

Control of contaminants in foodstuffs

If you want to sell food in the EU, you have to ensure it does not contain contaminants at levels which could threaten human health. For that, when arriving at the EU border, your consignment must be accompanied by the laboratory test document indicating the presence and amount of contaminants.

Food contaminants

Contaminants may be present in food as a result of the various stages of its production, packaging, transport or holding, or also might result from environmental contamination. To control them the EU legislation ([CELEX 31993R0315](#)) lays down the main principles:

- food containing a contaminant to an amount that may damage human health **shall not be placed on the EU market and will be rejected**
- contaminant levels shall be kept as low as can reasonably be achieved following recommended good working practices
- maximum levels may be set for certain contaminants to protect public health

Maximum levels of contaminants

EU legislation ([CELEX 32006R1881](#)) sets maximum levels for certain food contaminants. The foodstuffs listed in the [Annex](#) must not, when placed on the EU market, contain higher contaminant levels than those specified in the list:

Contaminant limit	product
nitrate	lettuce, spinach and baby foods
mycotoxins	groundnuts, nuts, dried fruit (including dried vine fruit) and products thereof, cereals and cereal products, milk, infant formulae, dietary foods intended for infants, spices, fruit juices, coffee products, wine, spirit drinks, cider, apple products, processed cereal based foods for infants and young children and baby foods
heavy metals	milk, meat, fish, cereals, vegetables, fruit and wines
3-MCPD	Hydrolysed vegetable protein and soy sauce.
dioxins and dioxin-like PCBs	meat, fish, milk, eggs, oils and fats.
PAHs	oils and fats, smoked meats, smoked fish, fish, crustaceans and bivalve molluscs, infant foods.

To check which contaminant can affect your product and its maximum limit, just click on the Annex.

Special conditions for food coming from non-EU countries

EU measures have been taken for certain contaminants imported from specific non-EU countries, in particular as regards aflatoxins, melamine, mineral oil and pentachlorophenol and dioxins. More [information on these measures](#) can be found on the Export Helpdesk and European Commission website.

Further information

European Commission, DG Health and Consumers, [Food contaminants](#)

[Centre for the promotion of imports from developing countries](#) (CBI)

[European Food Safety Authority](#) (EFSA)

Last update on: January 2013. Please check the [Export Helpdesk](#) for updated information