** – for the first time, Austria has reported the contamination of baby food with furan imported from Germany. Consumer exposure to furans and methylfurans in food could lead to possible long-term liver damage.

**Unauthorised colours Sudan I and Sudan III found in chilli powder** from Afghanistan.

**Genetically modified (GM) rice** – authorities in Germany detected GM rice in a consignment of organic basmati rice from Pakistan which entered Germany via The Netherlands.

**MCPD (3-monochloropropane diol) and glycidyl esters in noodles** imported from Bangladesh – reported for the first time by authorities in The Netherlands.

**Unauthorised genetically modified (GM) organisms in lactase enzymes from the UK** – reported by Belgium.



**Red lotus and White King branded flour recalled due to presence of benzoyl peroxide** – the use of benzoyl peroxide to 'bleach' flour is not permitted in the EU and UK.

**Food supplements containing ingredients not authorised in the EU** – there continues to be reported cases of food supplements containing substances considered to be novel foods or containing contaminants above

EU legal levels. A recent report from the heads of Food Safety Agencies (HoA) in Europe raised concerns about 13 ingredients in food supplements, including melatonin, piperine and curcumin. The HoA report identified a list of substances that should either be banned or restricted, recommending further regulatory action under Article 8 of Regulation (EC) No 1925/2006, which allows for scrutiny of ingredients beyond standard vitamins and minerals.

## Increasing issues

**Pesticides residues in rice from India** – increased reports.

**Aflatoxin B1 in peanuts from the United States** – reports notified by The Netherlands, France and The Slovak Republic.

**Absence of health certificates for sesame seeds from Nigeria** – reported by Greece and Poland.

**Lead in cinnamon from Vietnam** – reported by The Netherlands, Romania and United States.

**Unauthorised genetically modified (GM) organisms in rice noodles produced in China** – increased reports.

**Vibrio in seafood** – prevalence is expected to increase both globally and in Europe as a result of climate change and extreme weather events, especially in low-salinity and brackish waters according to EFSA's latest assessment. Additionally, resistance to last-resort antibiotics is increasingly found in some *Vibrio* species.

**Listeria monocytogenes** – according to the Journal of Infectious Diseases, the number of patients hospitalised has significantly increased since 2000 with a mortality rate of 16.7%. Specific programs addressing surveillance and prevention of listeriosis in Spain has been recommended.

## Highlighted food integrity issues in the news

### UK: Mustard ingredients contaminated with peanuts

The UK's Food Standards Agency (FSA) has issued an urgent allergy advice warning for individuals with peanut allergies to avoid products containing mustard due to potential peanut contamination. This contamination has been traced back to an ingredient producer in India. The FSA is conducting an investigation and around 50 products have already been recalled. At least one of the affected products has been exported to Ireland. Various brands across takeaways, shops and independent retailers are affected with a broader recall possible as more items are identified.

It is not clear whether the contaminated batch of mustard powder was exported from India to other countries but the FSA have alerted the International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) to enable other food authorities to take appropriate action in their countries.

## CHINA: Transportation of food products in contaminated tankers

The Chinese government is investigating allegations that fuel tankers have been used to transport food products such as cooking oil and syrup after carrying toxic chemicals such as coal oil or gasoline without being adequately cleaned between loads.

Although dedicated food transport vehicles are taken as standard in UK, the practice of transporting food products in fuel trucks is an “open secret” within the food industry in China. In China, tankers are not limited to any particular type of goods so can, in theory, carry food products straight after transporting coal-based oils for example, provided adequate cleaning is carried out between loads.

Several Chinese cooking oil brands have withdrawn their products from the market in China.

The situation rekindles concerns about food safety in China and is being compared to the ‘2008 Sanlu milk scandal’ in which 300 000 children became sick and at least six died after drinking powdered milk contaminated with high levels of melamine.

## Summary of food integrity issues from around the world

### Honey fraud

SPAIN: Operation ‘Matrihoney’ – the Guardia Civil uncovered a network which was distributing honey contaminated with pesticides. Over 40 tonnes of honey from China were illegally marketed as “certified organic” honey. The contaminated honey had pesticide levels exceeding EU limits, posing a public health risk. The company mixed Chinese honey with European honey to dilute pesticide concentrations and falsified documents.

ESTONIA: Honey sold under the brand “Marurskie miody” in Lidl stores in Estonia and Lithuania was found to contain atypical sugars, indicating it does not meet the standards for authentic honey. LIDL Lithuania has issued a recall of the affected honey.





