

First Consensus Workshop on Food Safety (QLAM-2001-000667)

"Residue and contaminants levels of food sold to consumers: Food testing results from consumer organisations - defining the problem"

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Among other aspects of food quality such as nutritional value, taste, correct labeling and packaging, residues and contaminants belong to the frequently tested parameters.

Generally speaking, consumer organisations can't do the job of the official authorities responsible for food safety, they can only do spot tests. According to published official statistics of food monitoring, in Germany e.g. 3% of foods exceed the maximum residue limits. In some cases, however, higher percentages are found.

Some of our recent test results of four categories are presented and discussed: mycotoxins (e.g. aflatoxins, ochratoxin A, fusarium toxins) as examples for naturally occurring contaminants, environmental contaminants (e.g. PCB, TBT), pharmaceuticals (e.g. antibiotics) and pesticides.

It seems difficult to deduce from these data a clear trend. Sometimes, however, residue levels are unexpectedly high in some foods indicating violations against good manufacturing practice.

In a market with an increasingly high variety of foods from all over the world, the control activities of the food safety authorities should be both extensified and intensified to keep the present standard of safety.