Current Perspectives on BMC for Large-Scale Food Fortification

The Use of Basic Methacrylate Polymer (BMC) in Large Scale Food Fortification (LSFF): A Regulatory Overview

September 2025

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Executive Summary

This report examines the regulatory and policy landscape surrounding the use of Basic Methacrylate Copolymer (BMC) in Large-Scale Food Fortification (LSFF), with a particular focus on its potential role as an encapsulation and coating agent for micronutrients particularly vitamin A. BMC has emerged as a promising technology for improving the stability, shelf life, and delivery of micronutrients in fortified foods, offering potential benefits for public health interventions aimed at addressing micronutrient deficiencies, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.

The analysis finds that BMC has a long-established history of safe use as a food additive and pharmaceutical excipient. International bodies, including JECFA, as well as European regulators such as EFSA, have concluded that BMC does not present safety concerns when used within approved applications and exposure limits. Although these assessments support its use as a coating or glazing agent, no regulatory authority has yet issued explicit approval for the use of BMC as a micronutrient encapsulant in LSFF. As a result, its regulatory status in this specific application remains somewhat ambiguous.

A key focus of the report is the question of whether BMC could be regulated as a microplastic. While BMC may technically fall within broad scientific definitions of microplastics, the analysis concludes that it is not subject to current European Union restrictions on intentionally added microplastics under REACH. Existing EU legislation exempts food additives such as BMC from these restrictions, meaning that BMC continues to be regulated primarily through food additive frameworks rather than environmental microplastic regulations. Furthermore, there is currently no indication of imminent legislative changes that would alter this position.

Outside the EU, particularly in West Africa where food fortification programmes are widely used, there are no specific regulations governing BMC in LSFF. Regulatory approaches in these countries generally follow international standards established by organisations such as FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius, JECFA, EFSA, and the U.S. FDA. While no regulatory barriers or prohibitions have been identified, engagement with national authorities remains advisable given the absence of explicit approvals for this novel application.

Overall, the report finds that BMC benefits from a strong safety record and a generally permissive regulatory environment. The principal challenge is not the existence of regulatory restrictions, but rather the absence of clear regulatory recognition of BMC as a micronutrient encapsulation agent for LSFF. This creates uncertainty for manufacturers and programme implementers. Consequently, there is a significant opportunity to improve regulatory alignment, particularly within the European Union, by clarifying or formally recognising the use of BMC in LSFF. Such alignment could facilitate innovation in food fortification and support efforts to combat micronutrient deficiencies globally.

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1. Introduction

This report provides an analysis of the existing regulations and policies governing Basic Methacrylate Copolymer (BMC) for use in Large-Scale Food Fortification (LSFF). By facilitating a joint understanding among stakeholders regarding the use of BMC as an encapsulating agent for micronutrients in LSFF primarily for the encapsulation of vitamin A, the report strives to facilitate informed decision-making, address regulatory and perception challenges, and promote the wider acceptance and adoption of BMC for LSFF in relevant industries.

Regulations and policies relevant to BMC exist in two main areas: where it is treated as a food additive, and where it could theoretically fall under the category of microplastics — the latter being a primary focus of this report. For new and untested applications in LSFF however, the picture is less clear. Understanding the regulatory considerations surrounding BMC and addressing any regulatory gaps and ambiguities is crucial for clarifying its acceptability for use in LSFF.

First, the topics of LSFF, BMC, and microplastics are introduced. Second, the Regulatory Landscape Surrounding BMC globally and in the European Union (EU) is analysed. Given that Codex GFSA, FDA, and European regulatory standards serve as de facto standards for other countries, understanding the global and EU framework is essential for resolving ambiguities surrounding BMC. Additionally, the legal and regulatory context in West Africa is assessed. Third, we look at gaps, ambiguities, potential challenges in the existing legal framework and make recommendations to overcome them. Finally, a general conclusion is provided.

2. Large-Scale Food Fortification (LSFF)

Large-Scale Food Fortification (LSFF) refers to the process whereby one or more essential micronutrients are deliberately added to staple foods or condiments during processing to improve their micronutrient composition [1].

It does not refer to the spreading of nutrient supplements containing these same micronutrients. Food fortification emerged as a strategy endorsed during the World Declaration on Nutrition in 1992 by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) to improve micronutrient intake and address micronutrient deficiencies as part of a broader food systems approach [1].

