European Parliament
2014-2019

Committee on Petitions

31.3.2017

NOTICE TO MEMBERS

Subject: Petition No 1001/2016 by F. M. (German) on banning the use of glutamate in human food and animal feed

1. Summary of petition

The aim of the petition is to ban the use of glutamate in human food and animal feed. The petitioner is concerned about the use of the chemical, as it is a trigger for a number of mental diseases and causes brain cells to die. Long-term intake of glutamate disrupts the body's satiety signals and is responsible for severe obesity. Glutamate is mixed into animal feed to make them gain weight faster. What is more, clear labelling is not mandatory.

2. Admissibility

Declared admissible on 10 January 2017. Information requested from Commission under Rule 216(6).

3. **Commission reply**, received on 31 March 2017

Glutamic acid and glutamates (E 620-625) are authorised for use in food in accordance with Regulation (EC) No 1333/2008 on food additives[1]. They belong to the functional class of 'flavour enhancers', which are substances which enhance the existing taste and/or odour of a foodstuff.

In the European Union, food additives may only be authorised if their use does not, on the basis of the scientific evidence available, pose a safety concern to the health of the consumer at the level of the use proposed. Therefore, glutamic acid and glutamates (E 620-625) and all other additives that are on the EU list of permitted food additives must have been favourably assessed for their safety by the Scientific Committee for Food (SCF) and/or the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) prior to their authorisation. Moreover, permitted additives are

[1] OJ L 354, 31.12.2008, p. 16–33.

kept under continuous observation and the Commission will consider taking appropriate measures, when needed, in the light of new scientific information.

L-glutamic acid and its sodium, potassium, calcium, ammonium and magnesium salts (E 620-625), used as food additives, were evaluated by the SCF in 1990. In its evaluation, the SCF also considered possible effects on the central nervous system and concluded that the use of glutamic acid and its salts does not represent a hazard to health. Effects such as disruption of the body's satiety signals and severe obesity were not considered by the SCF.

The Commission set up a programme for the re-evaluation by EFSA of the safety of food additives that were already permitted in the EU before 20 January 2009. For this re-evaluation, EFSA takes into account any new scientific and technical information about the food additives, in particular toxicological data and data relevant for the estimation of the human exposure to the additives. EFSA is expected to deliver its scientific opinion on the safety of glutamic acid and its salts as food additives during the second half of 2017.

Additives in foodstuffs are labelled according to the rules set out in Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 on the provision of food information to consumers[1]. Food additives are food ingredients and should be mentioned in the ingredients list. They must be designated by the name of their functional class followed by their specific name or E-number, for instance: "flavour enhancer – monosodium glutamate" or "flavour enhancer: E 621".

Sodium glutamate is authorised as a feed additive (flavouring) according to Regulation (EC) No 1831/2003 on additives for use in animal nutrition[2]. This use was also re-evaluated by EFSA. The Commission will propose the re-authorisation of this additive in accordance with the EFSA conclusions. The conditions for authorisation, based on the EFSA opinion, will ensure that the safety requirements for human health, animal health and the environment are satisfied.

Conclusion

The authorised use of glutamic acid and glutamates (E 620-625) complies with the conditions laid down in the EU legislation on food additives. Based on the information currently available these additives are considered not to represent a hazard to health. If needed, and taking into account the conclusions of the re-evaluation by EFSA expected by the end of 2017, the Commission will take appropriate measures to assure that the use of glutamic acid and glutamates remains safe for the consumer.

Additives in foodstuffs are labelled according to the rules set out in Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 on the provision of food information to consumers.

As regards the conditions for authorisation in feed, the Commission will propose the re-authorisation of the additives in accordance with the EFSA conclusions and will ensure that the safety requirements for human health, animal health and the environment are satisfied.

[1] OJ L 304, 22.11.2011, p. 18–63.
[2] OJ L 268, 18.10.2003, p. 29–43.