Imidacloprid residues in farm gate *Solamun lycoperscicum* of Kimira-Oluch Smallholder Farm Improvement Project, Kenya

ABSTRACT

**Aims:** Imidacloprid residues in farm gate tomatoes from Kimira-Oluch Smallholder Farm Improvement Project (KOSFIP) in Homa Bay County, Kenya were determined to evaluate compliance with Codex and EU residue limits.

**Study Design:** Although there were several non-registered tomato farmers in KOSFIP, samples were obtained from 30 out of the registered 34 commercial tomatoes farmers using cross-sectional survey design and simple random sampling method.

**Methodology:**  QuEChERS method for extraction followed by LC-MS/MS was used to determine the concentrations. The levels were compared with the maximum residues limits (MRLS) of EU/Codex.

**Results:**  All samples had detectable residues levels ranging from 0.025 to 0.575 mg $kg^{-1}$. Box plot showed a right skewed distribution, but without outliers. Data were further subjected to standardized normal distribution statistics that revealed that 19 and 28 farms produced tomatoes that satisfied EU and Codex MRL limits respectively. When the general use of imidacloprid was assumed to be uniform among all KOSFIP farms including unregistered farms, 62.9% and 92.92%, were within EU and Codex MRL limits, respectively. Most farmers used GAPs recommended for tomatoes production, although there were 11 and 2 farms with tomatoes whose residues exceeded the EU and Codex limits respectively

**Conclusion:** Some famers did not observe GAPs, resulting into residue levels above the EU and Codex limits. Therefore, strengthening extension services, regular training and surveillance is essential to achieve full compliance to safeguard consumer safety.

**Key words:** *Solamun lycoperscicum;* imidacloprid; residue levels; EU/Codex limits.

1. **INTRODUCTION**

Pesticides are used in agriculture to control pests, and insect-borne diseases 1 for increased agricultural production and profitability 2. Despite toxicity, pesticides are intentionally applied impacting the environment and human health negatively by causing ailments like cancer, endocrine disruption and reproductive damage 3. The degree of pesticide toxicity depends on quantity applied and route of exposure 4, with consumption as the primary route compared to inhalation and contact 5. There is need to regularly evaluate commonly consumed foodstuffs, like tomatoes, whose production require regular use of pesticides e.g. imidacloprid to ensure food safety, and compliance to regulatory guidelines.

Tomato is a leading Kenyan vegetable in terms of production and value after potatoes 6. The vegetable fruit is a source of vitamin C, phosphorus and calcium and has lycopene, which is an anti-inflammatory and an antioxidant that prevents prostate cancer 7. However, tomatoes are susceptible to pests infestations 8, that reduce both quality, and quantity 9. Consequently, pesticides such as imidacloprid are applied to curb pest menace. Imidacloprid, is a registered pesticide in Kenya 10) for insect pests control in tomatoes 11. Despite being among the best-selling pesticides in 2000, European Union banned its use on open field crops in 2018 due to its potential to collapse bee population 12. Imidacloprid is an effective, and wide spectrum pesticide widely used due to its low toxicity and short post application harvest interval. Though it has low toxicity 13, chronic exposure can lead to bioaccumulation in humans causing endocrine disruption, neurotoxicity, reproductive damage, immunologic effects 14.

Kimira Oluch Smallholder Farm Improvement Project, (KOSFIP) is an irrigation scheme project in Homa Bay County, Kenya, established to enable smallholder farmers to grow crops in all seasons 15. KOSFIP experiences high temperatures and humidity, which encourages insect pest infestations 16. The tomato farmers in KOSFIP therefore apply imidacloprid to curb pest infestations 15. It is the preferred pesticide at KOSFIP since it effectively overcomes pest resistance problems 17 and has short pre-harvest interval of only 3 days when used on tomatoes 18. Following good agricultural practices (GAPs) ensures produce complies with food safety requirements. The EU set maximum residue limit (MRL) is 0.3mg/kg 19 while CODEX limit is 0.5mg/kg 20 in tomatoes. In food crops production, farmers who apply GAP usually meet the recommended MRL limits 21, 22. Farmers using imidacloprid as recommended in tomato production and complying with GAPs should therefore have farm gate tomatoes whose MRLs are in compliance with regulatory limits 23. The levels of imidacloprid residues in tomatoes produced at KOSFIP are not documented and it is not known if the farmers are using the GAPs guidelines. This study assessed the imidacloprid residue levels in farm gate tomato fruits produced at KOSFIP and their compliance with GAPs guidelines.

