

P8_TA-PROV(2015)0034

Country of origin labelling for meat in processed foods

European Parliament resolution of 11 February 2015 on country of origin labelling for meat in processed food (2014/2875(RSP))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2011 on the provision of food information to consumers, amending Regulations (EC) No 1924/2006 and (EC) No 1925/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council, and repealing Commission Directive 87/250/EEC, Council Directive 90/496/EEC, Commission Directive 1999/10/EC, Directive 2000/13/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, Commission Directives 2002/67/EC and 2008/5/EC and Commission Regulation (EC) No 608/2004¹ (the ‘Food Information to Consumers Regulation’), and in particular Article 26(6) and (7) thereof,
- having regard to the Commission report of 17 December 2013 regarding the mandatory indication of the country of origin or place of provenance for meat used as an ingredient (COM(2013)0755), and the accompanying Commission staff working document of 17 December 2013 entitled ‘Origin labelling for meat used as an ingredient: consumers’ attitude, feasibility of possible scenarios and impacts’ (SWD(2013)0437),
- having regard to Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 1337/2013 of 13 December 2013 laying down rules for the application of Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards the indication of the country of origin or place of provenance for fresh, chilled and frozen meat of swine, sheep, goats and poultry²,
- having regard to its resolution of 6 February 2014 on the abovementioned Commission implementing regulation of 13 December 2013³,
- having regard to its resolution of 14 January 2014 on the food crisis, fraud in the food chain and the control thereof⁴,
- having regard to the question to the Commission on country-of-origin labelling for meat in processed food (O-000091/2014 – B8-0101/2015),
- having regard to the motion for a resolution of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety,
- having regard to Rules 128(5) and 123(2) of its Rules of Procedure,

¹ OJ L 304, 22.11.2011, p. 18.

² OJ L 335, 14.12.2013, p. 19.

³ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2014)0096.

⁴ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2014)0011.

- A. whereas Article 26(6) of the Food Information to Consumers Regulation requires the Commission to submit a report to Parliament and the Council by 13 December 2013 concerning the mandatory indication of the country of origin or place of provenance of meat used as an ingredient;
- B. whereas Article 26(7) of the abovementioned regulation provides that the report must, inter alia, take into account the need for the consumer to be informed, the feasibility of providing the mandatory indication of the country of origin or place of provenance and an analysis of the costs and benefits of the introduction of such measures; whereas it provides further that the report may be accompanied by proposals to modify relevant provisions of EU legislation;
- C. whereas on 17 December 2013 the Commission duly published its report regarding the mandatory indication of the country of origin or place of provenance for meat used as an ingredient, and an accompanying staff working document entitled ‘Origin labelling for meat used as an ingredient: consumers’ attitude, feasibility of possible scenarios and impacts’;
- D. whereas it is estimated that 30 % to 50 %, depending on the Member State concerned, of the total slaughtered meat volume is processed into meat ingredients for foodstuffs, mostly into minced meat, meat preparations and meat products;
- E. whereas the Commission has yet to make any follow-up legislative proposals and concludes that further appropriate steps will be taken following discussions in Parliament and the Council;
- F. whereas, according to the abovementioned Commission report regarding the mandatory indication of the country of origin or place of provenance for meat used as an ingredient, the existing traceability systems in the EU are not adequate to pass on origin information along the food chain;
- G. whereas Article 26(2) of the Food Information to Consumers Regulation provides that indication of the country of origin or place of provenance is mandatory where failure to indicate this might mislead the consumer as to the true country of origin or place of provenance of the food, in particular if the information accompanying the food or the label as a whole would otherwise imply that the food has a different country of origin or place of provenance;
- H. whereas the impact assessment that supported the Food Information to Consumers Regulation indicated that the origin of meat appears to be consumers’ prime concern across the EU⁵;
- I. whereas according to the Food Chain Evaluation Consortium’s consumer survey of 2013, meat-based food scored highest among the various food groups covered by the survey when it comes to interest in origin labelling; whereas, on the basis of a more targeted examination of different types of processed meat-based product, the survey results indicate that more than 90 % of consumer respondents consider it important that origin be labelled;

⁵ See Commission staff working document of 30 January 2008 accompanying the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the provision of food information to consumers – Impact assessment report on general food labelling issues (SEC(2008)0092).

