Food safety MEPs call for country of origin labelling of meat in processed foods

Meat used as an ingredient in processed foods, such as lasagne, should be labelled by country of origin as is already the case for bovine fresh meat, said Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee MEPs on Wednesday. They call on the European Commission, which published a report on the issue in late 2013, to come up with legislative proposals in order to rebuild consumer confidence in the wake of the horsemeat scandal and other food fraud cases.

The resolution, passed by 48 votes to 15 with 4 abstentions, urges the Commission to follow up its 2013 report with legislative proposals to make it mandatory to state the country of origin of meat used in processed foods, in order to ensure more transparency throughout the food chain and better inform European consumers.

MEPs reiterate their concern over the potential impact of food fraud on food safety, consumer confidence and health, the functioning of the food chain and farm produce prices. They emphasise the importance of rapidly restoring the confidence of European consumers.

Empowering consumers

MEPs point out that the European Commission’s own report acknowledges that more than 90% of consumer respondents consider it important that meat origin should be labelled on processed food products. This is one of the several factors that may influence consumer behaviour, MEPs say.

Impact on prices

MEPs also point out that estimates of the measure’s likely impact on prices, based on the findings of research done by the French consumer organisation “Que Choisir”, diverge widely from those in Commission’s report, and ask for a clearer picture. The evaluation should be carried out in conjunction with consumer organisations and would not delay legislative proposals, they add.

These proposals should enable European businesses to operate in an economically viable manner and in conditions compatible with the consumer’s purchasing power.
Background

On 17 December 2013 the Commission submitted a report to the European Parliament and the Council on the likely consequences of making it mandatory to state the country of origin or place of provenance of meat used as an ingredient.

MEPs cite estimates that depending on the member state concerned, 30 to 50% of slaughtered meat is processed into meat ingredients for foodstuffs, mostly minced meat, meat preparations and meat products.

Next steps

The resolution is to be discussed along with an oral question to the Commission, and put to a plenary session vote in February.

In the chair: Giovanni La Via (EPP, IT)

Further information
Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety
Meeting documents
European Commission report
Study by consumer organisation UFC Que Choisir

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