EU Revises Lead and Cadmium Limits

The European Commission has again taken aim to reduce the presence of heavy metals in food by setting new limits for lead and cadmium in certain food products. Lead and cadmium, along with other heavy metals like arsenic and mercury, are naturally occurring and can be present in foods, cosmetics, and dietary supplements. Studies have suggested they may pose a health risk, particularly to neurological development in children.

In revising its standards for lead, the Commission considered the European Food Safety Authority’s (EFSA) 2010 opinion on lead in food and recent data from the Codex Alimentarius Commission to determine that limits for infant food, salt, and wild fungi merited revision. For cadmium, the Commission considered a 2009 EFSA opinion about health risks of cadmium in food and other new data showing that cadmium levels can be further reduced. The new limits cover a variety of products, including garlic, berries, nuts, fish, and salt. The new measures for lead will take effect on August 30, 2021, and the limits for...
cadmium will take effect the following day. Foodstuffs that were lawfully placed on the market before the new limits go into effect may remain on the market until February 28, 2022.

- Officials in the U.S. have also increased scrutiny on heavy metals in food, particularly in baby foods. In particular, FDA’s Toxic Elements Working Group seeks to identify vulnerable populations, prioritize toxicity concerns, and improve testing for heavy metals in foods. We will continue to monitor and report on updates in this area.

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