

Maximum Residue Limits (MRL) Policy Team

**IGTC**

International Grain Trade Coalition

Briefing Document
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Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs) for crop protection products are a growing cause of trade disruption for grains, oilseeds, and agri-bulks. Barriers created by inconsistent, unjustified, and unevenly applied MRLs create risk and can have negative consequences for farmers, exporters, importers, and consumers. There has been increasing demand for a global collaborative effort to tackle this issue and create an environment that is more supportive of trade.

Attention to MRLs is increasing in various global venues such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) through the 25th anniversary of the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement) and the 60th Anniversary of Codex in 2023. Other important venues have been the FAO, Interamerican Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), the East Africa Community (EAC), and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).

The MRL Policy Team is responsible for developing a common position, advocacy strategy, and action plan for IGTC's advocacy on MRLs. Reporting to the Management Council (MC), the Policy Team guides IGTC's efforts to ensure MRLs do not impede the movement of grain.

The MRL Policy Team's function includes the following:

- I. Analyze the regulatory environment to determine existing and potential barriers to the movement of grain as a result of domestic and international MRL policies as well as upcoming changes to domestic policies in key markets that may result in impediments to trade.
- II. Review opportunities for MRL policy modernization including the harmonization of MRLs internationally, advocate for a more productive Codex MRL system, and to review systemic issues in MRL setting nationally or internationally. The key focus remains on standard setting based on the recognition of the principle of sound science and developing recommendations for IGTC positions.
- III. Review the positions of, and materials prepared by, IGTC members. Leverage previously prepared materials to develop IGTC documents.
- IV. Consider existing forums, coalitions, etc. that advocate MRL policy modernization and recommend to MC if IGTC should support/join these initiatives.
- V. Identify gaps that exist in policy development and advocacy where IGTC can play a leadership role, including through the creation of a global coalition and/or binding agreement on the recognition of scientific standards and taking a proactive approach to regulatory approvals for key products in key markets.

▶ Advocacy in multilateral environments and like-minded groups

IGTC continues to support awareness raising in international venues when relevant. WTO remains a key venue with country-led work taking place at both the SPS and TBT committees, as well as the Goods Council. Key was “MC12”, the 12th Ministerial Conference of WTO held in June 2022.

IGTC was supported the SPS Committee Declaration which called for creation of a work programme to meet current challenges in implementing SPS agreement and impacts of emerging pressures. IGTC welcomed the outcome with consensus achieved and continues to advocate to include “MRL issues” within the wider thematic group on food security and sustainable food systems.

▶ Advocacy in multilateral environments and like-minded groups

- IGTC is one of 29 agri-value chain members, administered and led by the International Agri-Food Network (IAFN). The IAFN Coalition is working with the Codex Secretariat, as well as Codex members to increase the number of scientific experts available, to encourage a more productive Codex, and to find ways for a more efficient decision-making process.
- IAFN organised a panel on Science and Innovation - Improving Codex Alimentarius Processes to Support the Application of Science & Innovation for Food Safety at FAO and another during the WTO Public Forum in September promoting the benefits of international standards for international trade. Trade facilitation is one of the key components of the IAFN position paper. An overview of the IAFN “asks” for Codex enhancement is as follows:

1. Increase availability of scientific experts
2. Secure consistent budgetary resources
3. Reduce the delay between the registration of a compound and establishment of a Codex MRL
4. Increase use of crop grouping and representative commodities
5. Strengthen implementation of JMPR and CCPR procedures and more efficient communication
6. Elevate the trade perspective at Codex

REFERENCES

1. IGTC policy document: <https://bit.ly/3MGjtSA>
2. Volume 2 of USITC report on MRLs (March 2021): <https://bit.ly/388EaxM>
3. WTO SPS Committee report (November 2021): <https://bit.ly/3yNiHz4>
4. WTO Negotiating Group on Trade and Environment report (November 2021) : <https://bit.ly/3MAyZPM>
5. Organization of African, Caribbean, and Pacific States (OACPS) Ministerial statement, including a section on agriculture (November 2021) <https://bit.ly/3wAAWGs>
6. IAFN advocacy letter 2020 in response to WTO statement on MRL delays and the need for increased capacity at Codex Alimentarius (IGTC endorsed and signed): <https://bit.ly/3yTq7kj>
7. WTO Thematic session on MRLs Public Recording (March 2022): <https://bit.ly/3wECOha>
8. WTO SPS draft Ministerial statement for MC12 in June 2022: <https://bit.ly/3VyFli3>
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