



Horse meat fraud

Need to strengthen the mechanisms for consumer protection and the confidence consumers must be able to have in food.

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Food safety and quality assurance

Food plays an essential role in people's lives. Consumers rightly expect food to be safe and that the information that comes with the food is reliable. Any deviation from these expectations is damaging to the consumer's interests. It also damages the confidence consumers must be able to have in the food industry and controlling organisations and authorities.

Over the past decades, the EU has taken initiatives to improve food safety assurance. The introduction of traceability systems, which make it possible to track where food has come from and where it has gone to, has been an important step forward. The EU also embraced the principle of "operator's responsibility". The responsibility for the safety and quality of animals or animal products that are delivered, including the accompanying information, lies with the suppliers.

Based on these initiatives the safety of our food is more assured than ever before.

In the present case, where horse meat is fraudulently presented as beef, consumers have been grossly misled. While calling for the importance of the implementation and the respect of all the rules related to traceability, information and control, the FVE denounces this massive fraud.

- ***Safety and quality of the food must be assured, and the information coming with the food must be correct and complete. FVE calls for more effective controls on food from animal production and to every step along the food chain.***

Horse meat

In some EU Member States horses are slaughtered and consumed, in others not. The general rule in the EU is that a horse is allowed to be slaughtered for consumption as long as it is not decided to exclude it. Such decision must be recorded in the horse's passport. A main reason for deciding to exclude a horse from being consumed as food is that this allows the animal to be treated with a wider range of veterinary medicinal products. However, this system fails to work since there is no reliable guarantee that the horse passport, in which the exclusion has to be recorded, stays with the animal for the whole of its life. There is no central EU register for horse passports, which would prevent the issuing of a duplicate passport.

- ***FVE calls for the establishment of an EU register for horse passports, to reduce the risk of horses that have been excluded from being slaughtered for human consumption are re-introduced in the food chain.***

"Bute" in horse meat

Phenylbutazone, also known as "bute" is a medicinal substance. Long ago it was used as a painkiller to treat people. However, because of unacceptable side effects, it is no longer allowed. In some EU countries the substance is authorised for use in horses under the condition that the treated horse will never be slaughtered for consumption. FVE finds it unacceptable that a substance forbidden for horses that will be slaughtered has been found in horse meat for human

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consumption. It demonstrates that mechanisms to prevent the introduction of meat contaminated with forbidden substances in the food chain must be strengthened.

- ***FVE calls for a thorough investigation on how the substance could end up in the meat. All stakeholders should take common action to prevent this occurring again.***

Proper resourcing of controls

FVE emphasises that proper resourcing of Official Controls by Member States is crucial in order to ensure public health is protected and ensure that animal health and animal welfare legislation is adequately enforced. It is particularly important that effective veterinary services are maintained during times of national financial crisis; because this is precisely the time that unscrupulous operators are likely to attempt to carry out unsafe and fraudulent activities.

Brussels, 14 February 2013

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Notes:

The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) is an umbrella organisation of 44 veterinary organisations from 38 European countries, representing a total of around 240 000 veterinarians.

For further information, consult the FVE website <http://www.fve.org> or contact the FVE Secretariat on Tel +32 2 533 70 20 or by e-mail to [info@fve.org](mailto:info@fve.org)