## Olive oil fraud

**SPAIN:** Authorities seized more than 3,000 litres oil fraudulently documented and labelled as extra virgin olive oil (EVOO). Testing revealed the presence of low-quality oils and seeds. The products did not have any health registration, were inadequately labelled and had fraudulent food traceability documentation.

**PORTUGAL:** Authorities seized 1,600 litres of olive oil and suspended the activities of an illegal establishment due to suspicions of adulteration. The establishment was suspected of illegally packing olive oil mixed with other vegetable oils.

**ITALY:** Three sites dedicated to the production of counterfeit and adulterated extra virgin olive oil (EVOO) have been shut down and over 37,000 litres of illegal product seized. The sites produced oil that was then marketed as extra virgin olive oil but was actually a mixture of high linoleic acid sunflower oil with added colourants such as chlorophyll and beta-carotene in quantities exceeding the limits allowed for human consumption.

**ITALY:** Italian authorities in Puglia have disrupted an alleged counterfeit olive oil ring and seized 42 tonnes of fake extra virgin olive oil (EVOO) valued at 900,000 Euros. Some of the oil was already packaged for sale and



the rest was ready for distribution. In addition to this seizure, 71 tonnes of oil were seized along with 623 litres of chlorophyll used for oil adulteration.

**BRAZIL:** Authorities seized 1,343 litres of olive oil suspected of being counterfeit from three commercial establishments. The seized brands included Monte Verde, Grego Santorini and Foro de Galicia. The distributor claimed they were unaware of the adulterations. Inspections also revealed irregularities including registration discrepancies and missing label information.

## Wine DOC fraud

**ITALY:** 60,000 litres of counterfeit wine seized and 12 people apprehended at two wineries in the province of Piacenza. The action followed extensive investigations since 2020 which uncovered a complex association dedicated to the counterfeiting of DOC (Denomination of Controlled Origin), IGT (Typical Geographical Indication) and grape varieties by the falsification of electronic cellar registers and false certification by public officials responsible for certifying the suitability of wines for the corresponding DOC designation.

**SWITZERLAND:** A wine merchant in Valais has been charged with creating false invoices and records to disguise the true origin of wine. Between 2009 and 2016, the accused allegedly bought over 730,000 litres of Spanish wine and 105,000 litres of Swiss wine then sold them as Valais DOC wines. The merchant faces charges of embezzlement, fraud, counterfeiting and document falsification.

## Alcoholic Beverages

SPAIN: Re-branded counterfeit rum. Spanish police seized 13,000 bottles of counterfeit rum in Seville, valued at 200,000 euros. The counterfeit bottles were labelled as Barceló 'Añejo' and 'Imperial', impacting the brand's reputation and consumer trust. The responsible parties are being investigated for intellectual property crimes and document forgery.

BRAZIL: Grey market wine. 3,000 bottles of undocumented 'foreign' wine was seized from a truck during. The wine was concealed between hay bales.

## Cheese DOP fraud

ITALY: 19 tonnes (545 wheels) of counterfeit Parmigiano Reggiano DOP was seized by authorities in a dairy in Modena. Falsified branding equipment was also confiscated. The cheeses were still in the aging process and had a total commercial value of approximately 350,000 euros.

## Milk

PAKISTAN: Contamination of milk. 14,000 litres of milk were destroyed and four major milk producers are under investigation following the sale of adulterated milk. Details of the type of contamination are not stated. The investigation was prompted by numerous customer complaints.

## Egg

UNITED STATES: Processing error results in allergen contamination. Over 2 tons of liquid egg recalled from 9 US States due to misbranding and undeclared allergens. Due to a processing error during product changeover, a different product (which contained milk) was inadvertently packed into the liquid egg cartons.

## Meat & poultry

UK: Falsification of food testing certificates. An investigation by the FSA's National Food Crime Unit and Southwest Trading Standards has resulted in a £50 000 fine for food business which was found to have falsified Salmonella testing certificates. The authorities were alerted to traceability concerns at the poultry farm and abattoir, resulting in birds having been slaughtered without proof they were free from disease. The poultry farmer was successfully prosecuted for the offence after pleading guilty to various offences under The Food Safety and Hygiene (England) Regulations 2013 and the Animal Health Act 1981.

Andrew Quinn, Head of the Food Standards Agency's National Food Crime Unit (NFCU), said: *"We welcome this substantial fine as it shows the serious nature of faking documents and jeopardising food safety. This should act as a deterrent to anyone considering taking dangerous short cuts and breaching food safety and hygiene law."*



## Fish & seafood

**SPAIN:** Seafood traceability. The Guardia Civil seized 14,867 kg of sardines in the port of Ribeira due to discrepancies in transport documentation. The sardines, originating from Cambados lacked the required traceability. The transport company and boats involved face charges for violating Galicia's fishing laws. The confiscated sardines were donated to the local food bank.