2. **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study was conducted at KOSFIP, along the shores of Lake Victoria, in Homa Bay County, Kenya. (latitudes 0o 20' S and 0o 30' S and longitudes 34o 30' E and 34o 39' E (Figure 1), altitude 1277m amsl), temperatures 18-31℃, humidity 60-75% and evapotranspiration rates 1,800-2,000 mm per annum) 15. KOSFIP is an irrigation farm project 15 where farmers cultivate vegetables, including tomatoes 24. The area receives unreliable biannual rainfall ranging from 740 mm to 1,200 mm, necessitating irrigation using water from Tende (Oluch) and Kibuon (Kimira) rivers. KOSFIP is located on the lowland plains, with generally fertile black cotton soils suitable for agricultural production 25.



*Figure 1: Map of Kimira Oluch, Homa Bay County*

This study used cross-sectional survey design to assess imidacloprid residue levels in farm gate baskets tomatoes. KOSFIP had approximately 600 registered farmers, with 167 doing horticulture, of which 34 were commercially registered tomato farmers. Several farmers are not registered to produce tomatoes, but cultivate the vegetable on small-scale for domestic use and local markets. Sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan 26 table. Cross section survey procedure was used to do sampling. The tomato samples were obtained at farm gates from 30 registered commercial tomatoes producers with ready Ansal variety tomatoes using simple random sampling procedure. One kilogram of freshly harvested tomatoes fruits was collected from each farm gate basket, replicated three times in the same day. The samples were kept in pre-cleaned zip-lock bags and stored at -4$℃$ awaiting analysis.

Samples processing, preparations, extractions and partitioning for imidacloprid analysis was done using Quick Easy Cheap Effective Rugged and Safe (QuEChERS) multi-residue method 27. Tomato samples were chopped into small pieces using stainless steel knife and homogenized with a Stephan Chopper food processor. Approximately 100 g of the homogenized samples were placed in sample containers, then stored at -18$℃$ in readiness for extraction. Ten grams of homogenous wet samples were weighed into 50 mL centrifuge tubes and 50 µL of Malathion D10 (10 ppm) was added as internal standard. One of the control samples was fortified with 10 mg/kg imidacloprid internal standard solution to achieve the 0.01 mg/kg for LC – MS/MS analysis. To the contents in the centrifuge tube, 10.0 mL extraction solvent acetonitrile (MeCN) HPLC grade was added, closed and shaken vigorously by Geno grinder (2010) for 1 minute at 1000 revolutions per minute (rpm). The resulting homogenous mixture in the centrifuge tube was then subjected to liquid-liquid partitioning using 6.5 g of premixed QuEChERS extraction salts (4g magnesium sulphate anhydrous, 1.0 g sodium chloride, 1.0 g tri-sodium citrate dihydrate and 0.5 g sodium hydrogen citrate sesquihydrate). Anhydrous magnesium sulphate was used to remove water and salting out acetonitrile (MeCN); sodium chloride was added to increase selectivity of analyte by reducing amount of co-extracted matrix; trisodium citrate dihydrate and sodium hydrogen citrate sesquihydrate as a citrate buffer for pH adjustment. The tube was closed and immediately shaken vigorously by hand for 1 minute to avoid caking. The mixture was again shaken by Geno grinder (2010) for 1 minute at 1000 rpm then centrifuged for 5 minutes at 3700 rpm at 250C to allow phase separation of the mixture. An aliquot of 500 µL of the mixture was transferred into a 2.0 mL vial, followed by 495 µL of HPLC grade water and 5 µL of injection internal standard dimethoate D6 (10 ppm). The mixture was vortexed to mix for LCMS/MS analysis on Agilent Technologies 1290 Infinity II coupled to a triple quadrupole mass detector (Agilent 6460) using silica- based, reversed-phased C18 column. The column temperature was set at 400C, the injection volume was 3.0 µL using of a robotic auto sampler and the binary solvent elution gradient was as in Table 1 at a flow rate 0.3 ml/min. Limit of detection (LOD) was 0.01 while limit of quantitation (LOQ) was 0.01 mg/kg. The peaks were recorded in the chromatogram and quantified.

**Table 1: Solvent composition timetable**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Series**  | **Time**  | **Elution gradient with 0.01% formic Acid** |
| 1 | 0-3min | 95% Water  | 5% Acetonitrile |
| 2 | 3-7min | 50% Water  | 50% Acetonitrile |
| 3 | 7-15min | 5% Water  | 95% Acetonitrile |

*Note: mobile phase = Acetonitrile and water both with 0.01% formic acid*

The results were subjected to descriptive statistics. A box plot was constructed to determine the distribution and possible outliers 28. Since the sample size was large, the normal distribution statistics (Z-statistics) was used to determine the percent KOSFIP farmers whose farm gate tomatoes had MRLs above or below the EU limit (0.3 mg/kg) 19 and Codex limit (0.5mg/kg) (FAO/WHO, 2004), respectively.

