Circular economy and pathogenic Escherichia coli: unfolding the paradigm of human exposure to E. coli infections, including STEC, through crops

18th Annual Workshop of the

National Reference Laboratories for E. coli in the EU

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Giorgia Barbieri





"Emerging food safety risks from microbial hazards deriving from anthropogenic pressures in agricultural settings"

RF-2019-12369714

Circular economy: waste and water management







https://www.wateronline.com/doc/water-reuse-as-an-emerging-solution-0001

• **Sustainability:** reusing biological matrices to be reintegrated into the biosphere

Recovery of nutrients and water

Risk assessment?

- Spread of hazards along the agri-food chain
- Food safety non-compliance

Consequences on:

- Production of vegetables
- Pasture for livestock
- Soil health



Food safety hazards in the circular biobased economy

Potential (food) safety hazards in the circular biobased economy; showing the possible accumulation in the main production domains (plant, animal, aquaculture, packaging) and the secondary production systems through the reuse of (by-)products.



https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodres.2022.111505

SELECTED FOOD SAFETY HAZARDS

Dioxins and PCBs

PFASs

Prions

× Mycotoxins



Targeted treatments can be not fully effective in eliminating such hazards



EFSA Journal 2011;9(10):2390

SCIENTIFIC REPORT OF EFSA

Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* (STEC) O104:H4 2011 outbreaks in Europe: Taking Stock¹

European Food Safety Authority^{2, 3}

European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), Parma, Italy

Environmental Research 172 (2019) 630-636



Prevalence of Shiga-toxigenic and atypical enteropathogenic *Escherichia coli* in untreated surface water and reclaimed water in the Mid-Atlantic U.S

Check for updates

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Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report

Weekly / Vol. 73 / No. 18

May 9, 2024

Shiga Toxin–Producing *Escherichia coli* O157:H7 Illness Outbreak Associated with Untreated, Pressurized, Municipal Irrigation Water — Utah, 2023

BreAnne Osborn, MPH¹; Jennifer Hatfield²; William Lanier, DVM^{1,3}; Jennifer Wagner, MS¹; Kelly Oakeson, PhD¹; Ravyn Casey¹; Jacob Bullough¹; Pallavi Kache, PhD^{4,5}; Shanna Miko, DNP⁵; Jasen Kunz, MPH⁵; Grace Pederson, MPH⁵; Molly Leeper, MPH⁵; Nancy Strockbine, PhD⁵; Haley McKeel⁵; Jessica Hofstetter, PhD⁵; Alexis Roundtree⁵; Amy Kahler, MS⁵; Mia Mattioli, PhD⁵

Multistate outbreak of *Salmonella* Poona infections associated with imported cucumbers, 2015–2016

M. Laughlin¹, L. Bottichio¹, J. Weiss², J. Higa⁴, E. McDonald⁵, R. Sowadsky⁷,

D. Fejes⁹, A. Saupe¹⁰, G. Provo¹², S. Seelman¹⁴, J. Concepción-Acevedo¹,

L. Gieraltowski¹ (1) and The Outbreak Investigation Team*

The legislative frame for the use of biosolids and irrigation waters in Europe...

- The **Directive 86/728/EEC regulating the use of biosolids in the EU**, to avoid harmful effects on soil, vegetation, animals and humans, has been **embedded by only a few Member States** and the implementation criteria lack harmonization (Switzerland prohibits agricultural reuse, France and the UK reused them for > 70%!).
- The recent EU Regulation 2020/741 has implemented water-reuse practices by establishing standards and requirements for reclaimed water agricultural use, but certain aspects have not been comprehensively addressed, especially in terms of the microbiological criteria that need to be met (identification of generic *Escherichia coli, Legionella* spp. and nematode eggs).
- Technical guidance by the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission takes into account **STEC 0157:H7** as the only reference *E. coli* pathotype.
- The Commission Regulation (EU) 209/2013 prescribes the absence of STEC of serogroups O157, O26, O103, O111,
 O145 and O104:H4 in 200 ml of spent irrigation water used in the sprout production process

... and in Italy

- Although a new legislative decree is being worked on, the reference rule in Italy is still the Dlgs.
 99/1992, which provides as the only microbiological criterion for compliance of biosolids the microbial load of Salmonella spp. (<103 MPN/g).
- Sewage sludge management in Italy is regulated at the regional level, with the only exception being the national legislation implementing the SSD on national level in Italy. This means that there is a large variability between the sewage sludge management practices in the different Italian regions.
- As regards waters, in Italy the legislation in force is limited to the following parameters:

| Parametro | UdM | Classe I | Classe II | Classe III |
|----------------------|------------|----------|--------------|------------|
| Coliformi Totali | UFC/100 ml | < 5000 | 5000 - 12000 | > 12000 |
| Coliformi Fecali | UFC/100 ml | <1000 | 1000 - 12000 | > 12000 |
| Streptococchi Fecali | UFC/100 ml | <1000 | 1000 - 2000 | > 2000 |

