

What are Maximum Residues Limits (MRLs) and Who Sets Them?

What are MRLs?

A Maximum Residue Limit (MRL) is the maximum concentration of a residue of a pharmacologically active substance that can legally be present on or in a food. Assessing substances for safety and setting MRLs helps assure the safety of our food.

Before a pharmacologically active substance can be authorised for use as a veterinary medicine in a food-producing species, it must be assessed for safety under the procedure in Regulation 2377/90. Substances are then listed in annexes:

Annex I – substances where MRLs have been set:

Annex II – substances where on toxicological grounds, no MRL is necessary if a substance is used as directed;

Annex III – substance for which a provisional MRL has been set;

Annex IV – substances that are banned from use in food-producing animals because no safe limit can be set.

Who sets MRLs?

They are set by international bodies of scientific experts. In the European Union, the Committee for Medicinal Products for Veterinary Use (CVMP) sets some MRLs. More information on CVMP can be found at:

<http://www.emea.europa.eu/htms/general/contacts/CVMP/CVMP.html>

MRLs for some feed additives, such as Lasalocid are set by the FEEDAP panel of European Food Safety Authority. Their website can be found at:

<http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/science/feedap.html>

MRLs are also set by the Codex Alimentarius; this is part of Food and Agriculture Organisation and World Health Organisation and it sets standards for food. More information on Codex can be found at:

http://www.codexalimentarius.net/web/index_en.jsp

Currently, while the European Union Member States are represented at Codex, the MRLs it sets are not accepted for authorizing pharmacologically active substances as veterinary medicines in the EU.