

## Official controls along the food chain

Controls undertaken by Member States to ensure the safety of our food are essential. The operating principals of the 'official controls' are to be updated and modernised. Parliament is expected to adopt during its March II plenary its second-reading position, following a trilogue agreement with the Council, on the proposal which aims to guarantee that food business operators are controlled with equal effectiveness in all Member States throughout the whole food chain.

### Background

The proposal on official controls is the last part of a '[review package](#)' proposed by the Commission in 2013. In addition to official controls, it included proposals on [animal health law](#), [plant health law](#) and [management of expenditure](#) relating to the food chain, which have all been adopted. The fifth proposal (plant reproductive material) was withdrawn by the Commission after the European Parliament rejected it. EU Member States are responsible for organising official control systems on their territory to verify that all business operators comply with the EU food chain legislation. [Regulation \(EC\) No 882/2004](#) on official controls aims to establish an integrated and uniform approach to controls performed by the Members States' authorities. Controls should be carried out regularly at all stages of the food chain on domestic products, as well as on [imports](#) and exports. The European Commission's Health and Food Audits and Analysis Directorate (previously called the 'Food and Veterinary Office') carries out [audits and inspections](#) in EU Member States and in non-EU countries to verify that the national systems are working properly.

### European Commission proposal

In May 2013 the Commission published a [proposal](#) to revise existing rules and bring under the same regulation separate sets of rules that currently apply to official controls in specific areas. In the proposal, the scope of the controls is broadened to include plant health.

### European Parliament position

Parliament adopted its position at [first reading](#) on 15 April 2014, prior to the last European elections. After trilogue negotiations in the new parliamentary term, the Parliament and Council reached an 'early second reading' political agreement on 15 June 2016. Parliament's proposal to establish European Reference Centres to help combat fraud in the agri-food chain was accepted, as well as its amendment aimed at protecting whistle-blowers who report potential infringements. The EP and Council agreed to remove plant reproductive material from the scope of the regulation. Unannounced and risk-based controls will help detect fraud more effectively and make it possible to concentrate resources on areas where they are needed most. The [new rules](#) also enhance transparency of official controls and increase competent authorities' accountability to consumers and operators. The Commission will be empowered to adopt delegated or implementing acts to complement and specify requirements, such as on minimum frequencies of controls. The [Council's position](#) at first reading was formally adopted on 19 December 2016. On 31 January 2017, the Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) tabled a [recommendation](#) for second reading. Parliament's second-reading vote to formally endorse the position of the Council is due to take place during the March plenary session. This would complete the adoption procedure, with the Official Control Regulation thereafter becoming applicable on 14 December 2019.

Second reading: [2013/0140\(COD\)](#); Committee responsible: ENVI; Rapporteur: Karin Kadenbach, S&D, Austria.

