

Surveillance Sampling Programme - Conclusion

Overall, satisfactory results with respect to the tests carried out were returned for 89% of samples.

Allergens

Consumers managing food allergies have to rely on products being correctly labelled to ensure that they do not suffer allergic reactions which can be severe and, in some cases, fatal.

A significant number of samples (13%) were found to have undeclared allergens at varying levels. In particular, milk protein was detected in almost 50% of soya lattes tested. Undeclared allergens, including milk, soya and sesame protein, were also detected in 23% of bread products tested.

All cases of undeclared allergens were dealt with as incidents and/or reported to the relevant local authorities for follow-up as determined most appropriate.

Contaminants

Contaminants are substances that have not been intentionally added to food but may be present through environmental contamination or as a result of one of the stages of production. They generally have a negative impact on the quality of the food and may also be a risk to health.

Heavy metals occur both naturally and as a result of human activity. Foods such as grains, spices and leafy vegetables absorb heavy metals from the environment. This survey tested 240 products for the presence of heavy metals and all returned satisfactory results.

Mycotoxins are naturally occurring toxic compounds that are produced by different types of fungi and can enter the food chain as a result of infection of crops such as cereals, spices and dried fruits. Out of the 250 products tested for mycotoxins, 3% were found to have levels above the regulatory limits.

Unauthorised Ingredients

Foods imported from another country must meet the same food standards as food produced in the UK. Of the cereal products sampled, 16% had colours that are not authorised within the food category for breakfast cereal and are thus non-complaint for the UK market.

Authenticity

It is important that consumers have trust in the food they buy and get what they pay for. Occasionally substituting premium products for cheaper alternatives can be an attractive option

for businesses to make more money.

A total of 278 samples were tested for authenticity and 2% were found to be inauthentic. Basmati rice sells at a higher price than other rice varieties and 3 out of 20 basmati rice samples were reported as having been adulterated with either non-basmati rice varieties or with a basmati rice different to the marked variety.

The other non-authentic products included a salmon product substituted with trout, oregano with the addition of olive leaves and goat meat substituted with lamb.

Composition

As well as being authentic it is important that food matches its description so that the consumer can make informed choices.

The alcohol contents of 33% of the tested gins and 17% of the vodkas were outside the tolerances for the declared alcohol strength, both above and below the limits. Similarly, the fat content of 19% of milks tested were outside the permitted limits.

The compositions of 5 samples, 4 oregano and 1 olive oil were not of a quality that would be expected by the consumer.

Labelling

Food labels are a legal requirement and are crucial in delivering key information to consumers including ingredients, nutrition and allergy information so that they can make informed choices based on diet, allergies, personal / religious beliefs or cost.

More than 50% of the 21 labelling irregularities related to allergen information not being in line with the BRC Guidance on Allergen Labelling. [\(footnote 1\)](#) Standardisation of allergen labels ensures faster, easier and consistent relay of the important information of the substances or products causing allergies or intolerances added as an ingredient, to the relevant group(s) of sensitive individuals. Missing or incorrect information was reported on 4 labels and 6 were found not to be in the manner required by the regulations.

Retail Outlet Types

Compliance of food samples purchased from both large FBOs and online retailers was 92% and compliance of those purchased from small retail outlets was 87%. 1 in 7 samples bought from independent retailers were deemed as unsatisfactory by Public Analysts while from both large FBOs and online retailers this figure was 1 in 12.

1. [British Retail Consortium Guidance on Allergen Labelling and the Requirements in Regulation 1169/2011](#)