



Information for primary producers

PFAS contamination

Overview

This publication provides information relevant to the production and sale of primary produce from areas that have been affected by contamination with per and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS).

This publication does not deal with the effect of PFAS on human health. For questions related to human health effects, please contact your General Practice (GP) healthcare provider or Queensland Health on 13HEALTH (13 43 25 84).

What are PFAS?

PFAS are a group of manufactured chemicals that have been used since the 1950s in a range of common household products and specialty applications, including in the manufacture of non-stick cookware, plastics, fabric, furniture and carpet stain protection applications and food packaging.

PFAS are very stable chemicals that take a long time to naturally breakdown and can persist for a long time in the environment.

The substances are not manufactured in Australia and are no longer directly used in consumer products.

As well as consumer products, PFAS have also been previously used in some industrial processes, including in certain types of firefighting foams.

Where does PFAS contamination occur?

In recent years, PFAS have been detected in underground water and soils in areas near facilities where firefighting foams containing PFAS have been used. Most commonly, this is in areas near major military and civilian airfields where firefighting training takes place. A list of areas in Queensland where PFAS have been detected in soils or water, or where investigations are currently underway, can be found online at www.qld.gov.au (search 'PFAS in Queensland'). Plants and animals can accumulate PFAS where they are exposed to PFAS contaminated water, soils or feed over time.

Do PFAS affect the health of agriculture animals or plants?

Investigations on the effects of soil and water contaminated with PFAS have focused on whether the accumulated levels of PFAS in agricultural production animals or crops exposed to PFAS may provide a pathway for human exposure rather than whether these accumulation levels have any impacts on animal and plant health.

Producers may however wish to take the precautionary approach and minimise exposure of your animals to PFAS-contaminated water and feed. Consult your veterinary professional if you are concerned about the health of your animals. Stay informed about the latest findings and guidelines on PFAS at <https://www.qld.gov.au/environment/management/environmental/incidents/pfas>

What should I do if I suspect that PFAS are causing health problems in my livestock?

If you suspect that your livestock have been affected by PFAS contamination, you should contact your private veterinarian. Your private veterinarian can investigate the possible causes of the changes seen in your stock.

Can I sell produce produced in areas contaminated by PFAS?

There are currently no restrictions in place in Queensland on the sale or movement of plant or animal products produced in areas affected by PFAS contamination.

The Department of Primary Industries acts in accordance with relevant policy and legislation and will advise producers in affected areas if this situation changes.

Will PFAS affect the breeding value (genetics) of stud animals?

No. Toxicology data suggests that PFAS are not genotoxic and therefore genetic traits will not be affected.

Are there standards for PFAS levels in agricultural products in Australia?

There are currently no standards set for PFAS in agricultural products or food in Australia. Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ), the agency responsible for food standards in Australia, has reviewed risks associated with PFAS in human diets and has not recommended any food regulatory measures at this stage.

Does PFAS contamination represent a risk to international trade in agricultural products?

The European Union (EU) has set standards for maximum limits of specific PFAS chemicals in cattle products. On 1 January 2023, the Commission Regulation (EU) 2022/2388 on maximum levels of perfluoroalkyl substances in certain foodstuffs came into force, establishing maximum levels for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in certain foods sold in the European Union.

All cattle that go into that market must be registered as part of a closed scheme called the European Union Cattle Accreditation Scheme (EUCAS). The EUCAS system is managed by the Australian Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF).

There are currently no other restrictions in place on the international trade of agricultural products from an area identified with PFAS contamination.

What can I do to minimise the presence of PFAS in my livestock or plant products?

The main source of PFAS contamination of livestock and crops is through the use of contaminated groundwater for drinking or irrigation. Exposure to PFAS can be minimised by using only non-contaminated water in the production of plant and animal products.

As PFAS are known to accumulate in animal tissue it is likely that PFAS concentrations will increase in older animals. PFAS contamination can be minimised by restricting the time that animals are exposed to contaminated water and feed.

How can I find out if my water, soil or feed is contaminated by PFAS?

If your business or property is in an area identified as being affected by PFAS contamination, and you have a specific international market with PFAS restrictions, you may wish to request the entity responsible for the contamination undertake testing at your site. Alternatively, there are commercial laboratories that can undertake analysis for a fee.

Laboratories accredited by NATA to test for PFAS can be found online at www.nata.com.au (select 'Find Organisation', then in the 'Search accredited organisations' keyword search type 'PFOS' or 'PFAS' and click search).

Can my customers refuse to buy my produce, or offer a lower price, because it was produced in a PFAS contaminated area?

The decision to purchase a product, and the price offered, are commercial decisions negotiated between the producer and the customer.

PFAS contamination has cost my business money. Can I seek compensation for my losses?

If your business has suffered an economic loss as a result of PFAS contamination you may be able to seek compensation from the entity responsible for the contamination.

What is the Queensland Government doing to protect agricultural producers and industries?

The Queensland Government is working actively to ensure that the impact of PFAS contamination on agricultural industries and producers is minimised, and that all Queensland laws and regulations are complied with.

Queensland Government agencies are working with industry and Australian Government food and trade agencies to ensure that food safety and export implications are managed in a timely and responsible manner.

To avoid future contamination, the Queensland Government banned the future use of firefighting foams containing PFAS in July 2016. Existing stocks of the foams are being phased out—they are being withdrawn from service at commercial and industrial premises and replaced with alternatives.

The Queensland Government has a coordinated and active approach to ensuring that those entities responsible for PFAS contamination comply with their obligations.

Where can I find more information?

Further information about PFAS contamination can be found at:

Queensland Government

Department of Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation

Information about contaminated sites is available online at www.qld.gov.au (search 'PFAS in Queensland').

Queensland Health

Anyone concerned about their own health or that of family members should talk to their GP or call 13HEALTH (13 43 25 84).

Department of Primary Industries

www.daf.qld.gov.au

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Australian Government

Australian Government PFAS Taskforce

Information about Australian Government actions to manage PFAS contamination, and national guidance and advice.

www.pfas.gov.au

The information in this fact sheet is current as at 22 October 2024 and will be updated if the situation changes. Visit publications.qld.gov.au/dataset/information-for-primary-producers-pfas-contamination for the latest version.