

Same Spice, Three Borders: Why a Lot Passes in One Country and Fails in Another

Yash Khatri

Founder, SourcingFrom

Updated 12 Oct 2026 5 min read

Indian spices fail different tests at different borders. In our count of official records from 2021 to September 2026, the EU mostly rejected them for pesticide residues, the US for Salmonella and filth, and Australia almost entirely for Salmonella, so the test panel has to follow the destination.

Key takeaways

- Cumin leads EU notifications on pesticides, black pepper leads US refusals on filth and Salmonella, and chilli drives Australian Salmonella failures.
- Ethylene oxide fell from 43% of Indian spice notifications in the EU in 2021 to 6% in 2025, while other pesticide residues rose from 22% to 54%.
- A clean lab certificate does not release goods from a supplier on a US import alert.
- 70 of 453 EU spice notifications were document problems, often a report that did not match the lot.
- A lot going to two markets needs two test panels.

Because each border is looking for something different. In our count of official records from January 2021 to September 2026, Indian spices failed the EU mostly on pesticide residues, the US mostly on Salmonella and filth, and Australia almost entirely on Salmonella. A spice lot can be clean for one of those questions and fail the other, so a single "export quality" test report rarely covers both.



I'm not going to tell you Indian spices are unsafe. India is the default origin for most of them, and the grading systems are real. The point is narrower and more useful. The test panel has to follow the destination, and the failures differ by spice as well as by border. Our [food import testing guide](#) sets out the method for any food. This post goes spice by spice.

SourcingFrom Intelligence

powered by [Kirnova](#) – the intelligence company

- 01 One product, three hazards.** EU: pesticides in 202 and ethylene oxide in 106 of 453 Indian spice notifications, Salmonella in 19. US: Salmonella on 690 and filth on 355 of 1,320 refused spice lines. Australia: Salmonella in 77 of 88 failing spice records. *(Our count of RASFF, FDA import refusals and DAFF failing food reports, January 2021 to September 2026)*
-

02 The EU's problem moved. Ethylene oxide was in 43% of Indian spice notifications in 2021 and 6% in 2025, while other pesticide residues rose from 22% to 54%. (*RASFF, our count*)

03 Failing lots aren't borderline. The median failing EU spice lot was 7.5 times the chlorpyrifos limit and 20 times the ethylene oxide limit. (*RASFF hazard records, our analysis*)

What we don't know yet

- ❑ Failure rates. Each count measures what a regulator checked and caught, not how often Indian spices fail. Nobody publishes import volumes by lot.

Why Do the EU and the US Fail Different Things?

Because they're asking different questions. The EU is a residue hunter. Its limits for many farm chemicals in spices sit at 0.01 or 0.05 mg/kg, and of all 1,765 EU notifications on Indian food over the period, pesticides came up 584 times (RASFF, our count). The US polices hygiene and facilities. Salmonella, "filthy" and "manufactured under insanitary conditions" dominate its refusals, and it often acts on the firm through import alerts rather than on a fresh sample. Australia tests its listed risk foods against its own food code, and for Indian spices that has meant Salmonella nearly every time.



One caution before the detail. These sources count different things. RASFF counts notifications, the FDA counts refused entry lines (one shipment can create several), and Australia counts failing test records. Compare which hazard leads. Never add the numbers up.

Which Spices Fail Where?

Cumin fails the EU. It was 151 of the 453 Indian spice notifications, and its hazards read like a pesticide shopping list – chlorpyrifos 72, thiamethoxam 68, clothianidin 66, acetamiprid 62, tricyclazole 50. It also carried 17 notifications for pyrrolizidine alkaloids, plant toxins from weeds harvested with the crop (RASFF, our count). In the US, cumin had only 58 refused lines.

Black pepper fails the US. It had 316 refused lines, with filth on 283 and Salmonella on 262. Black pepper from India also sits under a country-wide US import alert, 28–02, in place since 1987, which is why the US asks for the

export inspection certificate the alert describes ([FDA import alerts, India](#)). Our [black pepper page](#) covers grades and buying.

Chilli fails Australia. Salmonella drove 77 of the 88 Indian spice failures there, and chilli powders were most of them. The detail, including how many were Kashmiri chilli, is in our post on [Indian food failures at the Australian border](#).

Mixes fail on more than one count. In the EU, ethylene oxide led for curry powders and mixes, 40 of 65 notifications. In the US, mixes and seasonings had 285 refused lines, Salmonella on 111 and unsafe colour on 57.

Fennel fails the US on colour. 63 refused lines, 41 for unsafe colour and 38 for colour labelling. Synthetic colour in fennel and mixes is a US problem far more than an EU one in our data.

What Changed Over Time?

In 2021 the EU story was ethylene oxide, the sterilising gas. It was in 30 of 69 Indian spice notifications that year. By 2025 it was in 5 of 82. Over the same years, farm pesticides took over – chlorpyrifos went from 10 notifications in 2021 to 39 in 2024, and thiamethoxam from 2 to 30 (RASFF, our count).



That's a real improvement in processing, and Indian exporters deserve credit for it. But it moved the problem upstream to the farm, where it's harder to fix with a factory process. A lot steam-sterilised perfectly can still carry field residues. So the EU test you needed in 2021 isn't the one you need now.

Does a Lab Certificate Protect Me?

Not on its own. In the US, 149 refused Indian spice lines had a private lab analysis on record, and the FDA sampled only 87 lines itself (FDA import refusals, our count). Most refusals rested on import-alert status or on the importer's own lab submission. If your supplier sits on Salmonella alert 99–19, a clean certificate doesn't release the goods. Check the supplier against the alerts before you order, as [FDA import alerts](#) explains.

In the EU, documents themselves fail. 70 of the 453 spice notifications were certificate or documentation problems, typically an analytical report that didn't match the lot. Make sure the lot number on the report is the lot number on the bags.

What Should Your Test Panel Look Like?

Follow the destination.

Destination	What to test
EU and UK	Multi-residue pesticide panel on the raw lot naming the substances above. Ethylene oxide and 2-chloroethanol for ground spices and mixes. Pyrrolizidine alkaloids for cumin. Aflatoxins for chilli, ginger and turmeric
US	Salmonella on every lot, a filth test, a colour screen for fennel and mixes, and an import-alert check on the supplier
Australia	Salmonella on every lot, and aflatoxin for chilli

If one lot is going to two markets, it needs two panels. That's not a supplier failing. It's the cost of selling into borders that ask different questions. Confirm the current limits for your exact product with your lab before you ship, because limits change by commodity and date.

Australian buyers should also read [biosecurity for natural goods](#).

Ready to act

Need hands-on help?

Drawing the samples yourself, sending them to an accredited lab and holding the balance payment until the results clear is the kind of execution that stops a rejection. SourcingSync can run it at the Indian end.

Talk to SourcingSync ↗

FAQ

Are Indian spices safe? ^

Most lots clear. The counts show what each border checks and catches, not a failure rate. The fix is testing for the right hazard for your market.

Why does the EU reject Indian spices more for pesticides than the US? v

Is ethylene oxide still a problem? v

Can one test certificate cover the EU and the US? v