



Horsemeat scandal and the EU level response

A symptom of a wider problem in our agri-food system

The discovery of meat from horses and pigs in processed food marketed as beef products has raised serious questions about the European food supply system. In addition to immediate questions about applicable rules and responsibility for controls and ensuring compliance, there are wider questions in terms of legislation and the agriculture and food supply system in Europe.

Tougher rules and stricter enforcement can reduce the scope for fraud and gaming but there are also more fundamental questions about the nature of our agriculture and food system, which are particularly relevant in the context of the ongoing reform of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy. As a consequence, the Greens/EFA group believes a credible and coherent EU-level response requires a comprehensive multi-faceted approach.

FOOD QUALITY COMPLIANCE

Controls to ensure compliance with EU food labelling laws as well as sanctions in case of non-compliance are the responsibility of EU member states. Member states have to fully investigate the extent of the scandal: where the mislabelled meat comes from, and how and why it was mislabelled. Where fraud is involved, the responsible authorities have to apply severe and dissuasive sanctions.

Beyond the immediate scandal, strict and regular controls along the food chain and severe sanctions have to be established to prevent further fraud.

The Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) of the EU Commission has the mandate to conduct audits and inspections to check whether EU requirements and legislation are complied with. **There is a need to strengthen the FVO and to expand its competence and capacity for carrying out the necessary inspections to ensure compliance**, as well as coordinating compliance among EU member states. The results of the FVO's work must be given **proper political follow-up, with democratic scrutiny** by the European Parliament and national parliaments, aimed at ensuring issues it raises are properly acted on and addressed.

The Commission plans to revise EU hygiene legislation this year (the Hygiene Package). Supposedly, it is set to propose making economic operators responsible for controls on the food supply chain, rather than public authorities, as is currently the case. **Making the food industry responsible for its own compliance is clearly not a prudent approach**, given the primary concern of the industry is on maximising profits and lowering costs, rather than on food safety. This scandal clearly shows that the food chain does not need less independent controls, but more official and independent controls, as it is in no shape to regulate itself.

TRANSPARENCY AND FOOD INFORMATION

While compliance with existing EU rules on food quality and information needs to be improved, there are also clear deficiencies in EU legislation on food information and labelling, in particular, with regard to meat and meat products.

The Greens have consistently pushed for more ambitious and more comprehensive labelling for all meats, including for meat used as ingredients in processed products, and other sensitive products such as milk or milk used in dairy products. **The Commission must now come forward with proposals to revise EU legislation on food information to this end, notably ambitious origin labelling for all meat and processed meat products and ingredients** (including place of birth, rearing and slaughtering). Currently, origin labelling only exists for unprocessed, fresh beef, not for processed beef or any other meat. A local farming and direct sales labelling scheme, as originally considered, would also provide greater transparency and certainty for consumers.

AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD SYSTEM REFORM

This scandal raises serious concerns about the flaws of the current concentrated and globalised food supply system, based on highly complicated supply chains in which economic operators buy ingredients for processed food from wherever they are cheapest. Networks of brokers, cold-store operators and subcontracted meat-cutting plants supply rapidly fluctuating orders. This scandal has highlighted that **we have a highly vulnerable food supply system consisting of many points where the integrity of the food chain can break down.**

Ultimately, **we need to fundamentally reform our agricultural and food system to address this. This means prioritising and supporting regional, transparent and short-distance food supply chains and quality food production.** This is particularly relevant in the context of the ongoing legislative process on the **reform of the Common Agricultural Policy.**

With the European Parliament about to vote on CAP reform, this is all the more pertinent. Crucial in this regard are Green **proposals for cross-compliance rules on food chain transparency and food safety**, which would ensure the CAP is used to promote the production of quality food. The group hopes MEPs will now see the sense in supporting these provisions (notably on transparency - animal IDs, BSE notification and the ban on hormones being fed to animals, but also other environmental rules on groundwater pollution, soil erosion, and minimum maintenance).

Guaranteeing support for rural development is also vital for strengthening short-distance food supply chains and quality local production. Current drafts would see support for rural development undermined to favour unsustainable direct payments and wasteful insurance and risk management schemes. The Greens believe this must be changed.