

**ENVI COMMITTEE MEETING
FIPRONIL IN EGGS
MONDAY 11 SEPTEMBER 2017
STRASBOURG,**

SPEAKING NOTE

Honourable Chair,
Honourable Members,

I want to thank you for this opportunity to update this Committee on the recent contamination of eggs and egg products with Fipronil.

Let me begin by assuring you that public health and food safety are always considered a top priority for me and are treated as such by the Commission.

Coherently with this approach the Commission has **immediately taken very seriously the fipronil issue**.

It is important to clarify right from the beginning the succession of event. The Commission was informed of the fipronil contamination via the EU's Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) only on **20 July**.

Previously, **on 6 July 2017**, Belgium initiated a request for information to the Netherlands in the Administrative Assistance and Cooperation System (AAC).

This system allows Member States to liaise bilaterally (or multilaterally) to rapidly confirm suspected cases of fraud and is only monitored by the Commission when a "European Commission coordinated case" is created.

Belgium initiated a "normal case", not a European Commission coordinated case, which means that the Commission was not an addressee of the notification and no follow-up was expected by the Commission.

But as soon as the issue was notified through the RASFF system, the Commission took control of the situation, focusing on managing and minimising the consequences of the contamination.

Today's Committee meeting comes at an opportune time, then, as it allows me to present an overview of the situation as we move from mitigation to reflection on lessons learned. First, let me emphasise two points – one, the risk to human health remains very low and has been successfully contained. And two, this incident is clearly the result of a criminal act resulting in food fraud.

Today, and the situation evolves every day, 25 Member States (one less than previously announced) and 19 non-EU countries have been affected by the contamination. It is crucial to underline that all farms on which fipronil has been found have been blocked, and will remain so until Member States are certain that their production is safe.

In response to the findings of fipronil, the Commission requested that specific measures be taken at national level; in particular we have instructed, via the RASFF, the following measures to be taken:

1. **On 31 July 2017**, we shared information on applicable maximum residue levels and the measures to be taken as regards illegally treated farms.
2. **On 7 August**, Member States were requested to be vigilant with respect to products used to control red mites in poultry establishments, to guard against treatments with unauthorised substances.
3. **On 16 August**, we reminded all Member States that any past distribution of contaminated eggs/egg products/chicken meat had to be timely notified to RASFF in order to ensure the appropriate follow-up by the authorities of the country of destination.

4.

As a consequence, following the monitoring of domestic production, several Member States have blocked farms because of the illegal use of fipronil.

The Commission has also taken additional important steps:

1. **On 21 August** a note on the fipronil contamination was shared with our global partners to ensure transparency. The Commission has also been in direct contact with a number of non-EU countries to limit the impact on the EU's export capacity. And since the very beginning of this criminal situation I was systematically in contact with my counterparts in the most involved Member States.
2. **On 30 August**, we organised a meeting of the Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed, which examined technical aspects of the contamination and the appropriate follow-up action.
As a result the Commission services are co-ordinating an EU-wide monitoring exercise to investigate the possible use of illegal substances, including amitraz, in egg-producing farms.
3. I personally participated in a fruitful and forward-looking discussion in the Informal Meeting of the Agriculture and Fisheries Ministers, last week in Tallinn.
4. While the consequences of these criminal acts are being dealt with, we need to avoid any side effects on the food chain.
As such, we are asking authorities to ensure that contaminated food or animal by-products do not find their way into animal feed and thus back into the food chain.

I should stress that during this time my services have been working hand in hand with those of Commissioners Malmström and Hogan to ensure that the Commission's response has been coordinated and comprehensive.

We also met with the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee, and their suggestions, alongside yours today, will inform the ongoing response.

Honourable Chair,
Honourable Members,

Now, however, we need to move forward, and collectively examine what lessons can be learned, including on how we communicate and exchange information.

With this in mind, the Commission is organising fact-finding missions in early October to the four Member States where the original contamination occurred to gather information on the actions taken.

I have also taken the initiative to call a High-level Ministerial meeting on **26 September**, where we can reflect and agree on how best to strengthen the way the EU networks dealing with food safety and food fraud are used and how to improve the coordination between the Administrative Assistance and Cooperation System and the EU's Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed.

It is simply unacceptable that the criminal actions of a few could threaten the integrity and the reputation of our entire food chain, one of the economic pillars of the Union.

And yet, the consequences of this act have been so widespread that citizens are justifiably concerned. We – together with Member States – must ensure that the right lessons are learned and these learnings are applied diligently.

Honourable Chair,
Honourable Members,

To reiterate - maintaining the highest standards of public health protection across Europe is an absolute priority for me. But we all bear a collective responsibility for ensuring that the EU's food safety and food fraud systems and networks are used efficiently and effectively.

The RASFF system has been criticised in some quarters, erroneously in my opinion. When it is correctly used with timely and reliable information by the national control authorities of Member States, the system works.

And the proof is that once notified, RASFF - in combination with the EU's food traceability provisions - has allowed us to quickly find and destroy the relevant food products in the EU.

Close coordination and cooperation amongst Member States and with the Commission are essential in this regard. But so too is your engagement and I look forward to a robust discussion on this matter today.

Thank you.