

16/04/2014

EU food inspections to rise

Food sold in the EU will be subject to stricter inspections after a European Parliament vote last night¹. The new laws aim to boost the safety and authenticity of the food we eat and raise consumer confidence which has been so harshly hit by recent scandals.

Ilaria Passarani, Head of the Food & Health Department at BEUC, commented:

"Last year's horsemeat scam still weighs on many people's mind. Although we were lucky it wasn't a question of safety, consumers' trust in their food was severely compromised. Adding to the problem, we have seen food inspections and checks of food labels in the UK plummet by over 6% and 16% respectively over the past year². Yesterday's vote intends to reverse these trends.

"Transparency is the currency of trust. Making publication of food control results mandatory is crucial for rebuilding trust. If consumers can see safety certificates online or on restaurant doors, no doubt they will eventually trust their food again.

"Food controls must be carried out without advance notice if we want them to be as fair as possible. As for who should be in charge, having staff control their own work is not an option. Independence is the only answer. We are glad last night's vote enshrines independent and unannounced controls.

"Adopting stricter rules is a good start, but half the battle. What happens on the ground matters most. Governments must allocate sufficient financial and human resources so food controls can be performed correctly. Safe food should not be compromised by the recession we find ourselves in.

"MEPs have acknowledged that higher penalties for food fraud, inadequate hygiene or misleading labelling are part of the solution. As regards who pays for these tougher inspections, national governments will have the power to exempt smallest enterprises from chipping in. Such option could water down the proposal's ambition as SMEs account for 90% of food manufacturers in Europe."

ENDS

Notes

1. Official controls and activities performed to ensure the application of food and feed law, rules on animal health and welfare, plant health, plant reproductive material, plant protection products
2. <http://press.which.co.uk/whichpressreleases/how-safe-is-your-food/>

For more information on BEUC's position see our paper 'EU proposal for a review of Official Controls – BEUC comments', June 2013: <http://bit.ly/120DNEn>