

ESA FACTSHEET

on ETO/ECH RESIDUES IN CULINARY HERBS AND SPICES

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European Spice Association (ESA) member companies and national associations ensure that foods intended for distribution are in accordance with the general principles and requirements of European food law and safe for human consumption.

The position of the European Spice Association (ESA) on this is that the intentional use of ETO for products intended to be placed on the EU market, is illegal.

Residue of ETO/ECH can however sometimes be found in products. Sources of residue vary: i.e. ECH residue, it is considered that low levels can be naturally generated from within the growing environment; in non-EU markets, ETO treatment is frequently used, which can lead to a risk of cross-contaminations during processing, storage and shipment (see technical annex).

Managing the risk of cross contamination, especially from overseas suppliers that rely on this type of treatment process, during storage and shipping, should be included in the hazard analysis critical control points (HACCP) of all ESA member companies and their suppliers.

Available (scientific) information leads us to believe that, when low levels of ECH residues are found in a product, they are most likely the result of natural generation, cross contamination or environmental contamination, rather than the outcome of an intentional Ethylene Oxide treatment of products bound for the European market.

ESA members are obviously required to abide by European legislation, including the obligation to report results above Maximum Residue Level¹ (MRL) to national authorities. Furthermore, if an ESA member company finds low levels of ECH residues, which are likely to be present due to a contamination, they are advised to undertake their own risk assessment to understand the root cause for the levels they are detecting.

Clearly, if a product contains ETO or ECH residues above the legal MRLs, it is not compliant for the EU market.

¹ Current MRLs

Commodity	EU Maximum residue level
spices	0.10 ppm
herbs	0.05 ppm
dehydrated vegetables (ginger, garlic, onions, paprika, tomatoes)	0.02 ppm