

NEW EUROPEAN UNION MAXIMUM LEVEL OF AFLATOXIN IN DRIED FIGS

On November 12th, 2012, Regulation (EC) No. 1881/2006 was amended and replaced with Commission Regulation (EU) No. 1058/2012 as regards maximum levels for aflatoxins in dried figs. The commission established the maximum levels of aflatoxin B1 and total aflatoxins (B1, B2, G1, and G2) at 6 and 10 µg/kg, respectively. This new level has been applicable for all European Union (EU) members beginning November 2012.

Aflatoxins are the naturally secondary metabolites, produced by fungi such as *A. flavus*, *A. parasiticus*, and *A. nomius*. Among 20 similar compounds belonging to an aflatoxin group, only four compounds such as aflatoxin B1, B2, G1, and G2 are commonly found in foods and feeds. *A. flavus* produces only B aflatoxins while the other species produce both B and G aflatoxins. Aflatoxin B1 is a predominant toxin that causes carcinogenicity in humans and is frequently detected. When lactating cattle and other mammal animals ingest the contaminated feed with aflatoxin B1, this toxin can metabolize to aflatoxin M1. Aflatoxin M1 can remain in dairy products after heat processing.

A wide range of food commodities, including cereals, spices, maize, groundnuts (peanuts), pistachios, Brazil nuts, chillies, black pepper, dried fruits and figs are well known as high risk foods for aflatoxin contamination.

In recent years, exported Turkish dried figs have been rejected from the EU resulting in a significant economic loss because the content of aflatoxin in samples was higher than the regulation limit of [Commission Regulation \(EC\) 1881/2006](#) of 2 µg/kg for aflatoxin B1 and 4 µg/kg for total aflatoxin (B1, B2, G1 and G2). In regulation EC 1881/2006 dried figs were classified in the group of dried fruits. Codex Alimentarius classified dried figs separately from the other products and established a maximum level of total aflatoxin for ready-to-eat figs at 10 µg/kg, excluding the other figs products.



Since there was a different maximum level of total aflatoxin between Codex and EU regulation, the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) and the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) studied the effect of total aflatoxin exposure in dried figs. The results of the study showed that an increase in the total aflatoxin level of dried figs from 4 µg/kg to 10 µg/kg would not adversely affect public health. Therefore, the Commission Regulation (EC) 1881/2006 was amended and replaced with [Commission Regulation \(EC\) 1058/2012](#) in order to harmonize both regulations maximum levels for aflatoxin in dried figs.

Since aflatoxin B1 is still the most hazardous aflatoxin, the regulation EC 1058/2012 still requires monitoring of aflatoxin B1 separately from total aflatoxin and revised the maximum level of aflatoxin B1 corresponded to a new limitation of total aflatoxin in dried figs. Based on the data on occurrence of aflatoxin in dried figs collected since 2005, the ratio of the aflatoxin B1 content / total aflatoxin is average on 0.6 rather than the 50% of total aflatoxin previously assumed. Consequently, the new maximum level of aflatoxin B1 in dried figs was established at 6 µg/kg.

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