

China beefs up law to fight food safety scandals

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(AP)—China's top court has issued guidelines calling for harsher punishment for making and selling unsafe food products in the latest response to tainted food scandals that have angered the public.

The Supreme People's Court said Friday that the guidelines will list as crimes specific acts such as the sale of food excessively laced with chemicals or made from animals that have died from disease or unknown causes.

China's penal code, which forbids unsafe and poisonous food, does not specify what acts are considered in violation of the law.

"We hope this explanation will be a strong tool for police and judicial authorities," Pei Xianding, a supreme court judge, told a news conference.

Adulterating [baby food](#) so that it severely lacks nutrition is also punishable as a crime under the guidelines. Negligent government food inspectors are also targeted for criminal punishment.

Despite years of food scandals—from milk contaminated with an industrial chemical to the use of industrial dyes in eggs—China has been unable to clean up its [food supply](#) chain.

In the latest scandal, Chinese police have found meat harvested from rats and [foxes](#) was sold as lamb after it was processed with additives.

Li Fangping, a Beijing lawyer who represented victims of the tainted milk scandal, said the guidelines are more of a political statement than a judicial document, as existing laws can sufficiently address food [safety violations](#). "It is a policy declaration," Li said. "It is a response to the widespread public dissatisfaction."

The supreme court said 2,088 people have been prosecuted in 2010-2012 in 1,533 food safety cases. It said the number of such cases has grown exponentially in the past several years. For example, [Chinese courts](#) prosecuted 861 cases of poisonous food in 2012, compared to 80 cases in 2010.

"The situation is really grave and has indeed caused great harm to the people," Pei said.

Harsher [punishments](#) are necessary to combat the food scandals, he said. "We cannot tolerate it any longer. We must punish the criminals severely, or we cannot answer to our people."

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