3. **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The imidacloprid residue levels in farm gates tomatoes of KOSFIP ranged from 0.025 to 0.575 mg/kg (Table 2), with mean of 0.242 mg/kg, median of 0.188 mg/kg, standard deviation of 0.175 mg/kg (Table 3).

**Table 2: Imidacloprid residues levels in the farm-gate baskets of tomatoes from KOSFIP area**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Farm  | Mean concentration (mg/kg) | Farm | Mean concentration (mg/kg) |
| F1 | 0.025 | F16 | 0.275 |
| F2 | 0.025 | F17 | 0.025 |
| F3 | 0.175 | F18 | 0.175 |
| F4 | 0.450 | F19 | 0.375 |
| F5 | 0.575 | F20 | 0.175 |
| F6 | 0.325 | F21 | 0.025 |
| F7 | 0.025 | F22 | 0.450 |
| F8 | 0.175 | F23 | 0.250 |
| F9 | 0.300 | F24 | 0.250 |
| F10 | 0.225 | F25 | 0.575 |
| F11 | 0.025 | F26 | 0.325 |
| F12 | 0.175 | F27 | 0.025 |
| F13 | 0.575 | F28 | 0.175 |
| F14 | 0.200 | F29 | 0.175 |
| F15 | 0.550 | F30 | 0.150 |

*Note: F= KOSFIP farms: Limit of Detection (LOD) =0.010 mg/kg: Replicates per farm = 3*

The statistical measures of central tendency and dispersion of imidacloprid residue levels in *Solanum lycopersicum* Ansal variety at farm gate baskets of KOSFIP area are outlined in Table 3.

**Table 3. Measurement of central tendency and dispersion of imidacloprid residue levels in tomato at the farm gate baskets of KOSFIP area**.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **The data points**  | **Value** |
| Minimum | 0.025 |
| 1st Quartile (Q1) | 0.150 |
| Median (Q2) | 0.188 |
| 3rd quartile (Q3) | 0.325 |
| Inter Quartile range | 0.175 |
| Maximum | 0.575 |
| Range | 0.550 |
| Mean  | 0.242 |
| Standard deviation | 0.175 |

The data was used to generate a box plot (Figure 2), that showed a right skewed distribution. There were no outliers demonstrating the KOSFIP tomato farmers were applying almost uniform imidacloprid use practices. Since the sample size was large (30), the data was subjected to z-statistics showed 62.9% of the farms had imidacloprid levels within the EU acceptable MRL (0.3 mg/kg) 19, while 92.92% had acceptable Codex MRL (0.5 mg/kg) 20. Thus 37.1% and 7.1% of the farms had tomatoes exceeding EU 19 and Codex 20 MRL limits, respectively.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **0.0** | **0.05** | **0.1** | **0.15** | **0.2** | **0.25** | **0.3** | **0.35** | **0.4** | **0.45** | **0.5** | **0.55** | **0.6** |

*Figure 2: Farm gate distribution of imidacloprid residues levels in tomatoes at KOSFIP*.

The median imidacloprid residues in the farm gate tomatoes was 0.188 mg/kg (Table 3) demonstrating that most of the farm gate tomatoes had their residues below the EU 19, 29 and Codex 20 acceptable limits. These results were similar to findings at Luckdown, India 30, Mwea 31, Imenti North 32 and Nairobi 33, in Kenya where most of tomatoes samples had residual levels below the EU limit 19, but varied with those from Buuri farms in Kenya 32. Farmers that use GAPs produce crops with within the recommended residues levels 21, 22. Most farms at KOSFIP were producing tomatoes with imidacloprid residues levels conforming to EU limit 19, suggesting good compliance with GAPs. Such trends had been reported in Spain 34 and Wafra and Abdally in Kuwait 35. The KOSFIP farms with tomatoes whose imidacloprid residues levels were above the EU MRL limit were higher than those observed in studies in Kuwait (12.5%) 36 and Spain (4.8%) 37. Therefore, at KOSFIP there is need to intensify trainings and extension services to ensure all farmers comply with MRL requirements.

4. Conclusion

Most KOSFIP tomato famers adhered to Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) in the use of imidacloprid. However, a portion of farmers recorded residue levels exceeding the EU and Codex limits, which cannot be overlooked. This therefore, highlights the need to strengthen surveillance and enhance farmer training to ensure full compliance with GAPs, thereby safeguarding consumer health and safety

**COMPETING INTERESTS DISCLAIMER:**

Authors have declared that they have no known competing financial interests OR non-financial interests OR personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Disclaimer (Artificial intelligence)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

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