1. Notes that indication of origin has been mandatory for unprocessed beef and beef products in the EU as a consequence of the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) crisis⁶, and that EU rules for beef labelling have been in place since 1 January 2002; notes that these labelling requirements already include place of birth, rearing and slaughter;
2. Considers that the abovementioned requirements applicable to unprocessed beef and beef products have raised consumer expectations as regards information on the origin of other types of fresh meat widely consumed in the EU and of meat used as an ingredient in processed foods;
3. Notes that recital 31 of the Food Information to Consumers Regulation underlines the fact that the origin of meat is of prime concern to consumers and that as a result consumers expect to be properly informed about the country of origin of meat; points out, in addition, that recital 31 stipulates that mandatory labelling requirements should take into account the principle of proportionality and the administrative burden for food business operators and enforcement authorities;
4. Stresses that 90 % of companies in the meat processing sector are SMEs; stresses the special role played by SMEs in the creation of growth and jobs, their contribution to a competitive European economy and their commitment to safe and high-quality food; believes that the creation of a level playing field for players in the sector is essential;
5. Reiterates its concern over the potential impact of food fraud on food safety, consumer health, consumer confidence, the functioning of the food chain and the stability of agricultural prices, and emphasises the importance of addressing food fraud as a matter of priority and thereby quickly restoring the confidence of European consumers;
6. Believes that labelling the country or place of origin of meat and meat products does not in itself prevent fraud, but that a rigorous traceability system does contribute to detecting possible infringements and taking action against them; notes that recent food scandals, including the fraudulent substitution of horsemeat for beef, have shown that stricter rules on traceability and consumer information are wanted by consumers; points out that stricter rules on traceability would also enable authorities to investigate food fraud incidents more effectively;
7. Highlights the importance of considering horsemeat in the context of meat used as an ingredient in processed foods, besides beef and the meat of swine, sheep, goats and poultry, as it represents a considerable share of meat used in processed foods;
8. Highlights, further, the fact that the Commission's own report recognises that more than 90 % of consumer respondents consider it important that meat origin be labelled on processed food products⁷; notes that this is one of several factors that may influence consumer behaviour;

⁶ Regulation (EC) No 1760/2000 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 July 2000 establishing a system for the identification and registration of bovine animals and regarding the labelling of beef and beef products and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 820/97 (OJ L 204, 11.8.2000, p. 1).

⁷ COM(2013)0755, p. 7.

9. Believes that labelling the origin of meat used as an ingredient in foods will help ensure better traceability along the food supply chain, more stable relationships between meat suppliers and processors and increased diligence when food business operators choose their suppliers and products;
10. Feels that food labelling should take account of the transparency of the information and its readability for consumers while enabling European businesses to operate in an economically viable manner and in conditions acceptable to the consumer's purchasing power;
11. Points out that, as regards price impacts, the results of research undertaken by a French consumer organisation diverge widely from the findings of the Commission's report as regards the costs of introducing country-of-origin labelling; recommends that this issue be further examined in order to gain a clearer picture of the possible price effects, provided that such an examination is done in conjunction with consumer organisations and would not delay legislative proposals;
12. Notes that country-of-origin labelling will become mandatory for unprocessed meat of swine, sheep, goat and poultry as of April 2015; whereas this must be taken into account in assessing the costs of providing origin information for these types of meat when used as an ingredient;
13. Notes that current voluntary origin information can give misleading information to consumers;
14. Calls on the Commission to review such voluntary schemes on origin labelling and propose clear, consistent, harmonised and enforceable rules when producers decide to implement voluntary origin labelling;
15. Notes further that while, as indicated in the Commission report, an EU/non-EU labelling indication requirement would be a lower-cost alternative, research undertaken by the European Consumer Organisation (BEUC), which covers some Member States, has found that this would not be an acceptable solution for consumers⁸;
16. Believes that the Commission should investigate further the practice (which is already fairly widespread) among some European retailers and manufacturers of labelling the origin of meat in processed foods and to report its findings;
17. Reiterates its call for the Commission to take all necessary steps to make the prevention and combating of food fraud an integral part of EU policy and to address structural weaknesses within the overall food chain, in particular by increasing and strengthening monitoring;
18. Urges the Commission to adopt an implementing act concerning the application of Article 26(3) of the Food Information to Consumers Regulation, which relates to the indication of the country of origin of primary ingredients where this is not the same as that of the food product;

⁸ <http://www.beuc.org/publications/2013-00043-01-e.pdf>

19. Urges the Commission to follow up its report with legislative proposals making the indication of the origin of meat in processed foods mandatory in order to ensure greater transparency throughout the food chain and to better inform European consumers, while taking into account its impact assessments and avoiding excessive costs and administrative burdens;
20. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.