

EU sets out post-horsemeat food standards revamp

May 6 2013

The European Commission set out Monday what it said would be a revolution in food safety from farm to fork, drawn up in response to the scandal of horsemeat sold as beef.

But the EU executive was careful to underline that the new rules would not in and of themselves prevent willful future mis-selling.

The agri-[food industry](#) is the European Union's second biggest, in the world's largest tariff-free market of half a billion consumers.

It is worth, the Commission says, some 750 billion euros per year and employs nearly 50 million people across Europe.

If passed by EU member governments and the [European Parliament](#), the proposed revamp, boiling down existing legislation and sharpening testing regimes, will introduce:

— financial penalties directly related to profits from "fraud";

— and mandatory spot-check testing, as opposed to the power only to recommend inspections, as now.

In a departure, national authorities will be encouraged to publish [league tables](#) where consumers can check food data from everything from big-brand producers to individual restaurants, the Commission's proposals said.

But the changes will not affect, in the main, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) or "micro-businesses," a large part of the post-industrial [food chain](#).

Neither will stipulations governing the important seed sector be applied to "private gardeners," who will still be able to buy seeds "in small quantities" on open markets.

"The recent horsemeat scandal has shown that there is room for improvement," said EU Health and Consumer Commissioner Tonio Borg, in announcing the rulebook rewrite.

He said the changes "take on board" some of the lessons of a scandal that stunned consumers in large part due to links to organised crime.

Borg's office spelled out that the labelling of food, as seen in the [horsemeat](#) scandal, is a problem of fraud, not origin—already covered in legislation due to take effect from December 2014.

"This fraud could have occurred, even if there was mandatory origin labelling in place," it said of the equine scandal.

The Commission is to report to the European Parliament by December on whether or not it is desirable or feasible to extend origin labelling to meat provenance, it added.

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