

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

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Report Name: Ghana supports ECOWAS push for MRL of Aflatoxin in Peanut at 10 ppb

Country: Ghana

Post: Accra

Report Category: Sanitary/Phytosanitary/Food Safety, Agriculture in the News

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Report Highlights:

Having pegged its nationally acceptable limit of aflatoxin in peanut at 10 parts per billion (ppb) as far back as 2018, Ghana could well be leading, and not just supporting the regional block's preference of setting the MRL for aflatoxin in peanut at 10 ppb.

Ghana “supports” ECOWAS’ push for MRL of Aflatoxin in Peanut at 10 ppb

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Though Ghana Standards Authority (GSA), the nationally mandated regulatory institution, had set this national threshold for aflatoxin in peanuts in 2018, there was no policy framework to ensure effective application of the standard until Wednesday May 4, 2022, when the GOG announced the Cabinet’s approval of a policy framework for the regulation of aflatoxin in the food value chain.

Aflatoxins and the major crops at risk in Ghana

Aflatoxins are naturally occurring toxic metabolites produced by the fungi *Aspergillus flavus* and *Aspergillus parasiticus* that affect the safety of food and feed in tropical and subtropical regions of the world, including Ghana.

Aflatoxin is a major cause of ill health and lost trade opportunities in many African countries, including Ghana where solutions have been sought for decades. It has been reported that consuming aflatoxin-contaminated food causes stunting in children and increases the risk of liver cancer in adults.

In Ghana, corn and peanut are the crops with the highest aflatoxin levels. In 2018, the GSA reviewed the acceptable limit of aflatoxin for peanut from 20 ppb to 10 ppb (GSA Standards Catalogue GS 313:2018). However, levels over 50 ppb are a common occurrence. This move became necessary because Ghana had received notifications from major trading partners regarding detections of unacceptable aflatoxins levels in exported peanuts and peanut products (especially peanut butter).

Aflatoxins can only be quantitatively detected through laboratory analysis but rapid test kits and ultra violet (UV) lights can be used to qualitatively detect the presence of aflatoxins in food and feed.



Aspergillus moulds in peanuts



Aspergillus moulds in corn

Maximum Regulatory Limits (MRLs) of aflatoxins in selected foods in Ghana

Like many food safety hazards, maximum regulatory limits have been set for aflatoxins in food and feed. It has been established that foods that contain aflatoxin levels below the maximum regulatory limits will pose negligible health risks to humans and animals. Table 1 shows the regulatory limits or standards set for aflatoxins in some foods in Ghana.

Table 1 Ghana's standards for Aflatoxin in food

Commodity	Maximum level ($\mu\text{g}/\text{kg}$)		Ghana Standard
	Total aflatoxins	Aflatoxin B1	
Corn	15	-	GS 211
Peanut	10	5	GS 313
Sorghum	10	5	GS 96
Rice	10	5	GS 765
Soybean	15	-	GS 1039
Cowpea	4	-	GS 1004
Peanut butter	4		GS 49

Source: Omari et al., 2020. Aflatoxins and their Management in Ghana: A Situational Analysis. FARA Research Report 5(20): PP 81

Economic and trade effects of Aflatoxin

Economic losses occur when aflatoxin-contaminated products are rejected by importing countries or when badly damaged and contaminated products are discarded. This leads to food loss and food insecurity. It has been estimated that Africa loses up to \$670m annually due to aflatoxin contamination. Some Ghanaian food exports have been rejected by the European Union Member States due to high levels of aflatoxin. Prior to reviewing the aflatoxin threshold for peanut in 2018, there had been several alerts issued by the European Commission's Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) on aflatoxins in products exported from Ghana to the EU.

The highest number of notifications recorded on aflatoxins was 33 in 2006. Various products were involved as follows: peanuts (2), peanut butter (18), kebab powder (7), *agushie* (3), *ogbono* (1), and chili powder (2). Per the RASFF 2004 annual report, a total of 219 notifications were received concerning aflatoxin in peanut and derived products out of which 14 was from Ghana. In that report, Ghana was mentioned among the top 10 countries with high incidence of aflatoxin in peanut and corn products.

According to data from the Ghana Export Promotion Authority (GEPA), the major destinations of Ghana's peanut butter have been the European Union (i.e. Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, United Kingdom); ECOWAS (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Guinea, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo) and the United States.

The GEPA reports that the number of EU countries importing peanut and peanut products has decreased sharply since 2008. And aflatoxins contamination has been suspected as being largely responsible for the observed decrease in the number of EU destinations.

Clearly then, Ghana's motivation to advance the course of pegging the CODEX MRL for aflatoxin in peanut at 10 ppb is to protect its trade interest by avoiding rejection of its exports to the EU market.

End of report.

Attachments:

No Attachments.