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European Parliament vote on lactic acid: Meat safety at stake

In what could be a turning point to the EU's 'farm to fork'¹ policy to food safety, Wednesday's European Parliament vote on lactic acid will indicate whether the EU accepts chemical decontamination of meat. Lactic acid is a substance used outside the EU to decontaminate bovine carcasses.

BEUC, The European Consumer Organisation is against any kind of chemical substances to decontaminate meat. We therefore strongly urge the European Parliament to oppose the use of lactic acid on beef.

While industry pushes to allow lactic acid, BEUC is concerned slaughterhouses could use it to mask poor hygiene practices and clean meat prior to final inspection by the official vet. If it were ever to be permitted, lactic acid should only be applied after final inspection by the official veterinarian guaranteeing that meat is fit for consumption. Given consumers' rejection of chemical treatments of meat, it is essential that they are informed via the label if their meat has been chemically treated.

Monique Goyens, Director General of BEUC, said:

"Evidence shows that consumers are against the chemical treatment of meat². They want and expect the meat they eat to be safe. The foremost concern of decision makers must be to maintain Europe's strict food safety standards regardless of trade pressures.

"If chemicals such as lactic acid were ever to be allowed, their use should be made transparent for consumers. Shoppers should be able to rely on clear labels telling them whether or not their meat has been chemically treated."

ENDS

For more information, please read out Q&A on this subject: <http://bit.ly/Sn5lym>

¹ Good hygiene practices and safety management systems have to be in place all along the food production chain so that food that is sold to the final consumer is ultimately safe.

² An online survey by BEUC UK member Which? of 1,406 British citizens, aged 16+ years, showed that "60% of people would be unlikely to buy chicken which had been treated with washes/sprays which use mild acid". The survey was conducted between 10-14.02.2011. Data was weighted to be representative of the GB population. Another study conducted in Finland showed that "nearly 90% of respondents were of the opinion that they would not choose chemically treated poultry meat". <http://bit.ly/V7STFR>