

Guidelines for obtaining stored potato samples for MRL testing

For the assessment of compliance with a Maximum Residue Level (MRL), a sample must be obtained in the appropriate way. The sampling procedure is detailed in European Commission directive 2002/63/EC, which requires that a random sample must be taken for each tested lot. This, together with input from HSE's Chemicals Regulation Division, has been used to draw up these guidelines for **sampling potatoes from lots of 500kg or more**.

Summary of legal and CRD requirements

A 'lot' is defined as a quantity of food delivered at one time that has the same: origin, producer, variety, packer, type of packing, markings.

A sample must:

- Consist of a minimum of 12 tubers.¹
- Tubers must be obtained from at least ten different places.
- Weigh a minimum of 1.2 kg.²
- All the potatoes that make up a sample must be from the same batch number/lot. Record the batch number/lot code (e.g. Desiree from Ravens Field in Store 2) and other available traceability information.
- The sample must be tubers of the same variety. Mixed samples are not acceptable.
- Only potatoes that are being marketed or used or available for marketing or use (i.e. outside the withholding period for any treatments) should be sampled.
- The sample must be in a good condition with no evidence of rotting or moulds.
- All reasonable steps should be taken to avoid cross-contamination e.g. from other lots.
- Tubers should be sampled by ungloved hand³. Do not wear rubber (latex) gloves as they could contaminate the sample.

¹ The legal requirement is 10 tubers, but it recommended that 12 tubers are taken.

² The legal requirement is 1kg, but it is recommended that the sample weighs a minimum of 1.2kg.

³ This is not a specific legal requirement, but is recommended to meet the general requirement to avoid contamination.

- Samples should be obtained randomly. Where a random sample cannot be obtained, then sampling should take place from the accessible portion (see page 4)
- Samples should be delivered promptly, unwashed (or without further washing) and unprocessed to a UKAS accredited laboratory.
- If the samples have been subject to washing prior to the time of sampling, information on this should be provided.
- The samples should be sent to the laboratory in a clean, new (unused), inert container, such as polythene wrapping/bag, which provides secure protection from contamination, damage and leakage. The container should be sealed and securely labelled.

Sample information

For each sample, record all key information for the store and lot being sampled. Ensure this information is matched with the result from the analyst and retained for due diligence purposes.

OBTAINING A SAMPLE SAFELY FROM A POTATO STORE

Sampling must be carried out with due regard to health and safety including the Working at Height Regulations 2005, which may limit access to some parts of stores.

Box stores

It is recommended that one tuber should be taken from each of 12 boxes.

Tubers should be obtained from varying depths within boxes. Only one or two surface tubers should be sampled. Only when a limited number of boxes are accessible, should more than one tuber per box be sampled.

- If all box heights are accessible, using a scissor lift for example, identify at least 10 boxes (which is the legal requirement but 12 recommended) randomly on the front, back or both faces. Take at least one tuber from each box.
- If a series of fixed, stepped ladders is in the store (pictured), sample sufficient tubers from all available box heights to make up the 12 tuber sample.
- Where there is not safe access available to boxes more than 2 boxes high, it is considered that it is unlikely that a fully representative sample can be obtained. When a lot is not fully accessible the law permits an inspector to take a sample from the accessible parts of the lot. In this example, an inspector could choose to take from the accessible boxes. Alternatively (time and co-operation of the store operators permitting) boxes could be temporarily moved to ground level, for safe sampling, using a fork-lift truck.

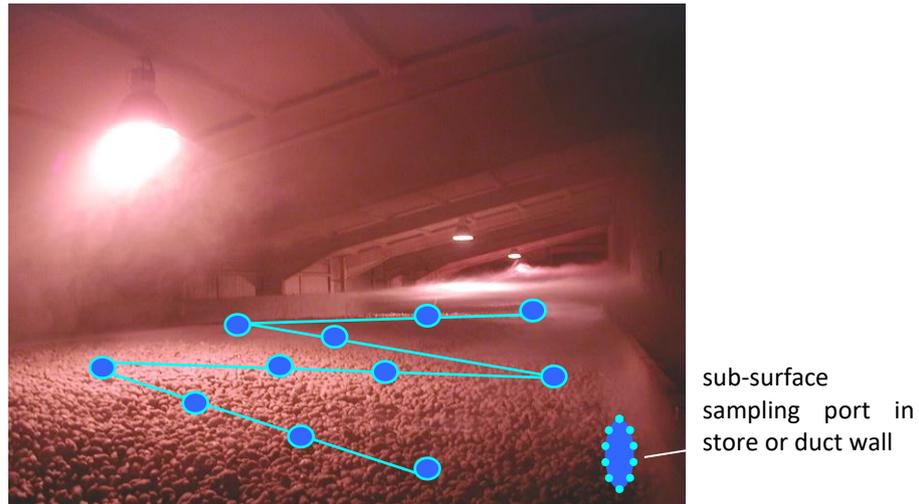


Whichever approach is taken, it is important to record how many boxes the sample was taken from, and whether or not it was possible to access all boxes.

Bulk stores

A 12 tuber sample is required. When a lot is not fully accessible the law permits an inspector to take a sample from the accessible parts of the lot, including taking all samples from a single accessible point.

Assuming complete access, it is recommended that one tuber should be sampled from each of 12 random positions (the legal requirement is at least 10) on the top of the pile. As far as is feasible, tubers should be obtained from varying depths. If sub-surface sampling ports are available, e.g. in the duct wall, it is recommended that a tuber should be sampled from just one of these.



Otherwise, take the sample from accessible points, if necessary taking all 12 tubers from a single point.

Whatever approach is taken, it is important to record how many and what sort of locations the sample was taken from, and whether or not it was possible to access all areas.

General considerations

In both types of store, it may be difficult to get a representative sample because the accessible portion of the lot is a small proportion of all the potatoes stored.

In such cases a sample may be obtained at store loading or unloading, by taking individual tubers at different points in time rather than different locations. This method of sampling is also acceptable legally.

Packing, processing and grading facilities

Samples may be taken for MRL residue testing from packing, processing and grading facilities following the guidelines set out above.

In addition, tubers may be taken from a conveyor over a period of time to obtain a representative sample for the lot. It is important to record if the tubers being taken for analysis are from a washed sample.

Finally, an inspector may sample from any other place in a processing, packing or grading operation and if necessary may sample from a single accessible point. Partial or very limited access may not cause an inspector to select a different lot for sampling.