

EU says too early to impose meat labelling

February 12 2013

The European Commission said Tuesday it is too early to require labelling on meat used in processed foods despite growing uproar over horse meat being passed off as beef in frozen hamburgers and lasagne.

"It is premature to think about compulsory labelling of [processed foods](#) when it comes to the meat used," said Frederic Vincent, spokesman for the EU Health and Consumer Affairs Commissioner Tonio Borg.

"At present, the problem is ... one of fraud," Vincent said, referring to the horsemeat scandal.

He insisted on the other hand that the current tracing regime for fresh meat was working.

The origin of fresh meat must be clearly marked since the [Mad Cow Disease](#) scandal in the 1980s and 1990s.

Processed foods are not covered, however, and only have to state the type of meat used—beef, pork or poultry.

The European Commission is reviewing the situation, Vincent said, adding: "We are looking at whether (such labelling) is possible ... but nothing is fixed yet."

Commissioner Borg will host a meeting of EU agriculture ministers and officials in Brussels on Wednesday to discuss the crisis after horsemeat meat was found in prepared foods believed to be made of beef in several

countries.

The EU says public health is not at stake but that the problem is instead one of misrepresentation and it is up to national regulators to take action.

Critics say the scandal does have implications for [food safety](#) as it shows that consumers cannot be certain that what they buy is exactly what it says on the box.

Additionally in Britain, among the worst hit, the authorities are worried that horse meat could contain traces of equine medicines such as phenylbutazone, used to control pain, which are unsuited for [human consumption](#).

"At this state, that has not been found," said Vincent, insisting again that "it is not a health issue, it is a labelling problem."

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Citation: EU says too early to impose meat labelling (2013, February 12) retrieved 8 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-02-eu-early-impose-meat.html>

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