

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0456/01

by Cristiana Muscardini (UEN) and Gianfranco Fini (UEN)  
to the Commission

Subject: Food safety, delays and connivance

In the wake of the increasing alarm over 'mad cow' disease and the legitimate fears of the public, controls on foodstuffs have been stepped up, albeit with some delay.

The Italian press, referring to investigations conducted by the Italian anti-adulteration units (NAS), has declared that a third of all products examined were found to be illegal in one way or another. The food safety emergency which has been plaguing Europe for a few years has concerned primarily BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy), discovered in Great Britain, dioxin-contaminated chickens bred in Belgium and the Netherlands, and antibiotic-reared pigs. All this has been done in absolute contempt of Community legislation

The current state of affairs is: fresh BSE scandals in France, Germany and Italy; the production, sale and export of banned animal meal by Great Britain and other Community countries; a delay by the Commission in deciding which butchered parts should be withdrawn from the market and what sanctions to impose on those countries which, because of non-existent controls or connivance, allowed the production and sale of foodstuffs which were harmful to health and caused incurable diseases.

In the light of this, can the Commission:

1. state the reasons for the delay in setting up the Food Safety Agency which was proposed by the Commission at the start of its term of office and supported by Parliament;
2. launch a new task force to monitor the problem, pending the entry into operation of the Food Safety Agency; report all cases of fraud and draw up a guide for all EU consumers to be promoted through the media and to help consumers purchase foods which do not put their health at risk; initiate infringement proceedings against those countries, including Italy, which have failed to fulfil their obligations by violating the most basic consumer protection rules; propose that Member States introduce sweeping, root-and-branch controls with specific deadlines for delivering the results. On the basis of these results measures could be taken, also to prevent any kind of harmful substances relating to the food sector from being surreptitiously sold in the EU or exported to third countries.