

Residues of EU-banned pesticides present in European food, report says

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MEPs and environmental groups have urged the European Commission to halt the production and sale of pesticides banned in the EU as a report details worrying residue levels on both domestic and imported fruit and vegetables.

The EU's 2009 Pesticides Regulation – already [under fire](#) for allowing the use of unsafe pesticides – bans the use of substances that are harmful to human health by setting Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs).

Speaking on Tuesday at an event hosted by the European Parliament, the Socialist MEP and chair of a recent parliamentary committee of inquiry, Eric Andrieu, called on EU and national authorities to “be more ambitious” and set up a “more transparent” pesticide authorisation process.

Legislators should tackle the issue of identifying [endocrine disruptors](#) and consider tougher sanctions against EU countries who fail to abide by the regulations, Andrieu said.

Under the EU's Prior Informed Consent (PIC) Regulation, the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) regularly updates a list of substances facing export restrictions, which last July saw [22 new chemicals added](#).

“The food that we eat contains cocktails of pesticides,” said Angeliki Lyssimachou, an environmental toxicologist with the campaign group Pesticide Action Network (PAN) Europe. This includes both food produced in and outside Europe, Lyssimachou said as she launched a report urging the EU to take action.

Although a higher percentage of food samples imported from third countries had pesticide residues and pesticide mixtures, the report says, in the EU 7.1% of the animal products produced and 3.8% of plant-based products were found to be contaminated with PIC-list pesticides.

A total of 74 different pesticides were detected in 5, 811 samples – 6% of food samples tested. “That might sound small, but we included all types of samples like organic and baby food,” she added.

Laurent Gaberell from the Swiss NGO Public Eye said that it is a widespread practice that recently EU-banned pesticides were exported by companies still allowed to produce them in Europe, because the current regulation does not interfere with the manufacture or tracking of these substances.

Public Eye and Unearthed, Greenpeace UK's investigation unit, launched a report showing that in 2018 EU countries approved the export of 81,615 tonnes of EU-banned pesticides such as Syngenta's best-selling and poisonous paraquat.

"The United Kingdom, Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, France, Belgium and Spain account for more than 90 percent of these volumes", the report said.

Klaus Berend, who heads a pesticides and biocides unit at the European Commission's health and food safety directorate, said that a ban on exports of pesticides whose use is prohibited in Europe would "not in itself solve the problem that these substances will continue to be used in third countries".

The solution, he said, is rather a "refusal to set MRLs on imports and convincing third countries to stop using such substances, as intended in the [Farm-to-Fork Strategy](#) and the Green Deal".

Follow-up: PAN Europe [report](#); Greenpeace [report](#)