According to UNICEF, "LSFF programs should complement the promotion of access to and consumption of nutritious, safe, diverse and affordable diets. [1]" For example, fortification of salt with iodine has proven effective in combating iodine deficiency disorders, which negatively impact child health, women's health, and overall quality of life [2]. Additionally, fortification initiatives targeting deficiencies in vitamin A have been instrumental in ensuring adequate nutrient intake in low and middle-income countries [3].

3. Basic Methacrylate Copolymer (BMC) and its relevance to LSFF

Basic Methacrylate Copolymer (BMC) is a synthetic polymer with a cationic copolymer property composed of dimethylaminoethyl methacrylate, butyl methacrylate, and methyl methacrylate in a molar ratio of 1:2:1 [4,5]. It is widely used as a food additive. Its properties have made it a valuable bulking agent in the preparation of pharmaceutical drugs and a film-coating material for taste and odour masking. BMC has been used in humans for 50 years as a pill coating and has been considered in Europe for use in food supplements [6].

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In all its applications so far, BMC has been considered a food additive. Food additives are substances added to food and drinks for various reasons, such as to maintain or improve their safety, freshness, taste, texture or appearance [7]. Food additives often have labelling requirements and rigorous authorisation procedures, depending on the local legislation. [18]

BMC holds significance for LSFF as it could be utilised as a stable glazing/coating agent for micronutrients such as vitamin A. BMC could be used to protect the micronutrient from heat and humidity during storage and would dissolve in the digestive tract, releasing the nutrient for absorption. The micronutrient can with a coating of BMC be added to staple foods such as wheat flour, sugar and bouillon. BMC encapsulation has yet to be commercialised for vitamins.

4. Microplastics

Microplastics are broadly defined as solid plastic particles composed of synthetic polymers and functional additives, typically smaller than 5 mm [8]. This definition encompasses a wide range of polymeric materials, including those commonly used in industrial and food applications, and is primarily based on physical characteristics rather than specific risk or environmental impact.

Under this broad definition, virtually all laboratory-created polymers could, in theory, be classified as microplastics — including BMC. However, this is **not** how the term "microplastics" is typically understood in regulatory or political discourse. In practice, the concern centres on microplastics that are **intentionally added to products** and are likely to be released into the environment, where they may persist and accumulate [19].

Importantly, **BMC is not considered a microplastic under existing European legislation**. The European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) has explicitly limited its 2023 microplastics restriction (under REACH Annex XVII) to **intentionally added microplastics in products such as cosmetics, detergents, and fertilisers** that pose a risk of environmental release. BMC, when used in large-scale food fortification (LSFF), is not subject to this restriction due to its controlled use profile, lack of environmental dispersion, and non-intentional release.

5. Global Regulatory Landscape

a) Safety of BMC as a food additive

According to the 2016 CODEX report assessing safety and specifications for BMC as a glazing/coating agent for food supplements, BMC was classified as a food additive by the FAO and was deemed safe for use in food supplement coatings. This conclusion was based on the absence of safety concerns related to BMC when used as a food coating agent, but does not mention the use as a micronutrient encapsulation for food fortification. The Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) concluded in 2018 that **the use of basic methacrylate copolymer is not of safety concern when the food additive is used as a coating or glazing agent for** solid food supplements and for foods for special medical purposes and **micronutrient encapsulation for food fortification**. JECFA concluded that the toxicological data on the residual monomers do not give rise to concerns when taking into account the low dietary exposures [9]. This regulatory body however did not take the concerns over BMC as a microplastic into account.

b) Environmental and health concern over BMC as a microplastic

Although awareness over the potential harmful effects of microplastics is rising [10], UNEP has not undertaken any initiatives to limit the use of microplastics as food additives and is unlikely to do so.

