

FOOD SAFETY: WHAT THE EU DOES FOR CONSUMERS

(Part 1)

Facts: EU policy aims for consumers

- Why to have a legislation in constant evolution
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- Food labeling / Substances added to food products



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SAFFI
Safe Food for Infants
in the EU and China

FACTS:

The objectives of European food safety policy are twofold: to protect human health and consumer interests and to facilitate the proper functioning of the single European market. Accordingly, the Union ensures that control standards are established and adhered to in the areas of food and feed hygiene, animal and plant health, and prevention of contamination of food by foreign substances. The Union also regulates the labeling of food and feed.

WHY TO HAVE A LEGISLATION IN CONSTANT EVOLUTION?

Following a series of crises concerning human food and feed (e.g., bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) and dioxins), EU food safety policy underwent substantial reform in the early 2000s. This led to the development of the "farm to fork" approach, which aims to ensure a high level of safety at all stages of the production and distribution process of all food products marketed in the EU, whether produced within the EU or imported from third countries. This body of legislation forms a complex and integrated system of rules that covers the entire food chain, from feed and animal health to plant protection and the production, processing, storage, transport, import, export and retail of food. These standards will be further developed in the context of the farm-to-fork strategy presented by the Commission in 2020 as part of the European Green Deal

General Legislation: A 2002 framework regulation establishes general principles and requirements for EU food and feed legislation, taking into account the "precautionary principle" (2.5.1). This regulation sets out an approach to risk assessment, establishes general provisions regarding the traceability of food and feed, and introduces the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed, which allows Member States and the Commission to rapidly exchange information and coordinate their response to health threats posed by food or feed. It also establishes the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) to assess and provide information on all risks associated with the food chain. Following an adequacy review, and in response to the European citizens' initiative on glyphosate, the EU reviewed its General Food Law to increase the transparency of risk assessments conducted by EFSA and the independence of the scientific studies underlying those assessments, as well as to improve cooperation with Member States regarding experts and data made available. The Commission also undertook to review other key pieces of legislation on novel foods, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), pesticides, food contact materials and food additives to bring them in line with the revision of the General Food Law and to increase transparency

FOOD HYGENE

In April 2004, as part of the "farm-to-fork" approach, a new legislative framework on food hygiene, known as the "hygiene package," was adopted, which lays down specific hygiene rules for food of animal origin and establishes a common framework for the organization of official controls on products of animal origin intended for human consumption. The common framework also includes specific rules for fresh meat, bivalve molluscs as well as milk and dairy products. This package assigns responsibility for



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food hygiene directly to the various operators in the food chain through a system of self-regulation, using the method of hazard analysis and critical control points, monitored by means of official controls to be carried out by the competent authorities. The annexes to the regulation were updated in March 2021.

FOOD CONTAMINATIONS

Food contamination can occur naturally or be the result of farming practices or production processes. In order to protect public health, maximum levels of certain contaminants in food products, such as nitrates, heavy metals and dioxins, are set and regularly updated. Residues in food products may also come from food-producing animals that have been treated with veterinary medicines or exposed to pesticides or biocides. Maximum residue limits are established and updated periodically. No food products containing unacceptable amounts of contaminants may be marketed in the EU.

Rules are also in place regarding food contact materials, such as materials used for transporting or processing food, as well as packaging materials and kitchen or tableware. A framework regulation amended in 2019 establishes general requirements for all relevant materials and articles, ensuring that these materials do not transfer their constituents to food in quantities harmful to human health. Specific EU measures containing more detailed provisions may also be adopted for the 17 food contact materials and articles (MCAs) listed in Annex I. For plastics, for example, restrictions have been introduced on the use of bisphenol A in plastic baby bottles. In September 2022, the Commission adopted new rules on the safety of recycled plastic materials and articles intended to come into contact with food.

FOOD LABELING

The legal framework for food labeling was developed with the aim of ensuring consumers' access to clear, understandable, and reliable information about the content and composition of products in order to protect their health and interests. For example, allergens, such as soy, gluten or lactose, must be clearly marked on packaging. The main change in the new regulation on the provision of food information to consumers, which has been applicable since December 2016, is the requirement for manufacturers to indicate the presence of allergens in unpackaged food products, such as in restaurants and canteens. Producers must also indicate the origin of unprocessed meat (for certain types of meat other than beef, for which there is already an obligation to indicate the origin on the label) and the presence of imitation foods, such as plant products that replace cheese or meat. The details are set out in specific origin labeling provisions, which require (with some exceptions) that the place of rearing and place of slaughter of pre-packaged fresh, chilled, or frozen meat of swine, sheep, goat, and poultry species be indicated.

The labeling, presentation or advertising of food must not mislead consumers. There are clear standards for permitted nutrition and health claims (e.g., "low-fat" or "high-fiber" or claims referring to a link between nutrition and health). Such claims must be based on scientific evidence and can be found in an EU public register.

A new 2013 regulation on foods for specific categories, updated in 2021 and March 2023, abolishes the concept of a broad category of "dietary" foods in favor of standards for specific groups of vulnerable consumers, such as infants and young children, people with special medical conditions, and individuals on low-calorie diets aimed at weight reduction.

SUBSTANCES ADDED TO FOOD PRODUCTS

Food additives, food enzymes or food flavorings-also known as "food improvers"-are substances not normally consumed as such that are intentionally added to foods to perform certain technological functions as colorants, sweeteners or preservatives. Regulations are in place that govern the authorization procedure, conditions of use and labeling of such substances. The same applies to food supplements, such as vitamins and minerals, which may be added to foods for the purpose of enriching them or enhancing a particular nutritional aspect of them, provided that they appear on the specific lists of permitted substances and their respective authorized sources.



SAFFI: THE SINO-EUROPEAN CONSORTIUM PARTNER CENTERS



- Coordination: French National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and Environment (INRAE),
- Five international infant food companies (Friesland Campina, HiPP, YIOTIS, Beingmate, YFFC)
 - Two food safety authority institutions (ZAIQ and ANSES)
 - Three European technological SMEs (CremeGlobal, Computomics, BDS)
 - The Union of 49 National European Societies of Pediatric (EPA-UNEPSA)
 - Seven leading European and Chinese academic institutions (WU, UNITO, IRTA, IVV; ZJU, ZAAS, JAAS)



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