

December 2013

Origin of meat-based ready meals to remain in the dark

European consumers will barely know more about the origin of the meat in their ready-made meals.

This is the main conclusion of a long-awaited report the European Commission has just published on country of origin labelling (COOL). While an initial version leaked in October 2013 stacked the arguments against COOL for processed meat, the final version released today, while not explicitly ditching it, gives little hopes to consumers wanting to know more about the origin of their food.

Following the leak, the publication of the report was reportedly blocked by France who called on the Commission to make COOL mandatory for processed meat. Manufacturers currently choose whether they display such information on ready meal packages.

The study details the feasibility of COOL for meat used in sausages, lasagne and other meat-based processed foods. Although it has no legal implication, the report is of crucial importance as it will drive future discussions.

Ruth Veale, Head of the Food, Safety and Environment Department at BEUC, commented:

“Our worst fears have been confirmed by the publication of this report. This is a blow to the many consumers who want to know the origin of their meat, including when it has been processed.

“We do not understand that in the aftermath of the horsemeat scandal the report comes forward with recommendations such as telling consumers the pig meat in their sausage comes from the EU. This is a no-brainer as virtually no pig meat is imported into the EU for processing. Consumers want to know the country where their meat comes from, let’s just give them the information they want.

“Contrary to what the report suggests, consumers’ demand for greater transparency in the food chain is not an emotional reaction to the horsemeat scandal. Our research showing about 90% of consumers want to know their meat’s journey from stable to table was published before the ill-famous food fraud¹.

“The food industry claims making origin labelling mandatory for meat used in ready meals would spur price hikes. Where is the proof? Our French member UFC-Que Choisir’s study foresees a pack of frozen lasagne would cost an extra €0.015 only².

“We now look to the Council and Parliament to get the facts straight and to call on the Commission to make concrete proposals for mandatory origin labelling of processed meat. If the Institutions are serious about putting the EU economy back on track, it is high time they took consumers’ concerns into account. They are the ones driving the economy after all.”

ENDS

Notes to editors:

[1] See our report “Where does my food come from?”, January 2013, <http://bit.ly/1fofmaP>

[2] See UFC Que Choisir’s report “Indication de l’origine de la viande de bœuf dans les produits transformés” <http://bit.ly/1cmC5xS>