

Ms. Stella Kyriakides
European Commissioner
for Health and Food Safety
European Commission
Rue de la Loi 200
B- 1049 Brussels

The Consumer Voice in Europe

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13 April 2023

Subject: EU food packaging legislation falls short of consumer needs and expectations, new research by BEUC members show

Dear Commissioner Kyriakides,

Today, BEUC releases findings of an eleven-country consumer survey detailing needs and attitudes towards safe and sustainable food packaging. Together with our members,¹ we sought to understand how consumers use food containers and kitchenware. Are they aware of food-related risks associated with using these items? Do they feel well informed – and what are their main concerns? Over 11,000 consumers participated in our survey. We are confident that their answers can help the European Commission devise EU rules that better correspond to actual consumer needs and behaviours, as well as meet their expectations.

In brief, the findings show notable concerns among European consumers about the negative impact food packaging could have on health and the environment. There is significant support for EU action to prevent such impacts. This includes strong support behind the goals identified in the Farm to Fork Strategy. For example,

- 9 in 10 consumers support EU rules to reduce the use of hazardous chemicals in food packaging.
- 4 in 5 consumers (strongly) agree that the EU should require producers to only use packaging materials that are reusable and recyclable.

The enclosed report unpacks these findings in further detail along with our recommendations for a revised legal framework that better corresponds to consumer needs and expectations.

A recurrent theme emerging from our survey is also that consumers do not feel sufficiently informed when buying or using food containers and packaging. 90% of respondents thus say they overall feel only somewhat or even poorly informed. There are further signs that consumers often do not receive information they in fact are entitled to, such as directions for safe and appropriate use. This situation can mislead consumers and may in turn increase food-related risks. The findings for example show that 1 in 5 consumers use throwaway packaging and containers in ways that could increase their exposure to chemical contaminants.

Taken together, these findings show that EU food packaging legislation falls short of consumer needs – and expectations. A rethink of the legal framework is required to enable informed consumer choices, and to better protect the health of people and our planet. This fact is rightly recognised in the Farm to Fork Strategy in which the Commission commits to build a better, future proof legal framework. BEUC and our members fully support this ambition.

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¹ Altroconsumo (Italy), Consumentenbond (the Netherlands), DECO (Portugal), dTest (Czechia), Forbrugerrådet TÆNK (Denmark), Forbrukerrådet (Norway), OCU (Spain), Testachats/Testaankoop (Belgium), VKI (Austria), vzbv (Germany), Zveza Potrošnikov Slovenije (Slovenia).

The EU and Member State governments should also act on these findings today. There is an evident need to invest in awareness-raising campaigns to educate consumers about how to avoid food-related risks when using – and reusing – food containers and packaging. Consumer groups can play an important role in supporting such efforts and in ensuring that relevant information reaches consumers.

We would warmly welcome an opportunity to discuss with you how our members could contribute to such campaigns, as well as to present our findings and recommendations for a revised legal framework that better corresponds to consumer needs and expectations.

Yours sincerely,

Monique Goyens
Director General

Encl. – BEUC. *Unwrapped – what consumers say about safe and sustainable food packaging.*
April 2023.