

Understanding PFAS in Our Food

Why PFAS in Food and Feed Matters and What the New Rules Say

PFAS: What Are They?

PFAS stands for chemicals found in many products that keep stains, water, and grease away. They're in many everyday items like waterproof clothes and some types of pans. Because they last a long time and don't break down easily, PFAS can end up in the environment and then in our food.

Regulatory Framework: EU Regulation 2023/915

In response to growing health concerns, the European Commission has enacted Regulation 2023/915. This revises and establishes maximum contaminant levels for certain substances in food products. This regulation supersedes the previous Regulation (EC) No. 1881/2006, updating limits to better reflect current scientific understanding and epidemiological data.

Local Legislation PFAS Food and Feed

While the EU provides a baseline standard, individual countries might have additional local requirements. It's important for food businesses to check both EU regulations and any specific national laws that might apply in their country to ensure full compliance.

Restrictions on PFAS in Food Packaging

In addition to being present in food, PFAS can also transfer from food packaging into the food itself and then into our bodies. This is a concern with items like pizza boxes and certain drink packages. To address this, there are new rules that limit the use of PFAS in paper and cardboard food packaging. Currently, only one type of PFAS is permitted in these materials, pending a potential Europe-wide ban on all PFAS in food packaging. This step is crucial to prevent further contamination of our food and the environment.

Drinking Water Regulations

The safety of our drinking water is also crucial. The Drinking Water Directive, updated on 12 January 2021, sets a limit for all PFAS in drinking water at 0.5 micrograms per liter. This directive follows a grouping approach, treating all PFAS together to ensure broader protection against these contaminants in drinking water across the EU.

Details from EU Regulation 2023/915

The regulation specifies Maximum Limits (MLs) for PFAS in a range of food categories, reflecting the seriousness with which the EU is addressing the potential risks. Here are some notable points from the new regulation:

Meat and Meat Products:

- Different types of meat, including beef, pork, and poultry, now have specified limits for PFAS like PFOS, PFOA, and their derivatives.
- For instance, the limits for beef, pork, and poultry are set at 0.30 µg/kg for PFOS and 0.80 µg/kg for PFOA.

Seafood:

- Seafood, particularly prone to PFAS accumulation, has more stringent requirements.
- Specific fish species such as bonito and herring have limits set at 1.0 µg/kg for PFOS and 0.20 µg/kg for PFOA.

Eggs and Egg Products:

- Eggs are also regulated under this new directive, with PFAS limits set to ensure safety in consumption.
- The regulation underscores the commitment of regulatory bodies to monitor and control PFAS levels, thereby ensuring food safety and protecting public health.

Who Needs to Act?

Meat and Seafood Processors:

- If you process meat or seafood, you need to check your products to make sure they meet these new limits. This means testing the products regularly.

Egg Producers:

- Farms that produce eggs should also test their eggs to make sure they don't have too much PFAS.

Food Safety Teams:

- Anyone in charge of keeping food safe at a company needs to know about these rules and help make sure the company follows them.

Monitoring, Compliance, and Enforcement

The Dutch Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (NVWA) and other national authorities across the EU will monitor compliance with these PFAS limits. If a food product is found to exceed these limits, the authorities can enforce various actions, including product recalls, to protect public health. Ensuring that products do not surpass the allowed levels of PFAS is crucial for food businesses to avoid such forced recalls.

PFAS Limits and Recall Requirements in Food

Understanding the Recall Requirement:

- When your food products exceed the PFAS limits specified in EU Regulation 2023/915, Annex I, Chapter 4.2, a recall is typically necessary to comply with the regulations and ensure consumer safety. This action is mandated to prevent health risks associated with higher levels of PFAS.

PFAS Limits for Specific Products:

- The regulation sets specific limits for various food products like meats, seafood, and eggs. It is crucial to check these limits in Annex I, Chapter 4.2 of the regulation to understand which products are covered and their respective PFAS thresholds.

Products Without Specified Limits:

- For food products not explicitly mentioned in Chapter 4.2, currently, there are no established PFAS limits. Therefore, if PFAS are detected in these products, a recall is not mandated under this specific regulation. However, it's important to stay informed about any future updates or changes to regulations that might include additional products.

Balancing PFAS Monitoring in Unlisted Raw Materials

Legal and Operational Responsibilities of Food Businesses:

Company Responsibility:

- Food companies are directly responsible for ensuring their products meet legal standards. This includes actively monitoring and managing the levels of PFAS in their products to prevent exceeding regulatory limits.

Inclusion in HACCP Plans:

- For products where PFAS could potentially be a concern, it is mandatory to include PFAS control measures within the company's HACCP plan. This plan should outline risk assessments, control points, and monitoring procedures specifically for PFAS.

Implications for Animal Feed Companies:

- This responsibility extends to manufacturers of animal feed as well. PFAS in feed can accumulate in animal products such as meat and eggs, thereby entering the human food chain. Feed producers must also ensure that their products do not contribute to excessive PFAS levels in food products.

Rationale Against Routine Monitoring in Products Without Specified Limits:**Cost Considerations:**

- Given the high costs associated with PFAS testing, routine monitoring may not be feasible for all businesses, especially when there are no specific legal requirements for certain products.

Regulatory Compliance:

- Companies need to monitor PFAS levels only in contexts where PFAS presence is likely based on the nature of the raw materials and the geographical and environmental characteristics of the sourcing locations.

When Monitoring PFAS in Food and Feed Might Still Be Advisable:**High-Risk Products:**

- Companies should focus on monitoring products that are more likely to be contaminated with PFAS, either due to the production process or environmental factors.

Brand Reputation and Consumer Trust:

- Voluntary monitoring for PFAS can be a selling point for businesses emphasizing food safety and quality, particularly in markets where consumers are highly health-conscious.

Preparing for Future Regulation:

- Keeping abreast of potential regulatory changes and beginning to monitor products that might soon be regulated can place businesses ahead in compliance and market positioning.

Balanced Approach:**Selective Monitoring Based on Risk Assessment:**

- Implementing PFAS monitoring for high-risk products as identified through the company's HACCP plan can be more cost-effective than broad-spectrum testing.

Regular Regulatory Review and HACCP Updates:

- Regularly updating HACCP plans and staying informed about regulatory changes ensure that the business can quickly adjust its practices in response to new PFAS limits.

Industry Engagement:

- By engaging with regulatory discussions and scientific research on PFAS, companies can gain insights that help in strategic planning and risk management.

Looking Ahead PFAS in Food and Feed

The journey towards completely understanding and mitigating the risks of PFAS is ongoing. With robust regulations like EU Regulation 2023/915, the European Union is leading efforts to minimize these chemicals' impact on health and ensure a safer food supply for future generations.