POSITION PAPER
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Food and Feed Safety Omnibus: The EU Maximum Residue Level Policy

EU Maximum Residue Levels (MRLs) are essential trading standards and are set through a scientific, risk-based assessment that ensures residues on food and feed are safe for consumers.

Maintaining the current risk-based MRL framework is critical to protect consumer safety, provide legal certainty for farmers and companies, support compliance with WTO rules, and safeguard the competitiveness of the EU agri-food value chain and stable international trade. CropLife Europe therefore does not support shifting MRL-setting under Regulation (EC) No 396/2005 away from a risk-based approach towards a hazard-based system.

Any proposal to fundamentally change the MRL framework should be preceded by a comprehensive impact assessment, considering different options, relevant scientific evidence and alternative risk management measures, and fully assessing impacts on competitiveness, trade, food security, prices, international standards and supply chains.

Background

In December 2025, the European Commission presented a Food & Feed Safety Omnibus proposal amending, amongst others, Regulation (EC) No 396/2005 on Maximum Residue Levels.
The EU MRL framework plays a dual role. MRLs function as trading standards that provide predictability for farmers, food business operators and international partners, thereby supporting resilient and affordable food supply chains. At the same time, they ensure dietary safety of expected residues on food and feed, assessed via robust scientific risk assessment. Any changes to this framework therefore warrant careful consideration.

CropLife Europe supports maintaining the current risk-based framework and considers that any change should be evidence-led and assessed for impacts on supply, competitiveness and trade. CropLife Europe remains concerned about the proposed deviation from the consumer safety assessment and in particular shifting toward a hazard-based approach to MRL setting through the introduction of a subparagraph to Article 14(2) of Regulation (EC) No 396/2005.

Residue assessment must remain risk-based and science-driven

Regulation (EC) No 396/2005 governs how MRLs are derived based on two aspects: residue data reflecting authorised use and a dietary exposure assessment covering all consumer groups, including vulnerable populations. This risk-based approach compares estimated dietary intake with established health-based guidance values, ensuring that residues permitted on food and feed are safe for consumers.

Proposals that would set MRLs on grounds other than consumer safety, including at the limit of quantification (often described as a “technical zero”) based on hazard properties or cut-off criteria, would depart from established risk assessment principles and risk undermining legal certainty and trade-consistent outcomes.

Trade and food security implications

The EU is structurally dependent on imports for a wide range of agricultural commodities and inputs that cannot be produced, or only to a very limited extent, within the Union (e.g. coffee, tea, spices, soy, cocoa, tropical and

off-season produce)[1]. Predictable, science-based MRL setting aligned with international standards underpin stable supply chains for the EU food and feed processing sector. Introducing 'technical zero' MRLs for certain substances risks disrupting established trade flows, excluding safe food from the EU market, increasing compliance costs and putting upward pressure on consumer prices.

EU farmers competitiveness

Since 2009, the EU has increasingly applied a hazard-based regulatory system for crop protection active substances while most trading partners remain risk-based. This policy change has contributed to a shrinking toolbox: 89 active substances have been lost in the past 6.5 years. There is limited evidence that mirror measures improve competitiveness. They may instead raise costs, disrupt supply chains and increase retaliatory measures[2]. These effects should be fully assessed, including impacts on farmers, consumers and trade in the Commission's impact assessment.

International and development considerations

MRL policies that are more trade-restrictive than necessary can increase the risk of disputes and retaliatory responses. They may also disproportionately affect developing country exporters and smallholders operating under different agronomic conditions and authorised tools. This would run counter to broader EU objectives on sustainable development and international cooperation.

Technical improvements

The Omnibus proposal includes targeted technical adjustments that could improve the functioning of the MRL system, including clearer terminology and possibility to set permanent MRLs based on monitoring data, with appropriate review provisions. These changes would enhance efficiency and legal clarity and are consistent with the simplification objective.

Simplifying procedures to improve predictability

In the spirit of simplification, streamlining the adoption of technical, science-based MRL measures would improve predictability for operators and trade partners, reduce avoidable delays, and support resilient supply chains. Consumer protection would remain anchored in robust EFSA risk assessment and established health-based guidance values.

[1] Infographics on the international trade of commodities are available on the CLE website.
[2] Stoll, P.-T., Rudloff, B., Mensah, K., & Ahmad, Z. (2025). 'Mirroring': The scope and limitations of EU trade agreements and autonomous actions. European Parliament. https://doi.org/10.2861/2061247