

EU health commissioner favours more tests for horsemeat

June 10 2013

The EU's health commissioner is in favour of a new round of Europe-wide DNA tests to check for the presence of horsemeat in beef products, following a scandal earlier this year that rocked confidence in food safety standards.

Commenting on thousands of tests on beef products carried out in March and April that showed one out of 20 to be tainted with [horsemeat](#), the bloc's Health Commissioner Tonio Borg said this was "low but I would have preferred it to be lower."

"This is why I am personally in favour of a second round—to see whether this has been contained or is still going on," Borg said, adding that it would be up to member states to approve this course, not the [European Commission](#) alone.

The thousands of tests on European beef products showed more than 4.5 percent were tainted with horsemeat after cases across Europe sparked consumer outrage and forced companies into costly product recalls.

A separate test of horse [carcasses](#) showed just over 0.5 percent were positive for phenylbutazone, a [painkiller](#) for horses potentially harmful to humans.

At the time, Borg and other officials insisted the core problem was one of fraud—horsemeat being passed off as beef—and not food safety, a point he repeated on Monday.

He suggested, however, that the EU's Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF), used by member states to exchange information on food safety problems, could now also have a role in food fraud cases.

"It is important to highlight that thanks to the existence of RASFF, food safety authorities throughout the EU were able to swiftly exchange information," proving the system to be "an indispensable tool."

"As a result, the products were traced and withdrawn from the market," Borg said, adding: "The Commission envisages to extend the scope of RASFF to the fight against food fraud."

The Commission also cited the case in the [Czech Republic](#) last year when 36 people died after drinking adulterated spirits as justifying a greater RASFF role to counter growing instances of food fraud.

The RASFF report itself showed a 3.9 percent fall in 2012 food safety notifications to 8,797, with some 60 percent of the total being follow-up actions. There were 526 "alert" cases involving serious risk, it said.

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