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6. Regulatory Landscape Surrounding BMC in the European Union

a) Safety of BMC as a food additive

The safety of all food additives that are currently authorised has been assessed by the Scientific Committee on Food (SCF) and/or the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) [11]. EFSA supported the use of BMC, also known as E 1205, to coat solid supplement tablets even though they did not specify whether BMC is microplastic or not. A journal released by EFSA in 2010 indicates that BMC does not raise any toxicology concerns. "Basic methacrylate copolymer is virtually not absorbed from the gastrointestinal tract after oral administration. This is in line with it being a stable high-molecular compound." It was noted that although no human studies were available, BMC has been used for many years as an excipient in pharmaceutical preparations without showing any sign of immunotoxic effects in humans. In 2016, an additional opinion was adopted by EFSA, amending the specifications regarding the 'definition' and the 'particle size' limits of BMC listed in Commission Regulation (EU) No 231/2012 [12]. EFSA concluded that BMC poses no toxicity risks in humans when used as a glazing agent in solid food supplements and in solid foods for special medical purposes below certain use levels [13]. However, **EFSA did not explicitly address the use of BMC as a micronutrient coating for food fortification**.

b) Environmental and health concern over BMC as a microplastic

In August 2022, the EC published a proposal to restrict the placement of microplastics on the market out of environmental and health concern, including those added to certain products, under the REACH Regulations titled "Commission Regulation (EU) amending Annex XVII to Regulation (EC) No 1907/2006 of the European Parliament of the Council concerning the Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH) as regards the synthetic polymer microparticles".

In October 2023, the European Commission introduced new restrictions on the use of intentionally added microplastics in products under the REACH Regulation. However, the restriction does not apply universally to all microplastics; its scope depends on the product category and intended use. Notably, the regulation excludes certain applications — including natural and biodegradable polymers, as well as synthetic polymers used in medicinal products, food additives, and certain fertilisers [15].

BMC, when used as a food additive, falls within this exemption category. As such, it is not subject to the current microplastics restrictions under REACH. However, this exemption does not constitute formal authorisation for its use in large-scale food fortification (LSFF); **no such regulatory approval has yet been issued in the EU for this specific application.**

c) Upcoming legislative initiatives and policy priorities that could affect BMC regulation

Related to food fortification, international aid or food additives regulation, no major changes seem to be on the horizon in the EU.

Related to microplastics, the Mission Letter of Ursula von der Leyen to Commissioner for Environment, Water Resilience and a Competitive Circular Economy, Jessica Roswall, included the request to the commissioner to "strive for an ambitious global plastic treaty and support the implementation of the High Seas Treaty" [16]. In her hearing, Jessica Roswall confirmed that plastic pollution is something she will address [17]. It is however unlikely that future global initiatives led by the EU will propose stricter regulations on microplastics than currently the case in the EU.

7. Regulatory Landscape Surrounding BMC in West Africa

We also include an analysis of legislation of in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), specifically in West Africa, since the product in its application for encapsulating powdered vitamin A is mostly targeted

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towards this market. While the European regulation on food additives governs products produced within the EU, it does not directly apply to products once they leave the EU. Food manufacturers must adhere to the food safety and additive regulations of the importing country to ensure their products are legally permitted to enter the market.

In West Africa, food additives may be regulated by both regional bodies like ECOWAS and national agencies such as NAFDAC in Nigeria or the FDA in Ghana. These regulations are often aligned with international standards, particularly those set by the Codex mentioned above, but individual countries may also have specific regulations tailored to their local needs.

There are no specific regulations targeting microplastics in West-Africa yet. In the future, eventual legislative initiatives restricting the use of BMC as a food additive due to environmental concerns over BMC as a microplastic will probably be informed by the position of international bodies on this topic. Many countries are likely to strengthen their regulations as awareness of the environmental and health impacts of microplastics increases.

Currently, there are no specific regulations in West Africa that explicitly restrict the use of BMC in this application. At the same time, the situation is unclear and checks with the local responsible authorities are advisable. Most West African countries will align with international standards, following the regulations outlined above.

8. Global Legislative Status of BMC

As of the time of writing, no country has introduced legislation prohibiting the use of Basic Methacrylate Copolymer (BMC) as a food additive, either in general or on the basis of health or environmental concerns. BMC is widely recognised as safe for use in food and pharmaceutical coatings, and has not been subject to restrictions under food safety or environmental protection frameworks in any jurisdiction reviewed.

