

Small Countries and the Dioxin Scandal: How to Control Imported Food?

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The aspiration of the countries in transition to join the developed European countries resulted in opening their borders and several-fold increase in import, especially of food products. The imported foods are less expensive than domestic ones, but their quality is often highly questionable. In analyzing the safety of these products for human health, small countries encounter at least two sets of problems. One is related to legal provisions on the parameters to be analyzed, whenever new requirements emerge in practice, like the latest one on dioxin. The other, even more difficult set of problems, is related to the expensive equipment needed for the monitoring of foodstuff safety, the procurement of which exceeds the financial possibilities of these countries. For example, from June 11 until July 31, 1999, during the so-called European dioxin crisis, a total of 58 foodstuffs produced in Belgium, Netherlands, and France between January 19 and March 3, 1999, were referred to the Department of Health Ecology, Zagreb Institute of Public Health, the only laboratory authorized for identification of polychlorinated dibenzodioxins and dibenzofurans in the Republic of Croatia. In 40 samples, the level of dioxin was below the detection limit of 0.5 ng – international toxic equivalents per kg fat (ng-I-TEQ/kg fat), whereas in 18 positive samples the level of dioxin did not exceed the limit of 5 ng-I-TEQ/kg fat for the foodstuff commercial usability. Although highly contaminated products have not yet appeared on the Croatian market, recent developments in Europe have clearly pointed to the need of establishing an authorized laboratory for dioxins in the Republic of Croatia or in the region.

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