



Horsemeat: MEPs demand tougher controls and stricter labelling

Committees Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety [19-02-2013 - 11:46]

MEPs called for more meat tests along the food chain in the wake of the horsemeat scandal during a debate in the food safety committee on Monday. Many voiced concern over member states' level of commitment to enforcing the EU's existing rules on labelling and urged the European Commission to step up controls.

Most Members felt that the issue was one of labelling and traceability rather than food safety, although some highlighted concerns that horses could be treated with substances like the painkiller drug Phenilbutazone, which is banned from meat for human consumption.

"It is a vast fraud but we need to calm down on this," said Peter Liese (EPP, DE). "However," he added, "I understand that consumers don't want to be fooled into eating something they don't want." His advice was to improve enforcement of the existing legislation, reinforce tests and introduce DNA testing.

"What shocked most people was that after the BSE crisis the system was supposed to have brought in traceability," said Linda McAvan (S&D, UK). She pointed out that rules on the labeling of meat products had been supported by the EP but then rejected by EU governments. Since then, "the system has failed. There have been several cases of fraud," she said.

"On traceability, we have the most developed legislation in the world," said the European Commission's director-general for health and consumers, Paola Testori Coggi, adding "Fraud was detected and the meat was traced. The system worked. The Commission has proposed a plan for increased controls including DNA tests on meat."

How to tackle fraudulent labelling?

"For many people, eating horse is unacceptable. Imagine if it were pork!" said Chris Davis (ALDE, UK). "Responsibility must rest with the food manufacturers. Where is the evidence that the checks have been carried out by the national authorities? Ideally, some effort should be made for common penalties at EU level," he added.

Carl Schlyter (Greens/EFA, SE) warned that "focusing on low prices increases the risk of fraud" and said meat-origin labelling would allow companies to build long-term links with their suppliers, thereby reducing the risk. Moreover, he believed, "the risk of penalties should be felt by the companies." Ms Coggi replied that criminal sanctions were the responsibility of the member states and the EU could not legislate in this area.

"How do we stop people thinking of being dishonest and how do we sanction them?"

Press release

asked Ana Rosbach (ECR, DK). "I'd like to know where my meat comes from," she added, also calling for improved labelling. Kartika Tamara Liotard (GUE/NGL, NL) urged the Commission to be "tough on member states that don't apply the legislation," adding "we simply need to know what's in our food."

"Food safety is a competence of the EU, but the UK had higher standards before," said Paul Nuttall (EFD, UK). "We're not ensuring that food is safe and we're also labelling it incorrectly. (...) In this case the meat traveled to five different countries. It is almost impossible to police," he stressed, pleading for powers over food safety to be sent back to the member states.

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