



Modernising the rules on food additives and labelling of azo dyes

MEPs updated and simplified EU rules for authorising food additives, flavourings and enzymes with the European Parliament adopting a legislative package on four draft regulations. The new procedures will assist the free movement of food within the EU and will also give better health and consumer protection, including clearer labelling of certain food colourings.

Food additives are currently regulated by a dozen or so EU laws, which the four new regulations will simplify, update and bring into line with the latest scientific findings. The first regulation lays down an EU-level "common authorisation procedure" for additives, enzymes and flavourings. The other three deal in detail with each of these categories, for which lists of authorised products will be compiled, with conditions of use and rules on labelling. For flavourings, maximum levels for undesirable substances will be set. The European Commission will manage the lists of approved products subject to risk assessments carried out by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA).

Single EU-wide approval will guarantee high standard of consumer protection

The new "common authorisation procedure", dealt with by the EP in a report by Åsa **WESTLUND** (PES, SE) will contribute to the free movement of food within the Community and to the protection of human health and consumer interests.

Community authorisation will be granted in a transparent, centralised manner on the basis of a scientific opinion by EFSA, provided the authorisation criteria set out in the sectoral food laws are met. Authorisation will take the form of a regulation adopted under comitology rules. EFSA will have nine months to give its opinion, not six as the Council wanted. The Commission will have a further nine months to submit a draft regulation to include the new substance in the relevant Community list.

Food additives must be safe and bring benefits to consumers

A second report by Åsa **WESTLUND** (PES, SE) deals with additives such as sweeteners, colourings, preservatives, antioxidants, emulsifiers, gelling agents and packaging gases.

The legislation states that a food additive may be authorized only if it is safe in use, if there is a technological need for its use, if its use does not mislead the consumer and if it has advantages and benefits to consumers. Food additives will be completely banned in unprocessed food, as will sweeteners and colourings in food for babies and small children, except when specifically included in the Community list. Member States may continue to prohibit the use of certain categories of food additives in traditional foods produced on their territory.

Better labelling of additives containing azo-dyes

As new scientific data on health risks for children exposed to azo-dyes had emerged since Parliament's first reading, MEPs managed to include in the compromise a new provision that foods containing some of those food colours (colourings E 110, E 104, E 122, E 129, E 102 and E 124) must be labelled not only with the relevant E number but also with the words "may have an adverse effect on activity and attention in children".

Nanotechnology

In its first reading, the EP had called for separate limit values for nanotechnologies. This was not taken up in the compromise but MEPs demanded successfully that, if the production process of an additive is changed, for example via a change in particle size through nanotechnology, a fresh authorization process, including a safety evaluation, must be carried out.

Stricter conditions for "natural" flavourings

The food industry uses many natural and artificial flavourings, about 2,600 of which are currently registered. Flavourings are used in or on foodstuffs to impart odour and/or taste. The EP report on flavourings was drafted by Mojca **DRČAR MURKO** (ALDE, SI).

The new legislation introduces stricter conditions for the use of the term "natural" when describing flavourings. The compromise adds a recital stating that where possible, attention should be given to the effect of flavourings on vulnerable groups and that flavourings should not mislead the consumer.

Limits on "undesirable substances" - but reprieve for pesto fans

The new legislation sets out clearer rules on maximum levels for "undesirable substances" that might be present in flavourings due to their natural occurrence in plants traditionally used as food or food ingredients. The limits will not apply to certain substances if the only flavouring ingredients added are fresh, dried or frozen herbs and spices (an example is pesto sauce). This exception will cover not only food prepared in restaurants (as proposed by Council) but also, thanks to Parliament, industrially processed food.

Enzymes

Food enzymes have been used for hundreds of years, for example in baking, cheese-making and brewing, where they perform useful functions such as improving texture, appearance and nutritional value. They play an increasingly important role in food production and can be used as alternatives to chemicals. Currently food enzymes used as processing aids are not covered by EU legislation. Member States' legislation on food enzymes differs significantly. Under the new legislation, harmonised EU rules would be laid down for the evaluation, approval and control of enzymes used in food.

As with additives, under the new rules enzymes will be authorised only if they do not mislead the consumer. The compromise specifies that misleading the consumer relates to the freshness, nature and quality of ingredients and the naturalness and nutritional quality of the product. Avril **DOYLE** (EPP-ED, IE) drafted the EP report on enzymes. Speaking in the debate on Monday 7 July, Avril Doyle said: "It is the first time that we have an EU- legislation on enzymes. Until now only three Member States - UK, France and Denmark - have their own risk assessment for enzymes ... the new harmonised rules will increase food safety and give more choice to consumers."

How will the system work?

In parallel to the authorisation procedure for new additives, flavourings and enzymes, all such substances already on the market - around 300 additives and 2,600 flavourings - will gradually be re-assessed. Additives/flavourings/enzymes that are currently authorised may stay on the market but once the updating process is complete, any such substance not on the approved list will be banned.

Contact :

Richard FREEDMAN

E-mail: press-EN@europarl.europa.eu

BXL: (32-2) 28 41448

STR: (33-3) 881 73785

PORT: (+32) 498 98 32 39

Constanze BECKERHOFF

E-mail: envi-press@europarl.europa.eu

BXL: (32-2) 28 44302

STR: (33-3) 881 73780

PORT: (32) 0498.983.550