

Brussels, 4 July 2019

Pesticide cocktails in European Food

Over a quarter of the food consumed in Europe contains residues of two or more pesticides, according to the annual report published by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). For certain foods the situation is much worse: more than 60% of the popular summer fruits tested (currants, sweet cherries, strawberries and bananas) come with pesticide “cocktails”.

PAN Europe highlights that the absence of a safety assessment for pesticide mixtures present in our food not only fails to address the EU law requirements, but it also puts consumer health at risk in a clear violation of human rights.

For fourteen years, EU law¹ requires to address cumulative and synergistic effects of pesticides in safety assessment, yet Regulators continue to carry out safety assessments as if humans were exposed to a single pesticide - which, according to the report, is far from the truth.

The [EFSA report](#), which is based mainly on fruit and vegetable samples collected in 2017 across all EU Member States, reconfirms the worrying results from previous years: just over half (54%) of the food tested was free of detectable pesticide residues, whereas over one in four (27.5 %) contained 2 or more pesticide residues (Fig. 1 and 2). The maximum number of residues in a single sample (peppers) was 30 and a total of 353 pesticides were detected across EU. Two in three (62%) EU fruits and nuts from conventional farming contain pesticides. Higher rates of pesticide mixtures may be found in our summer salads: 70% of the currants and blackberries, and over 60% of cherries, strawberries, lettuce, rocket and bananas were found to have two or more pesticide residues.

For decades scientists have been raising the alarm that chemical mixtures may magnify the toxic potential of individual chemicals alone, including pesticides, making the safety assessment of “one chemical, one assessment” [unfit to guarantee consumers’ safety](#). Furthermore, persistent and highly toxic pesticides (DDT, hexachlorobenzene) and other persistent organic pollutants (POPs) that have already been banned, continue to be present in our food (meat particularly) establishing a continuous background exposure level to toxic chemicals.

Consumption of food high in pesticide residues has been linked to reduced [fertility rates in women](#) and [sperm quality in men](#). Moreover, some of the pesticides found in EU food have endocrine disrupting properties and should be banned according to EU law². For example, chlorpyrifos, which is a neurotoxic insecticide shown to [affect brain development in children](#), is one of the pesticides most often found in EU food and most often exceeding the Maximum Residue Limits (400 samples). Boscalid, an endocrine disrupting fungicide according to [Commission’s 2016 impact assessment](#), is in the top 5 pesticides detected. Glyphosate, the active ingredient of Monsanto’s (now Bayer) Roundup, which is classified as a probable carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer, was most often detected in lentils (42%), barley (23.5%) and peas (25%), and exceeded the safety limits in honey.

¹ OJ L 70, 16.3.2005. Regulation (EC) No 396/2005 on maximum residue levels of pesticides in/on food and feed

² OJ L 309, 24.11.2009. Regulation (EC) 1107/2009 concerning the placing of plant protection products on the market. Annex II 3.6.5 and 3.8.2

Press Release

Angeliki Lysimachou, Science Policy Officer of PAN Europe says “*The rate of exposure to pesticide mixtures has increased in the past years and while Regulators are - for over a decade now - promising to develop an assessment protocol for mixtures, consumers have become ‘guinea pigs’. We call upon our Regulators to immediately place an additional safety factor for mixtures and stop pretending that chemical mixtures are safe.*”

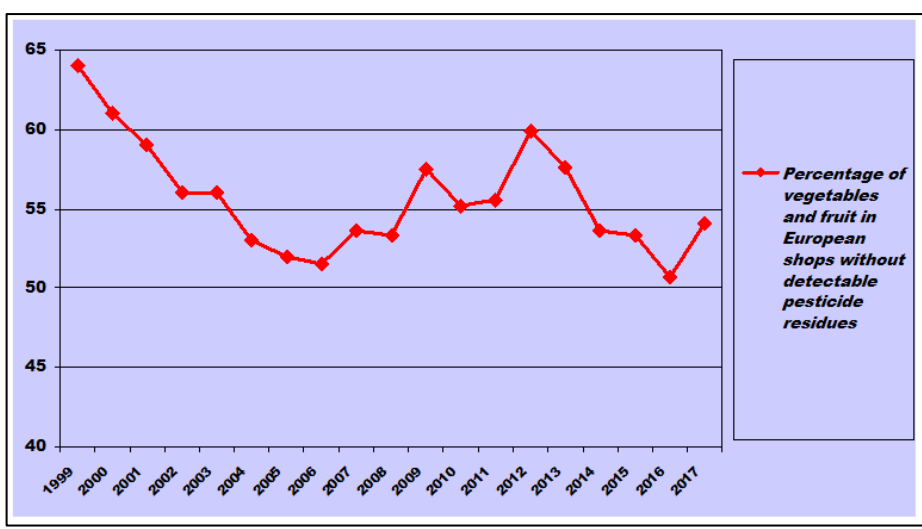


Figure 1. In 2017 the percentage of vegetables and fruit in European shops without detectable pesticide residues (below analytical detection limit) went slightly up to 54,1% (2014 levels), after the very bad 2016 outcome.

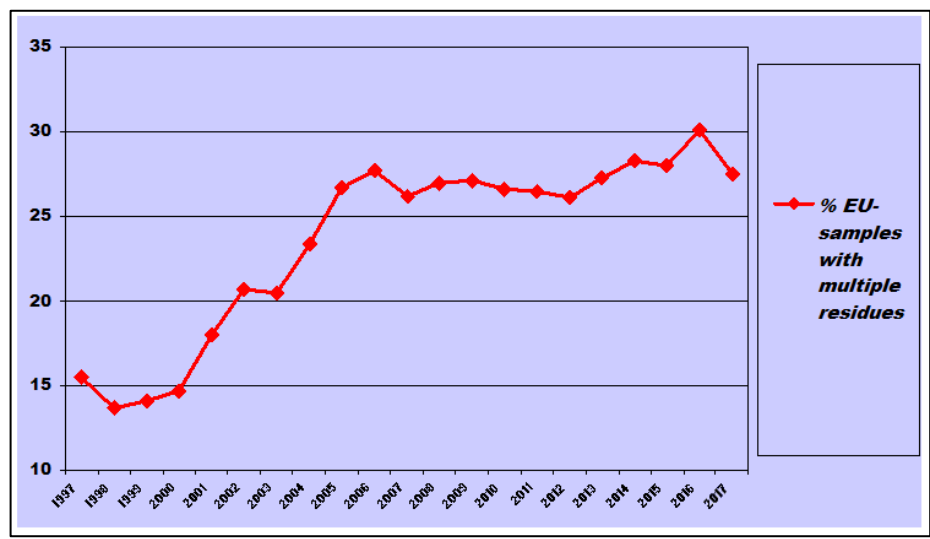


Figure 2. In 2017 the percentage of multiple residues in Europe consumed vegetables and fruit decreased slightly to a still very high rate of 27,5 %.