



The Consumer Voice in Europe

COOL for meat used in processed foods: meeting consumers' expectations

(BEUC Letter sent to the EC/Commissioner Vytenis Andriukaitis on
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Brussels, 9 March 2015

Re: Country-of-origin labelling of meat used in processed foods: meeting consumers' expectations

Dear Commissioner Andriukaitis,

I am writing to you on behalf of BEUC in the aftermath of the European Parliament's adoption of a resolution¹ calling for mandatory country-of-origin labelling (COOL) of meat used as an ingredient in processed foods. The text, which was endorsed by a strong majority of Members of the European Parliament on 11 February, urges the European Commission to follow up with a legislative proposal and we would like to firmly echo that demand.

A staggering 90% of Europeans want to know the origin of meat, both fresh and processed². This demand for transparency was already strong before the 2013 horsemeat fraud incidents and has grown even bigger since then. As you know, origin labelling is already mandatory for fresh beef and will be extended to fresh meat from pigs, poultry, sheep and goats as of April this year. However, EU consumers will remain in the dark when it comes to the origin of meat ingredients used in foodstuffs, although these account for 30-50% of EU's total slaughtered meat volume.

President Juncker's Political Guidelines³ pled for a "Union of democratic change": we believe the clear message that came from the European Parliament is the opportunity to turn words into deeds by tabling a legislative proposal on compulsory COOL for meat used as an ingredient. It is also a concrete occasion to help demonstrate the EU added value to 'ordinary' citizens, to whom the European Union often appears as too distant. This is all the more important as some Member States (e.g. France) have already passed a law⁴ requiring COOL for meat used as an ingredient while suspending its application until a decision has been made at the EU level on the modalities of processed meat origin labelling.

While some will inevitably consider any new food labelling rule as 'red tape' and argue it contradicts the EU Better Regulation agenda, we are deeply convinced of the contrary. Indeed, as an important element of consumers' trust in their food, COOL can contribute to boosting the economic growth of the EU food market. If proof was needed, plunging sales of meat-based frozen ready meals following the horsemeat scandal have served to demonstrate the disastrous economic impact of lost consumer confidence.

¹ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P8-TA-2015-0034+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>

² As shown by the European Commission's own [report](#) on mandatory COOL for meat used as an ingredient and research carried out by consumer organisations across Europe: [BEUC](#) in AT, FR, PL & SW; by [Test-Achats](#) in BE; [OCU](#) in ES; DECO in PT; [Altroconsumo](#) in IT; [KEPKA](#) in EL; [DTest](#) in CZ.

³ http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/docs/pg_en.pdf

⁴ Loi sur la consommation du 13 février 2014 <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/14/ta/ta0295.asp>

Finally, as for concerns that have been raised over the potential costs mandatory COOL for processed meat might entail, the huge gap between the European Commission report's findings⁵ and a study⁶ carried out in France by our member UFC – Que Choisir on beef-based products clearly calls for a more in-depth look into this issue, by product and meat type. In any case this should not prevent the publication of a legislative proposal for discussion by Member States and the European Parliament.

We thank you in advance for your consideration and remain at your disposal for further discussing this matter. Please kindly note this letter was also sent to First Vice-President Timmermans, Vice-President Katainen and Commissioner Hogan.

Yours sincerely,

Monique Goyens
Director General

⁵ The EC [report](#) found operational costs increases for industry ranging from +15-20% up to 50% and suggested 90% of these costs would be passed onto the consumer (hence reflected in the final price of the food).

⁶ [Study](#) by the consumer organisation UFC – Que Choisir published on 9 December 2013.