

Results in controls of imports in 2018

Rejected foodstuffs mainly from Thailand

In 2018, Customs inspected altogether 2 656 foodstuffs and food contact materials. Of the examined foodstuffs, 1 164, i.e. around 44 per cent, had been imported to Finland directly from non-EU regions. Of internal market imports 393 samples originated in non-EU countries, which means that the controls focused on products produced outside the EU.

Most internal market controls involved foodstuffs imported from Spain; altogether 245 batches, which mainly contained fresh fruits and vegetables, spices and rice. The controls of foodstuffs imported from non-EU regions mostly concerned products produced in Thailand. The products were mainly preserved foods and perishable products. Customs controlled altogether 141 batches of foodstuffs from Thailand. As during previous years, foodstuffs examined were mainly fresh fruits and fruit products as well as fresh vegetables and vegetable products.

During the control of foodstuffs no trends were detected, i.e. there was no certain product with recurring problems, but as in previous years, perishables imported from Asia contained pesticide residues that exceeded the maximum levels, and there were problems with the microbiological quality of the products. Of the consignments examined, altogether 212 products, i.e. around 8 per cent, did not comply with regulations. Less serious errors (cause for remarks) were detected in 306 products, which is around 12 per cent of the examined cases. The share of imported foodstuffs that did not comply with regulations was 11 per cent from non-EU countries, and 6 per cent from the EU territory. The examinations were carried out at the Customs Laboratory. The other member states were notified of the most serious findings through the so-called RASFF system. Notifications were made regarding around 40 products.

Package labels on imported products a general problem

The greatest number of problems were found to be in the product group vegetables and vegetable products, where altogether 29 batches were found in breach of food regulations. A too high level of pesticide residues, problems with the microbiological quality and unauthorised irradiation was detected in the perishables belonging to this group. Vegetable preparations were found to contain errors, e.g. in the use of additives and in the labelling. However, a large quantity of vegetables and vegetable products were examined, therefore, the share of non-compliant products was not large in relation to the examined quantity.

The highest proportion of non-compliant foodstuffs was found to be in the product group legume seeds and products, meat and dairy product analogues as well as food

supplements. The most common reason for the rejection was serious errors on packaging labels; for example, the required instructions on how to cook dried beans were missing. On a yearly basis, packaging label errors are one of the most common reasons for rejection. Moreover, unauthorised irradiation of food supplement products was observed as well as substances included in the appendices to the list of medicines.

Contact materials most commonly manufactured in China

Customs examined 382 samples from batches of supplies that come in contact with food, such as cutlery, dishes, and goods meant for processing or storing food. Of these so-called contact materials, 86 per cent were brought in to Finland directly from outside the EU, and the most common country of origin was China. Altogether six per cent were found to be non-compliant. The non-compliant products originated in China. The reasons for rejecting the products were harmful substances shed from materials (such as volatile compounds in articles made from silicone), excessive heavy metal contents, e.g. in ceramic mugs, as well as errors on packaging labels and document errors. A minor error was found in approximately every sixth contact material controlled.

Table 1. Foodstuffs controlled by Customs in 2018.

Product category	Examined	Non-complying lots	Remarked
Corn grains and corn products	110	5 %	9 %
Cereal-base dough products	126	7 %	7 %
Vegetables and vegetable products	486	6 %	11 %
Legume seeds and products	32	38 %	22 %
Fruits and fruit products	530	2 %	7 %
Nuts and nut products	81	5 %	5 %
Oil seeds and fruits	79	0 %	1 %
Starchy root crops and tubers	14	0 %	0 %
Herbs, spices et al.	156	8 %	15 %
Juices, spreads et al. made from fruits, vegetables and plants	69	6 %	12 %
Fish and fish products	10	10 %	10 %
Meat and dairy analogues	16	38 %	0 %
Waters, water-based soft drinks et al.	57	18 %	19 %
Raw ingredients for hot drinks and infusion	102	25 %	12 %
Hot beverages (coffee, cocoa, tea and herbal beverages)	2	0 %	0 %
Alcoholic beverages	26	8 %	38 %
Sweets and chocolate	36	25 %	14 %

Foodstuffs for adolescents	81	0 %	16 %
Foodstuffs for persons with special diets (incl. supplements)	67	28 %	15 %
Compiled courses	84	18 %	18 %
Spice products and meal sauces	71	14 %	11 %
Purified isolated ingredients	39	15 %	18 %
Food contact materials	382	6 %	15 %

Mainly toys were examined and rejected in the consumer goods control

Altogether 1 415 batches of consumer goods were controlled last year. Of the examined products, 1 155 were imported to Finland and cleared through customs from non-EU countries and 260 imported intra-EU trade products were taken for examination from operators warehouses. Examined were mainly toys (623 batches), when observed according to product group. Numerically, these were also rejected the most (93 batches, i.e. around 15% of the examined batches). Of the good items examined in the control of consumer products, altogether 191 products, i.e. around 13 per cent, were found to be seriously non-compliant. Less serious errors (cause for remarks) were detected in 146 products. Of products imported from non-EU countries, 13 per cent were found to be non-compliant as well as 17 per cent of products imported from the EU territory; although many internal trade consumer goods rejected upon import were manufactured outside the EU. Non-compliant goods came mainly from China. Consumer goods manufactured in China were also controlled the most, since around one thousand products were declared as originating in China. The second most common country of origin was India.

The most common reason for rejecting toys was a mechanical error, i.e. for example, a small part in a toddler's toy that posed a risk of asphyxiation or a string or strap that was too long and posed a risk of strangulation. Hobbyhorses, for example, had bridles with straps that were too long. A significant number of errors on toy labels were observed; mainly instructions on how to safely use the toys were missing in Finnish and Swedish. In addition, toys were rejected because of harmful substances. Prohibited softeners (phthalates), were discovered, e.g. in different plastic toy figurines and toy slime, which became a real hit product last year, contained high concentrations of boron compounds.

The greatest problems were cosmetics as during the previous years. Serious non-compliances were discovered in 50 of 126 examined samples, i.e. 40 per cent, and minor errors were discovered in 20 products (16%). Problems with cosmetics were connected with the composition, declaring ingredients and other information on packaging labels.

Table 2. Consumer goods controlled by Customs in 2018.

Product category	Examined	Non-complying lots	Remarked
Candle products and other burnable products	1	100 %	0 %
Child care supplies	47	13 %	26 %
Plastic supplies (not FCM)	43	2 %	5 %
Other consumer goods	92	4 %	17 %
Jewellery and other related objects	78	10 %	0 %
Cosmetics	126	44 %	16 %
Textiles, footwear and accessories	405	7 %	8 %
Toys	623	15 %	10 %

The most serious findings were notified through the Rapex alert system maintained by the Commission. Notifications were made regarding around 20 products. Based on the information in the alert system, the products can also be controlled in other member states.