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EU must make consumers' chicken safe without chemicals

Chicken sold in Europe in the future could be dipped in chemicals to wash bacteria away, according to a European Commission proposal BEUC strongly disapproves of.

Campylobacter is the most common cause of food poisoning in the EU, [affecting an estimated 200,000 people annually](#). In its strategy to tackle this bacterium, the European Commission is suggesting a food hygiene limit for campylobacter and wants to make sure Member States check that businesses comply with it.

The strategy also aims to allow slaughterhouses to wash poultry carcasses with the chemical substance peroxyacetic acid (PAA). This follows a request by the United States' Department of Agriculture that the EU approves the use of this chemical wash which is widely used in US poultry plants.

BEUC applauds action to control campylobacter but deplores opening up the possibility that chicken is rinsed in chemicals such as PAA. Before Member States discuss the campylobacter strategy next week¹, BEUC urges the EU to safeguard its 'farm to fork' approach on food safety.

The priority should be to prevent the contamination of poultry by harmful bugs on the farm. Measures include farm workers using dedicated clothing and footwear to avoid bringing bacteria into poultry houses. 'Poultry washes' are fairly inefficient and relying on them could distract farmers and abattoir staff from preventive measures.

Monique Goyens, BEUC Director General, commented:

"Campylobacter threatens public health and we need the EU to make our chicken safer. Setting targets to slash levels of this bug on poultry carcasses is a good move, as farmers and abattoirs will have to improve their practices.

"EU consumers have been very clear that they have no appetite for meat which has been treated with chemicals². Policy makers should respect consumers' wishes.

"A green light for PAA on chicken could lead to farmers and poultry plant workers lowering their guard on hygiene standards. This is not the way forward, especially when the effectiveness of PAA has been questioned by the European food safety watchdog³.

¹ On December 15th, experts from Member States will participate in the *Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed, Section Biological Safety of the Food Chain*. See [agenda](#). BEUC sent a [letter](#) to Member States today.

² No less than 85% of Danes found chlorine washes on meat "totally unacceptable", while 67% of the British and close to 90% of the Finns surveyed said they were unlikely to buy chemically-treated chicken. See [BEUC position paper](#).

"It is delusion to believe that rinsing off campylobacter at slaughterhouse level will solve the problem. 50% to 80% of campylobacteriosis cases can be traced back to *live chickens* carrying the bacteria, which then spread to people via for instance air, water or direct contact.⁴ Poultry *meat* is only the tip of the iceberg and that is why efforts to bring campylobacter levels down should start on farms.

"The fact that the United States has asked the Commission to allow PAA-treated chicken should not dilute our 'farm to fork' philosophy. We look to Member States to stand by EU consumers and call on the Commission to make our chicken safer without chemicals."

ENDS

For further information:

[Q&A](#) "Make EU consumers' chicken safe without chemicals", Dec 2015.

BEUC [letter](#) to Member States, Dec 2015.

BEUC position "[Peroxyacetic acid rinses on poultry meat: the consumer perspective](#)", July 2014.

BEUC factsheet on [Meat decontamination](#), Feb 2015.

Blog post "[What is wrong with chlorinated chicken](#)", July 2014

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³ EFSA's Scientific [Opinion](#) on the evaluation of the safety and efficacy of peroxyacetic acid solutions for reduction of pathogens on poultry carcasses and meat, 2014.

⁴ EFSA's Scientific [Opinion](#) on Campylobacter in broiler meat production