Source: Rapporto sulla qualità delle acque a uso irriguo 2022, ARPAE

Classe I: acque impiegabili senza limitazioni;

Classe II: acque da impiegare almeno 30 giorni prima della raccolta evitando il contatto con prodotti destinati ad essere consumati crudi dall'uomo;

Classe III: acque che devono essere preferibilmente distribuite con metodi che evitino il contatto con la vegetazione, Anche in questo caso gli interventi irrigui vanno sospesi almeno 30 giorni prima della raccolta.

Preliminary evidence

Evidence of microbiological hazards in soil improvers has recently been identified, requiring a more thorough assessment of the health risks associated with their use in agricultural environments. Journal of Applied Microbiology



Journal of Applied Microbiology ISSN 1364-5072

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Pathogenic *Escherichia coli* and enteric viruses in biosolids and related top soil improvers in Italy

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Environmental Research 155 (2017) 108–115



Comparative analysis of metagenomes of Italian top soil improvers



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Cross-Cutting Approach for the Characterization of Microbial Emerging Hazards in Agriculture Settings from Circular Economy-Driven Wastewater Streams

Giorgia Barbieri, Federica Gigliucci,* Gianfranco Brambilla, and Stefano Morabito

Lab workflow

Convenience sampling scheme

- 31 top-soil improvers samples
- 15 irrigation water samples



Real Time PCR screening



sequencing

Types of top-soil improvers and treatment



Figure 1 Schematic diagram of the production of biosolids, digestates and composts intended for agriculture soil dressing starting from different sources: urban, food industry and intensive animal farming sludges from wastewater treatment plants, green and household wastes.

Tozzoli R, Di Bartolo I, Gigliucci F, Brambilla G, Monini M, Vignolo E, Caprioli A, Morabito S. Pathogenic Escherichia coli and enteric viruses in biosolids and related top soil improvers in Italy. J Appl Microbiol. 2017 Jan;122(1):239-247. doi: 10.1111/jam.13308.

- Sludges from wastewater treatment plants (n=7) and from food plant (n=1);
- Mixed compost from urban organic and green wastes (n = 8);
- **Digestates**, accounting for different contributions from household, green and animal wastes (n=6);
- Animal waste (bovine manure, pig and bovine slurry and poultry litter) (n=9).



Results from top-soil improvers samples

| | 1 | | | | | | | Bios | olids | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------|---------------------|-----|------|--------------------|------|-----|------|------|-------|------|------------|-----|------------|-----|------|----------|------|-----|--------|-----|--------|-----|------|
| | | | | STEC EPEC EAEC EIE | | IEC | ETEC | | | ETEC | | | Salmonella | | | | | | | | | | |
| Category | Samples | 5 | tx1 | 5 | tx2 | s | tx2f | e | ae | ag | <u>g</u> R | a | aiC | ļį | раН | <u> </u> | lt | | stp | | sth | in | VA |
| | | pre | post | pre | post | pre | post | pre | post | pre | post | pre | post | pre | post | pre | post | pre | e post | pre | e post | pre | post |
| AW | Poultry litter | - | - | + | + | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| AW | Pig slurry | - | - | + | + | - | - | - | +* | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | +* | - | - | - | - |
| AW | Pig slurry | - | - | + | + | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| AW | Bovine manure | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | + | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| AW | Bovine manure | - | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| AW | Manure+compost | - | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| AW | Organic farm manure | - | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - |
| AW | Bovine slurry | - | +* | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - |
| AW | Poultry litter | - | - | + | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| SL-WWTP | WWTP sludge | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| SL-WWTP (DOPPIO) | WWTP sludge | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| SL-WWTP | WWTP sludge | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| SL-WWTP | WWTP sludge | + | + | + | + | - | - | + | + | - | + | + | + | - | - | + | + | + | - | + | - | - | - |
| SL-WWTP | WWTP sludge | + | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| SL-WWTP | WWTP sludge | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| SL-WWTP | WWTP sludge | + | - | + | - | + | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| MCO | Compost | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| MCO | Compost | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| MCO | Compost | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| MCO | Compost | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| MCO | Compost | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| MCO | Compost | - | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | + | - | - |
| MCO | Compost | - | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| MCO | Compost | + | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| DIG | Digestate | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| DIG | Digestate | - | - | + | + | - | - | - | + | - | + | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| DIG | Digestate | - | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| DIG | Digestate | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| DIG | Digestate | - | - | + | + | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| DIG | Digestate | - | - | - | + | - | - | + | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - |
| SI - FP | Food plant sludge | - | - | + | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |

