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Results of import controls in 2022

In 2022, Finnish Customs carried out controls on a total of 3,040 foodstuffs and food contact materials by taking samples of them for analyses and examinations performed by the Customs Laboratory. Of the examined products, 1,153 (about 36 per cent) were imported to Finland directly from areas outside the EU. Almost 600 of the 1,887 samples from intra-Union imports were of non-EU origin.

Overall, serious defects were detected in 333 products (about 11% of the examined products). Less serious defects were detected in 571 products (ca 19% of the examined products). A share of 16% of the foodstuffs and contact materials imported from outside the EU and 8% of those imported from within the EU were non-compliant, and because of this, their import and entry into the market as such was prohibited. Less serious defects were detected in every fifth product that was declared to Customs and in 16% of the goods that were subject to intra-Union import controls.

Customs sent notifications on the products that posed a health hazard to the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) of the EU Commission. Overall, Customs sent around 50 RASFF notifications last year.

Controls on perishable foods most common

As in previous years, most examinations involved foodstuffs from Spain, comprising a total of 290 batches of mainly fresh vegetables and fruits. In extra-EU imports, foods from the United Kingdom were subject to the highest number of controls with a total of 126 product batches examined. These products included food supplements, cereal products, spices and sweets.

In terms of product categories, the foodstuffs examined were mainly fresh fruits and fruit products as well as fresh vegetables and vegetable products. The perishables were examined for pesticide residues, heavy metal concentrations and microbiological quality, among other tests.

A total of 293 batches of organically produced food was examined. Most of the examined organic foods were fresh vegetables and fruits, but there was also process foods, such as spices and cereal products. A total of 57 product batches were examined in conjunction with customs clearance and 236 product batches of intra-EU imports; however, some of the samples from intra-EU trade were actually of non-EU origin. In the third-country imports, a batch of tea, a herbal beverage power and a pineapple juice were found to be non-compliant with the regulations on organic production due to pesticide residues. In the intra-EU imports, three different teas, as well as batches of psyllium, a spice mixture, fresh strawberries and ginger root were found to be non-compliant with the organic regulations due to pesticide residues. In the intra-EU imports, there were also two organic foods that

contained radiated ingredients. In addition, two batches of organic feed were also examined and found to be compliant with the organic regulations.

Almost half of the food supplements were non-compliant

In terms of numbers, problems were most commonly detected in food supplements and in products for special groups. In these categories, there were 58 different products that were found to be non-compliant, which is almost half of the products examined. The most common reason for rejection was that the details provided in the package labels were insufficient or contained errors. The second most common reason for rejecting the foods supplements was they contained a substance or plant that is mentioned in the annexes of list of medicines maintained by the Finnish Medicines Agency Fimea. Several compounds of vitamins and minerals that are not approved were also detected in the food supplements. In addition, there were defects involving additives, excessive levels of pesticides, poor microbiological quality and unauthorised radiation.

Every year, the most common reason for rejection are defects in the package labels. Last year, the Finnish and Swedish labels on a total of around one hundred foods were non-compliant. Less serious defects in the package labels were found on more than 400 foods.

The second most common reason for rejection was pesticide residues. The approved limit was exceeded in 60 products, including rices, various teas, fresh vegetables and fruits as well as herbs. As in previous years, excessive concentrations of pesticides were found in rice imported from Asia, but batches of rice imported from South America were also rejected for the same reason. A total of 12 batches of rice were rejected due to residues.

The ethylene oxide content was examined in almost 200 samples: spices, sesame seeds and products containing sesame seeds, spice packets for noodles, additives and food samples. Ethylene oxide was the cause of rejection in 9 products: a nutmeg powder, a turmeric powder, an organic spice mixture, three herbal mixtures, a food supplement and two smoothie ingredients. In addition, very low levels of ethylene oxide were also found in four other products.

The majority of the foodstuffs rejected because of pesticide residues originated in South America or Asia. Lower levels of pesticide residues for which a notice was issued were found in 52 products.

Incorrect use of additives or insufficient information in the package labels was detected in 57 products. Such defects that lead to rejection were found in various fruit and vegetable products, in beverage ingredients, sweets and food supplements. In addition, 10 products were issued a notice for incorrectly declared additives or additive concentrations.

Three food batches were found to be non-compliant due to mycotoxins, and in addition to that, there were elevated concentrations in nine products. Concentrations of ochratoxin A that led to rejection were found in batches of oatmeal and nutmeg. A batch of a product containing peanuts was rejected due to aflatoxins. Elevated levels of mycotoxins that nevertheless remained below the maximum limit were found in a chili sauce and in batches of nuts and nut products, coffee, quinoa and dried figs.

Products that were rejected due to heavy metals was a pineapple beverage that contained too much tin and rice that contained excessive levels of cadmium. One batch of dried oregano was rejected due to pyrrolizidine alkaloids.

The microbiological quality was found to be poor in 11 different products. Six of these contained salmonella. The products that contained salmonella were a sesame paste, a curry powder, fresh thyme, dried mushroom, pistachio nuts and stuffed bread. Various herbal products, including food supplements, and a batch of fresh spinach were rejected because of a high concentration of *Bacillus cereus*. In addition, degraded microbiological quality was detected in 25 products, including the bacterium *Listeria monocytogenes* in various frozen products, a hummus spread, a stuffed bread and in readymade meals, and the bacterium *Bacillus cereus* in dried vegetables and spices, as well as the bacterium *E. Coli* in fresh mint.