**SPAIN:** Illegal fishing. 12 companies prosecuted for laundering and selling bluefin tuna from illegal fishing.

**ITALY:** Seafood traceability. Restaurants in resorts including Palermo were inspected by authorities during operation 'Sapore di mare'. Many establishments were found to lack documentation for seafood products, leading to the seizure of over 7,300kg of fish and 1,800 sea urchins. A total of 110,000 euros in fines were issued across 75 inspected restaurants.

**ITALY:** Seafood traceability and food safety. Authorities in Cagliari seized 108 tons of seafood deemed unfit for human consumption due to lack of traceability, improper storage and non-compliance with HACCP procedures.

**ITALY:** 11kg of mussels seized by authorities at a beachfront food establishment due to lack of traceability documentation and hygiene deficiencies.

**BRAZIL:** Illegal fishing. French authorities seized 9 tonnes of fish from a Brazilian vessel engaged in illegal fishing in French Guiana's waters. Illegal fishing has been a longstanding problem in French Guiana with multiple Brazilian vessels caught and destroyed this year.



## Coffee & tea

**BRAZIL:** Coffee contamination. Ministry of Agriculture (Mapa) recall of 16 brands of roasted coffee found to contain foreign materials and contaminants at levels exceeding legal limits.

**PAKISTAN:** Tea brand fraud. Food safety officials in Lahore seized 4,710kg tea which had been falsely labelled in an attempt to fraudulently sell them as major tea brands.

## Cereals, grains & pulses

**BURKINA FASO:** Rice brand fraud. Authorities seized 14 tonnes of fraudulently repackaged rice. The rice was being sold under a different brand to deceive customers.

**INDIA:** Grey market rice. Four cases of rice smuggling of PDS rice. The PDS (Public Distribution System) in India is a government-funded system which distributes food such as wheat, rice and sugar and non-food such as fuels to India's poorest regions. Under the PDS scheme, each family below the poverty line is eligible for 35kg of rice or wheat every month.

**PANAMA:** Grey market rice seeds. Authorities seized 600 quintals of rice seeds suspected to be smuggled from Costa Rica. This is the second incident of this kind with the first involving 200 quintals.

**ARGENTINA:** Grey market soybeans and corn. 125 tons of smuggled soybeans and corn were seized by authorities during truck inspections by the National Gendarmerie who identified irregularities in the documentation presented by the three truck drivers. The cargo was estimated to have a value of over £5.5 million.

## Fruit & vegetables

**SPAIN:** Non-organic fruit and vegetables fraudulently exported as organic. Investigators estimate that over 2 million kilograms of non-organic produce was passed off as organic in just six months. The lucrative fraud involved the use of unregistered farms, corrupt laboratories to provide false test reports and forged documents to support their claims.

**PHILLIPINES:** Grey market vegetables. Over 300 tons of smuggled vegetables, including onions and carrots were seized in Navotas. The raid uncovered 132.75 tons of white onions worth P21.2 million and 89.89 tons of carrots worth P13.48 million. Other items seized included 360kg tomatoes and 10kg enoki mushrooms.

**PARAGUAY:** Grey market tomatoes. Three incidents of smuggled tomatoes from Brazil totalling over 100 tonnes.

## Herbs & spices

**INDIA:** Spice quality and safety concerns. In the last month, the manufacturing licences of 111 spice producers have been withdrawn by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) due to quality and safety concerns. The FSSAI is conducting a nationwide testing campaign including products from well-known brands such as Everest, MDH, Catch and Badshah. To date, 2,200 samples have been tested, with 111 manufacturers failing to meet basic quality standards resulting in the immediate revocation of their licences.

**Background:** In April 2024, Singapore and Hong Kong banned popular Indian spice brands MDH and Everest due to alleged detection of ethylene oxide (a carcinogenic pesticide). The Food Standards Agency (FSA) had been issuing warning alerts regarding the presence of ethylene oxide in Indian spices since before January 2023. These alerts highlight the growing concerns over food safety and adulteration in the spice industry.