Table 1. Detection of virulence genesassociated with the different *E. coli*pathogroups and *Salmonella* spp. from DNAextracted directly from biosolids samples(pre-enrichment) and after enrichment innon-selective medium (post-enrichment).Green boxes = no signal; red boxes= positivesignal; +* = isolated strain.



• **Hybrid strain STEC-ETEC** (*stx1a*+, *sta*+) from bovine slurry

- ETEC (stp+) ed EPEC (eae+) from pig slurry
- All possessing AMR genes

Water sampling points and sources



Figure 2. Sampling points of surface and reclaimed water in the river Po water body, in continuity with farming and abattoir's activities. Modified figure supplied by Servizio Epidemiologico of IZS Lombardia and Emilia Romagna.

Reused IN \rightarrow Water entering the plant **Reused OUT** \rightarrow Refined water from the treatment plant

Surface waters → Irrigation water from canals and rivers



IMPIANTO PER IL TRATTAMENTO DELLE ACQUE REFLUE 1: filtrazione, disoleazione, desabbiatura (trattamento primario) 2: vasca anossica di rilascio del fosforo 3: vasca anossica di denitrificazione 4: vasca di aerazione

5: sedimentatore 6: disinfezione e abbattimento inquinanti particolari 7: ricircolo miscela aerata nitrificata 8: liquame e fango di ricircolo

| Sampling Time (2022) | Cumulative Precipitation (mm/month) |
|-------------------------|--|
| May | 42 |
| June | 19 |
| August | 138,4 |

Emilia Romagna region

Results from irrigation water samples

| | | | | | | | | Irri | gatio | n wa | ter | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------|-----------------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|------|-------|------|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|------|------|-----|------|------|--------|
| | | | | S | TEC | | | E | PEC | | EA | EC | | Eł | IEC | | | ETEC | | | | Salm | onella |
| Sampling Time | Sampling points | s | tx1 | s | tx2 | s | tx2f | e | ae | ag | ggR | a | aiC | ip | аH | | lt | S | tp | 5 | sth | in | vA |
| | | pre | post | pre | post | pre | post | pre | post | pre | post | pre | post | pre | post | pre | post | pre | post | pre | post | pre | post |
| | Reused IN | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | + | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| | Reused OUT | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| First - May | River | - | - | + | + | - | - | - | + | - | + | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | + |
| 2022 | Canal | - | - | - | - | - | - | + | + | - | + | + | + | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | +* |
| | River | - | +* | + | + | - | + | + | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | +* |
| | Canal | - | + | - | + | - | - | + | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - |
| | Reused IN | - | - | - | + | - | + | - | - | - | + | - | + | - | + | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Second June | Reused OUT | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Second - June | Canal | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 2022 | River | - | + | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | + | - | + | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| | Canal | - | + | + | + | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| | Reused IN | - | + | - | + | - | + | - | + | - | + | + | + | - | + | - | + | - | + | - | + | - | +* |
| Third - August | Reused OUT | - | - | - | - | - | - | + | + | + | + | - | + | - | - | + | + | - | + | - | - | - | - |
| 2022 | River | - | - | - | - | - | - | + | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| | River | - | - | - | - | - | - | + | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |

Table 2. Detection of virulence genes associated with the different *E. coli* pathogroups and *Salmonella* spp. from DNA extracted directly from irrigation water samples (pre-enrichment) and after enrichment in non-selective medium (post-enrichment). Light blue boxes = no signal; dark blue boxes= positive signal; +* = isolated strain.



- **STEC** (*stx1*d+) with AMR genes (*bla*(AMP) cassette) from a river sample
- Salmonella Veneziana from the same river sample and from a canal
- Salmonella Taksony from a sample of water entering the WWTP

Take home messages

- Viable pathogenic bacteria potentially able to cause disease in humans
- Viable pathogenic E. coli, including STEC, and Salmonella spp. in samples of irrigation waters and TSI collected in the last step of their production process, immediately before their application on cultivated soils
- Stabilization treatments may not be completely effective in abating the microbiological hazards
- Risk that these hazards may be introduced into the agro-industry and expose consumers to infections

Workflow in the risk assessment



Circular economy and agro-industrial chain: problem or chance?