However, it is important to note that these regulatory authorisations have primarily applied to BMC's use as a coating or glazing agent for food supplements or pharmaceutical products. In the context of large-scale food fortification (LSFF) — particularly for the encapsulation of micronutrients such as vitamin A — no jurisdiction has yet issued specific regulatory language or formal approval. As such, while BMC is not restricted, its use in LSFF remains subject to interpretation under existing food additive rules and may require engagement with national authorities on a case-by-case basis.

This overall absence of prohibitive regulation suggests a stable and permissive environment for future applications of BMC, and may offer a foundation for greater international alignment as LSFF initiatives expand.

9. Challenges and recommendations

What are challenges and potential strategies for aligning regulatory frameworks to support the efficient and responsible use of BMC for LSFF?

No EU authority has explicitly approved the use of BMC as a micronutrient coating in food fortification given there is no market need in Europe. This results in an ambiguity in the European regulation, potentially limiting the production of fortified food products with BMC as a nutrient coating in Europe. **There is an opportunity to align the European regulation with international standards**. Health objections to the use of BMC in LSFF will probably be low since BMC has been consistently found to be without concern for use in food products within reasonable use limits.

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A potential future challenge could be the reduction of exemptions from the microplastic restrictions in the EU. However, there is no sign that there are any initiatives underway in this direction and it is unlikely to be the case.

a) Labelling and reporting of products including BMC in the EU

This section is a summary of the potential labelling requirements of BMC in an EU regulatory setting in its context as an encapsulation agent for vitamin A in bouillon food fortification.

BMC has not yet been approved for this type of use in the EU. The caveat must remain therefore, that if, when and how, a regulatory assessment is undertaken, it is possible that potential unforeseen issues might arise during the process related to labelling. However, it would be surprising if products such as BMC intended for human consumption were not labelled in various ways. But this does not need to be over-burdensome or problematic.

It is worth noting that BMC has a long history of use in the EU in pharmaceuticals, primarily as an excipient such as a glazing agent, coating, and film-forming agent in oral solid dosage forms. The point is that BMC is not new and is well known to EU regulatory agencies albeit primarily in a pharmaceutical context. Evonik Industries (Germany) is the leading manufacturer of BMC in the EU, supplying it under the well-known EUDRAGIT® E PO and EUDRAGIT® E 100 tradenames. Consequently, Evonik together with EU regulatory agencies have experience of managing BMC in an EU regulatory context albeit as a pharmaceutical excipient. This includes addressing safety issues.

An informative instrument in considering the safety of chemical substances and mixtures is a safety data sheet (SDS) which is a standardised document that provides detailed information about a substance or mixture, including its composition, properties, potential hazards (physical, health, and environmental), and instructions for safe handling, storage, and disposal. An SDS is a requirement in the EU as well as other jurisdictions for hazardous substances. An SDS tends to accompany a substance throughout the supply chain from manufacture to end use. An SDS exists for BMC, however, it would not be useful for this text to analyse its properties other than to note that it is generally considered to be of low concern for human health and the environment. Nevertheless, an SDS is likely to be taken into consideration in a regulatory assessment and any labelling and reporting requirements.

Turning to the regulatory environment in the EU vis-à-vis chemical substances; it is complex and sophisticated. The EU REACH Regulation (EC) No 1907/2006) is one of the EU's most complex regulations; REACH stands for the registration, evaluation and authorisation of chemicals with a focus on human health and the environment. It has been in force in the EU since June 1, 2007. It is regularly updated and implemented in a variety of ways. However, BMC is unlikely to be significantly impacted in terms of labelling by the provisions of REACH either for manufacturers in the EU and or exporters to the EU. [At the same time, manufacturers of BMC will still have certain reporting requirements to the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA)]. It has been argued that BMC might be considered a microplastic and the use of microplastics are of concern in the EU, elsewhere, and also within the context of REACH. For the purposes of this discussion BMC is subject to a number of exemptions from REACH and will not be subject to the provisions on microplastics.

To complete the picture of EU law related to chemicals, the consolidated version of the Regulation (EC) No 1272/2008 on the classification, labelling and packaging of substances and mixtures (CLP) is sometimes considered a second pillar of EU law concerning chemicals alongside REACH. CLP is also unlikely to have a significant impact on BMC in terms of labelling. But for the record, the CLP Regulation harmonises the

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classification, labelling, and packaging of substances and mixtures in line with the UN's Globally Harmonised System (GHS), so chemical hazards are clearly and uniformly communicated. Once again, CLP is unlikely to be relevant to BMC.

