Press Statement

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EU takes first step towards less acrylamide in food

Today Member States have adopted a proposal by the European Commission to reduce cancer-causing acrylamide in food. With the new rules, food manufacturers, fast-food chains and restaurants will have to apply measures to ensure acrylamide levels in their products remain below benchmarks. Up until now, the EU had relied on industry's voluntary efforts to reduce acrylamide. However, levels of acrylamide in Europeans' food have remained roughly the same.

BEUC welcomes the move as a first step but regrets that the EU did not go as far as setting binding limits. The consumer group urges the Commission and Member States to swiftly deliver on their promise to set binding limits for certain foodstuffs.

Monique Goyens, Director General at BEUC, commented:

"It has been fifteen years since scientists have known about acrylamide in food and warn about its effect on health. Yet, levels of this cancer-causing contaminant in Europeans' food have remained roughly the same. So it is good news the EU is finally obliging the industry to act and reduce acrylamide in their fries, crisps, bread, biscuits, or coffee.

"Our member organisations have found big variations of acrylamide amounts in similar types of foods.[1] If some manufacturers can bring acrylamide levels down, others can too. No one is asking to ban any food.

"However, we remain convinced binding limits are needed if we are to effectively protect consumers. Without mandatory limits, food makers will still be allowed to sell products which contain high levels of acrylamide[2]. Moreover, legal limits would equally apply to imported foodstuffs."

More info:
BEUC response to EU consultation

Background:
Acrylamide is a chemical that naturally forms when starchy food such as potatoes or cereals is baked, fried or roasted at above 120°C. Lab tests have shown that acrylamide in the diet causes cancer in animals and therefore scientists have concluded it potentially

[1] Some examples include crisps and fries in the Netherlands (Consumentenbond), Belgium (Test-Achats/Test-Aankoop) and Italy (Altroconsumo), gingerbreads in Norway (Forbrukerradet).
[2] Where benchmarks are exceeded, the proposal does not prohibit the sale of foodstuffs but requires businesses to take corrective action and reduce acrylamide further.

increases the cancer risk for consumers of all ages. In 2015, EFSA concluded that acrylamide in food is a public health concern.

Consumers get exposed to acrylamide through industrially-produced food (incl. crisps, bread, biscuits, coffee) but also from home cooking (e.g. if they cook fries above 175 °C or burn their morning toast).

For instance, techniques to reduce acrylamide in potato-based products include using potato varieties less likely to develop acrylamide, storing them properly, and frying them at minimum temperature.

ENDS

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