The use of purified water and soil improvers from circular economy circuits in agriculture is a practice with high added value.

It is necessary:

- 1. Estimate the problem of spread of these hazards directly in the field with **monitoring sampling**
- 2. Verify the **transfer rate of pathogenic and antibiotic-resistant microorganisms to crops** to combine information from consumption data and estimate exposure
- 3. Develop **treatment practices for soil improvers and reclaimed water** to be applied before use in the field to mitigate health impacts while ensuring food availability from the agro-industrial chain



Acknowledgments



BONNE IDÉE

Thanks for your attention!

Giorgia Barbieri

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Spread of genetic determinants of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in biosolids and the environment



SEED profile for Comparison.megan







SEED profile for Comparison.megan

Results of isolation of AMR+ strains in TSI

| Sample | Daptomicin | Species | Source | Use |
|---------|------------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|
| 2747_D1 | 2ug/ml | E. fecium | Poultry litter | Horticulture |
| 2747_D2 | 2ug/ml | E. fecium | Poultry litter | Horticulture |
| 2747_D3 | 2ug/ml | E. fecium | Poultry litter | Horticulture |
| | | | Mixed | |
| 2746_D1 | 4ug/ml | Sequencing | Compost | Horticulture |
| | | Bacillus | Manure + | Horticulture, |
| ISS2_D1 | 8ug/ml - 4ug /ml | licheniformis | compost | on market |

| Sample | Mupirocin | Species | Source | Use |
|---------|-----------|--------------|------------|------------|
| | | | Food plant | |
| 2751_M1 | 64 ug/ml | Bacillus | sludge | Open field |
| | | Clostridium | Food plant | |
| 2751_M2 | 512 ug/ml | amylolyticum | sludge | Open field |

| Sample | Bacitracin | Species | Source | Use |
|----------|------------|------------|---------------|----------------|
| | | | | Horticulture, |
| ISS_3_B1 | 256 ug/ml | Sequencing | Mixed compost | on market |
| | | | | Mixed uses, on |
| ISS_6_B1 | Sequencing | Sequencing | Mixed compost | market |



Enrichment in PWB 37°C for 24h







Isolation on selective and differential media in presence of antibiotics (Reference MIC)

| Sample | Tetraciclin | Species | Source | Use |
|----------|-------------|-----------------|----------------|---------------|
| 0740 74 | 10 5 | Duranthania | | Horticulture |
| 2746_11 | 12,5 ug/mi | B. paranthracis | Mixed Compost | |
| | | | | Horticulture |
| 2746_T2 | 25 ug/ml | Sequencing | Mixed Compost | |
| 2747_T1 | 12,5 ug/ml | Sequencing | Poultry litter | Horticulture |
| 2755_T1 | 100 ug/ml | Bacillus cereus | WWTP sludge | Open field |
| | | | | Horticulture, |
| | | | Manure + | on market |
| ISS_2_T1 | 50 ug/ml | Paenibacillus | compost | |

Correlation plot: SEED profile for Comparison.megan



Take home messages

- Irrigation waters and top-soil improvers carries viable pathogenic and antibioticresistant microorganisms
- ARG related to molecules use in human medicine clinical practice are transferred to resident microorganisms, configuring the environmental microbiota as a reservoir of ARGs
- Selective pressure from heavy metal pollution of soils can act as a stabilizer for ARG's reservoir

Punto di prelievo OA IN OA OUT OB ST 09 OB ST 20 OC ST 10 OC ST 19



A IN → Water entering the plant A OUT → Refined water from the treatment plant B→ Irrigation water from canals C→ Irrigation water from rivers

| WWTP specifications | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| Area occupied by the plant | ~ 300 thousand m ² | | | | | | | |
| Population equivalent | 169.846 | | | | | | | |
| Sewerage system served | Unitary | | | | | | | |
| Average daily flow rate | 52.919 mc/day | | | | | | | |
| Average hourly capacity | 2.205 mc/h | | | | | | | |
| Type of treatment | Tertiary treatment based upon multilayer rapid filtration and combined treatment with hydrogen peroxide and UV rays | | | | | | | |
| Full course of treatment | 24h | | | | | | | |
| Water transit speed for treatment | 12 m/h | | | | | | | |
| Addition of H_2O_2 | 3 mg/L; contact time = 7 min | | | | | | | |
| Equivalent UV dose | 45 mJ/cm ² | | | | | | | |