The route for the regulatory approval of BMC as an encapsulation agent for vitamin A in bouillon food fortification in the EU will be as an approved food additive under EU Regulation (EC) No. 1333/2008. In contrast to the earlier more cautionary comments vis-à-vis REACH and CLP the E number (and identifier for BMC) is E1205. E1205 is an approved food additive explicitly regulated under Regulation (EC) No 1333/2008 and associated regulations is authorised under Regulation (EC) No 1333/2008 and the rules in Regulation (EU) No 1129/2011 governing use and specifications for food additives. It is typically authorised for use as a glazing or coating agent (similar to pharmaceuticals) on food supplements and similar products, with defined purity and compositional criteria.

The EU sets strict safety and purity standards, with detailed specifications for use, maximum permitted levels, and labeling requirements. The safety evaluation and specifications are reviewed and managed by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), ensuring accepted usage levels and safety margins.

Under Regulation (EC) No 1333/2008 and the rules in Regulation (EU) No 1129/2011, the labelling requirements for E 1205 (Basic methacrylate copolymer) as a food additive are likely to include the following considerations:

- The packaging of food additives like E 1205 must clearly state the name and/or E-number assigned to the additive;
- It must include a statement such as "for food" or "restricted use in food" to specify its intended application;
- If applicable, any special conditions of storage or use must be indicated on the label;
- A batch or lot identification mark must be present for traceability;
- Instructions for use are required if their omission would prevent correct and safe use of the additive;
- The label must include the name or business name and address of the manufacturer, packager, or seller;
- There should be an indication of the maximum quantity allowed of the additive or groups of additives in food, expressed numerically or by the "quantum satis" principle (use as much as needed to achieve the intended effect but no more);
- The net quantity of the additive and, when relevant, the date of minimum durability or use-by date must also be shown;
- Compliance with labelling directives such as Directive 2000/13/EC regarding ingredient disclosure is required where applicable;
- E 1205 is currently authorised for use mainly on the surface of food supplements with specific conditions laid out in the EU lists of authorised food additives under Regulation (EU) No 1129/2011; and
- The additive must meet the purity criteria defined by Regulation (EU) No 231/2012, which specifies limits on contaminants like heavy metals.

These requirements ensure that consumers and businesses are fully informed about the presence and safe use of food additives such as E 1205 and that traceability and safety are maintained throughout the supply chain.

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In summary, labelling for E 1205 must clearly communicate its identity, permissible use, safety instructions, manufacturer details, and compliance with quantitative limits according to the EU's harmonised food additive regulations.

10. Conclusion

BMC is a well-established food additive with a long-standing safety record in pharmaceutical and food supplement applications. Although it could theoretically fall within the broad chemical definition of a microplastic, it is explicitly exempt from the European Union's current microplastics restriction under REACH. When used in the context of large-scale food fortification (LSFF), BMC is best understood as a food additive - and would likely be assessed as such under existing regulatory frameworks. In the EU, any future use of BMC as an encapsulation agent in LSFF would fall under the framework for food additives, with labelling requirements ensuring transparency, traceability, and consumer safety. Given its established regulatory history as E1205, BMC is well-positioned to meet these requirements, though formal authorisation for this new application will be essential to enable widespread adoption.

However, no regulatory authority has yet issued explicit approval or guidance for the use of BMC as a micronutrient encapsulant in LSFF, either in the EU or elsewhere. As a result, its regulatory status in this context remains unclear, even though no prohibitions or health-based objections exist. The absence of formal authorisation may pose a barrier to adoption, particularly in jurisdictions with stringent pre-market approval processes.

By contrast, low- and middle-income countries, especially in West Africa, do not currently regulate BMC specifically and tend to follow international standards set by bodies such as FAO, EFSA, and the U.S. FDA. While no restrictions are in place, developers are advised to engage proactively with local authorities to ensure compliance and anticipate potential policy developments - especially as awareness of microplastics increases.

There is a clear opportunity to improve regulatory alignment by formally recognising BMC for use in LSFF, in line with its established safety profile. Such alignment would support innovation in micronutrient delivery and help advance public health objectives in regions where fortification remains a key nutritional strategy.

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