

## **Advice 25-2013 of the Scientific Committee of the FASFC on the assessment of food safety risks of the effects of flooding**

The Scientific Committee has assessed the food safety risks of the effects of flooding in Belgium.

Given the diversity in (micro)biological or chemical contaminants which may be involved in flooding and given the specific conditions under which flooding may occur (season, weather, location), it is recommended that a case by case (site-specific) risk assessment is performed of the human and animal consumption of flooded products. Indeed, it is necessary to consider the origin of the flood water, its contamination profile, the plant type (root or leafy vegetables...), the destination of flooded plants (feed, food, raw consumption or processed...) or the type of animal products (milk, eggs, meat, farmed fish...).

The Scientific Committee makes several recommendations in order to minimize, in case of flooding, the public health risks resulting from the consumption of primary plant or animal products from flooded areas.

In case of direct contact with the edible portion of fruits and vegetables with flood water shortly (up to 2 weeks) before harvest, it is recommended to destroy products intended for raw consumption, because of the risk of contamination. For periods longer than 2 weeks before harvest or for not-ready-to-eat plant products, additional monitoring covering at least the hygiene indicators and possibly relevant pathogenic micro-organisms or chemical contaminants is recommended. The Scientific Committee also presents a list of chemical or (micro)biological contaminants which could potentially be introduced in case of flooding. Based on this monitoring and on the knowledge gathered about specific conditions (type of flood water, location of the flooded area, type of primary product and destination of the product, seasonal and weather conditions), the specific risks of microbiological and/or chemical contamination have then to be assessed case-by-case.

In addition, it is recommended that users of flooded agricultural land and the processing industry and trade pay always increased attention to good working practices and verification, such as for example the respect of waiting times before harvest or before the reuse of farmland, the control of the quality of irrigation water, the monitoring of the quality and hygiene of the harvested products delivered for further processing.

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