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FSSAI asks officials to check if pulses have glyphosate

The food safety authority has asked officials to, every 15 days, find out if the “cancer causing” herbicide is present in the pulses imported

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By Vibha Varshney (<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/author/vibha-varshney-50>)

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 In 2015, the International Agency for Research on Cancer labelled glyphosate as “probably carcinogenic”. Credit: Getty Images

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India has asked its imports division to check consignment of pulses for the presence of herbicide glyphosate. These samples would be tested by regional laboratories and the results have to be shared with FSSAI every 15 days, says the order dated October 12.

"This is a small step in the right direction," says Kavitha Kuruganti of Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture. Now they should take up frequent testing of Indian samples too given the amount of illegal use of glyphosate in the country, she adds.

Since India does not have any set standards for maximum residual limits for glyphosate, the authority has decided to use the standards set by Codex Alimentarius, a joint committee set by the World Health Organization (WHO) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). These standards allow MRL of 2 mg/kg in in beans and 5 mg/kg for lentils and peas.

In soybean, which has glyphosate-tolerant varieties, Codex has set the standard at 20 mg/kg. However, this is much higher than MRLs indicated in the draft notification that was released on December 27, 2017 in India. According to this notification, MRL was set at 1 mg/kg, 0.01 mg per kg and 0.05 mg per kg for tea, rice, meat and meat products respectively. The final notification is yet to be issued. In India, glyphosate is allowed only in tea plantations (<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/coverage/agriculture/the-real-weed-61174>).

"Lack of domestic regulation doesn't cancel out such a dire need. It becomes a cause for domestic regulation and residue testing," says D Narasimha Reddy, director of Pesticide Action Network India (PAN), a coalition against pesticides which is demanding a ban on the use of this herbicide.

In 2015, the International Agency for Research on Cancer, an agency under the WHO, labelled it "probably carcinogenic" and implicated it in non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. The use of glyphosate is linked to adverse effects on kidney, liver damage, changes in gut microflora, cancer, endocrine disruption, neurological damage and immune system dysfunction. For example, polyethoxylated tallow amine (POEA) used as an adjuvant to increase the efficacy of glyphosate has been found to be 3,450 times more toxic to human embryonic kidney cells than the herbicide itself.

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