

Advice 28-2009 of the Scientific Committee of the FASFC on the quality of irrigation water used in primary plant production in terms of food safety.

The present advice aims to identify hazards and assess risks, in terms of food safety, possibly associated with the use of water for irrigation in primary plant production, and to formulate recommendations for the management of these risks.

The Scientific Committee notes the lack of accurate data to conduct a risk assessment regarding the influence of irrigation on food safety of plant products. The Scientific Committee therefore advocates that knowledge in this area should be generated through scientific research.

The Scientific Committee reminds the general principle that the primary responsibility, in terms of food safety, rests with the farmer/vegetable grower who uses a particular type of water to irrigate his crops. The latter should make every effort to prevent that cultivated and irrigated plant products become contaminated, in accordance with Belgian and European legislations. Therefore, in the context of self-control and good agricultural practices, he must assess any risks eventually associated with the irrigation of plant products that he cultivates and, if necessary, he should take precautionary measures to control any risk of contamination of plant products that he cultivates and irrigates.

To assist the farmer/vegetable grower to control the risks potentially associated with irrigation, and despite the lack of accurate data, the Scientific Committee makes several recommendations, based among other things, on recommendations of the WHO. The most important recommendation concerns the ban of untreated wastewater use (= non-purified) for irrigation. Groundwater, rainwater or surface water (or a combination thereof), which has been previously stored or not in pits or in open or closed tanks, possibly recycled after previous use, may be used for irrigation if it has been demonstrated by a risk assessment that risks to food safety are controlled. Microbiological guidelines are proposed.

The full text is available on this website in dutch and in french, respectively under the section “Wetenschappelijk Comité/Adviezen” and “Comité scientifique/Avis”.