## General

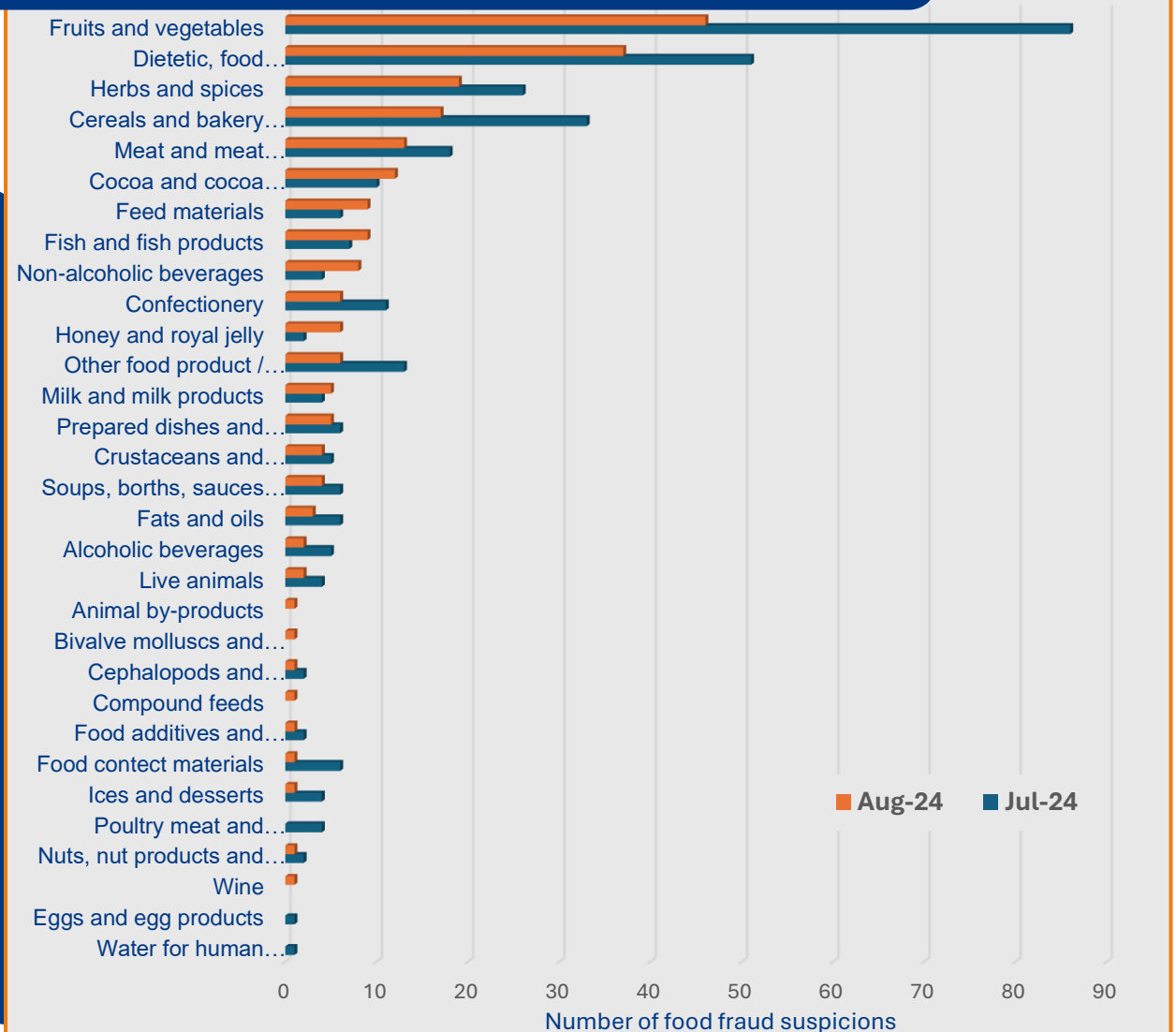
**SPAIN:** Re-labelling expired foodstuffs. The Guardia Civil in Malaga have uncovered a criminal organisation involved in relabelling and distributing expired foodstuffs. Almost 2,000kg of poorly stored and expired food products were seized, including frozen, refrigerated and dried items. The companies involved extended expiry dates and used unauthorised equipment, posing serious health risks to consumers.

**PAKISTAN:** Food safety of various foodstuffs. Authorities seized a large quantity of unsafe and substandard

food items in Peshawar. The items, including beverages, spices, China salt, tea leaves, snacks, ketchup, pickles and milk packs were confiscated and destroyed. The total value of the discarded items was significant, with notable quantities of banned China salt, substandard juices, energy drinks and counterfeit beverages among the seized goods.

**ITALY:** Tomato puree traceability. Authorities in Cerignola seized 176,000 cans of tomato puree valued at approximately 265,000 Euros due to lack of labelling and traceability.

## Summary of Food Fraud Suspicions (IRASFF) July vs Aug 2024







# 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.



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