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 with bovine fresh meat, said 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 460 votes to 204 with 33 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, better inform European consumers and thus help rebuild their confidence.

"After the horse meat scandal, it is now up to us to regain consumers' trust. We are asking the Commission to come up with a legislative proposal with a mandatory country of origin labelling, because this will help to enhance transparency and to provide clear and complete information to the consumers", said Environment Committee chair Giovanni La Via (EPP, IT).

“We must nonetheless ensure that this does not lead to additional burdens on small and medium-sized enterprises, of which there are many in this sector”, he added.

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.

Let the consumer choose

MEPs point out that the European Commission’s report (17.12.2013) itself 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 influencing consumer behaviour, MEPs say.

Impact on prices needs further check

MEPs also point out that estimates of the impact on prices, based on the findings of a French consumer organisation, diverge widely from those in the 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.

Background

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.

Further information

- Adopted text will be available here (click on 11.02.2015)
- Video recording of debate (click on 09.02.2015)
- European Commission report on Country of Origin Labelling for meat in processed foods
- Study by Consumer Organisation “UFC-Que Choisir” (in French)
- EuroparlTV news piece on Country of origin labelling
- EP research: Country of origin labelling for meat in processed foods

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Recent food fraud cases have made consumers suspicious. A growing number want to know from which country meat in processed food comes. © BELGAIMAGE/EASYFOTOSTOCK/Zoonar/V.Gudovskiy