



Food for thought: clearer information on food for babies and people with special medical needs

Buying food for someone with specific needs can be trickier than it seems. How do you know if you have got the right product? MEPs vote Thursday 14 June on legislation to make it easier for customers to identify food products intended for young children and people with specific medical purposes.

The Commission proposes to simplify existing legislation, establishing rules only for a limited number of categories of food considered essential for certain groups such as babies or people under medical supervision. Both the Parliament and the Council will have to approve it.

We interviewed Frédérique Ries, the Belgian Liberal-Democrat responsible for steering the proposal through the Parliament, ahead of the debate and vote. In her report she suggests that the draft regulation should cover gluten intolerance and certain low calorie diets, which was not in the original Commission proposal.

The European Union has already legislated on the labelling of food products. What will be the benefits of the new measures?

It's already the third legislation package that addresses food-related issues. That is not a lot: at this moment it is difficult being heard on issues that do not involve the crisis.

It is a specific and horizontal legislation that affects extremely vulnerable people, namely babies, children, hospitalised people and people with food intolerances, such as gluten. These people represent between one and five percent of the population, depending on the country. In Belgium, for example, it is 2%.

The food involved concerns specific food products that form the basis of real meals (gluten-free food, low-calorie diets) and not just dietary cakes, for instance.

The goal of these measures is to strengthen the rules regarding the labelling, quality and security, for example by clearly defining the threshold for certain ingredients such as gluten. We would like to see more cohesion and clarity in the legislation. Certain measures in force predate 1977 and were decided without the Parliament getting involved.

Will products imported into the EU also be subject to this legislation?

They will have to conform to it in the same way. This is why market monitoring has been strengthened. Afterwards it will be up to member states to implement this legislation.

Join the discussion on Twitter using the #EPfood hashtag.