Missing details in the documentation on food contact materials

The Customs Laboratory examined a total of 293 product batches of materials and articles that come into contact with food. The majority, that is, more than two hundred of the food contact materials examined originated in China. A total of 30 of the food contact materials, i.e. 10 per cent, were found to be seriously non-compliant, while less serious defects were detected in every fifth of the products examined. The food contact materials were rejected due to insufficient documentation and release of harmful substances, among other reasons. A total of 11 products, including drinking bottles and single use items, were rejected because of the documentation. Excessive release of substances harmful to health, such as melamine, formaldehyde and volatile compounds, was detected in a total of seven products. Some metal mugs were rejected because they were found to leach particles that may end up in the human body.

Less serious defects were mainly found in labels and documents, but notices were also issued regarding harmful substances that were released.

Table 1. Foodstuffs and contact materials examined by Finnish Customs in 2022.

Product category	Examined batches (no.)	Batches issued with a notice (%)	Non-compliant (%)
Cereal grains and cereal products	**145**	21%	12%
Cereal dough based products	**154**	32%	6%
Vegetables and vegetable products	**506**	7%	5%
Legume seeds and products	**66**	26%	20%
Fruits and fruit products	**552**	5%	3%
Nuts and nut products	**99**	52%	2%
Oil seeds and fruits	**80**	30%	8%
Starchy root crops and tubers	**22**		5%
Herbs, spices and similar	**191**	16%	8%
Juices, beverages, spreads and similar products made from fruits, vegetables and plants	**73**	22%	29%

Product category	Examined batches (no.)	Batches issued with a notice (%)	Non-compliant (%)
Fish and fish products	**28**	7%	4%
Meat and dairy analogues	**58**	40%	24%
Waters, water-based soft drinks and similar	**76**	36%	24%
Ingredients for hot beverages and infusions	**146**	10%	15%
Hot beverages (coffee, cocoa, tea, and herbal beverages)	**13**	38%	15%
Alcoholic beverages	**28**	39%	14%
Sweets and chocolate	**68**	41%	19%
Foods for growing children	**51**	14%	2%
Foods for persons with special diets (incl. supplements)	**120**	26%	48%
Composite dishes	**127**	36%	16%
Seasoning products and meal sauces	**98**	23%	13%
Purified isolated ingredients	**46**	17%	13%
Food contact materials	**293**	19%	10%
	3,040	**19%**	**11%**

The most common consumer goods examined and rejected were toys

Altogether 1,486 batches of consumer goods were examined last year. A total of 1,130 of the products were taken for examination in conjunction with customs clearance, while 356 were selected from intra-EU imports at the operators' warehouses.

The most common product category was toys, with a total of 654 product batches examined. This was also the category with the most rejections (87 toy batches, i.e. 13% of those examined). A total of 597 (91%) of the samples examined were taken as part of the controls on products imported from outside the EU. The majority of these originated in China. About half of the toys examined were intended for small children under the age of 36 months. The most common problems found in the toys were qualities that pose a risk of strangulation or suffocation, insufficient package markings and excessive concentrations of plasticisers, as well as hazardous concentrations of other substances harmful to health. The microbiological quality of two toys was poor, and three toys did not meet the fire safety requirements. In addition, minor defects were detected in about fifty toys, such as incorrect product labels.

A total of 295 textiles, shoes and accessories were examined. Eight (3%) of these were rejected. Excessive concentrations of phthalate plasticisers were detected in three products: purses and a children's jacket. The materials in two pairs of work gloves contained excessive levels of chromium VI. In addition, minor defects were also detected in nine textile products. For example, three pieces of children's clothing were issued a notice for parts that may get caught.

Customs examined a total of 31 different candle products, and almost half of them (14 products) were found to be non-compliant. The mass of almost all the cake candles

examined started to drip quickly, which can cause danger or harm to health. One pillar candle was found to have too tall a flame, and one candle fell over when it was being burnt. In addition, there were errors in the package labels of the candles.

A total of 211 cosmetics products were examined. The majority of the samples were taken from products imported from outside the EU in conjunction with customs clearance. Altogether 37 products were prohibited from being imported and from entering the market, each having one or several defects assessed as serious. A total of 18 products were rejected because of unclear composition. Defects in the product labelling leading to a rejection were detected in 20 products and poor microbiological quality in two products. In addition, less serious defects were found in every fourth cosmetic product.

Of the batches examined in the control of consumer products, altogether 195 products, i.e. around 12 per cent, were found to be seriously non-compliant. Less serious defects that led to the issue of a notice were detected in 143 products (9%). The share of non-compliance in the products imported from outside the EU was about 12%, while the share was about 17% in the products brought in from the EU. The highest number of non-compliant products came from China. Consumer goods manufactured in China were also subject to the highest number of examinations, since around one thousand products were declared as originating in China. The second most common origin country in all the examined consumer goods was India.

Table 2. Consumer goods examined by Finnish Customs in 2022.

Product category	**Examined batches (no.)**	**Batches issued with a notice (%)**	**Non-compliant (%)**
Candle products and other burnable products	**31**	6%	45%
Sports and fitness products	**53**		15%
Household and interior decoration supplies	**102**	3%	10%
Child care supplies	**35**	34%	14%
Jewellery and other similar objects	**87**		14%
Cosmetics	**211**	28%	18%
Other consumer goods	**127**	5%	17%
Textiles, footwear and accessories	**295**	3%	3%
Toys	**625**	8%	13%
	1,566	**9%**	**12%**

The most serious findings were notified to the Safety Gate alert system maintained by the EU Commission. Notifications were made regarding around 40 products. Based on the information in the alert system, the products can also be controlled in other member states. In the controls on intra-EU trade, defects in certain non-compliant products, mainly

toys, were also notified to the ICSMS, a system that allows the other member states to react to the surveillance results.