



EUROLAB Special Briefing

Food safety – protecting people and animals

The EU's food safety early warning network strengthened its vital role in keeping dangerous food products off the shelves in 2013, and aims to lead the fight against fraud. Europe is reliant on its Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) to ensure that the food meets some of the highest food safety standards in the world. Besides its main role of ensuring food safety since its creation 35 years ago, a 2013 RASFF annual report shows that it is an important tool to trace back and withdraw products where fraud was detected.

EU Commissioner for Health, Tonio Borg said: "RASFF is a vital tool to respond to food safety risks in Europe, since information is swiftly exchanged to protect European consumers. The horsemeat scandal illustrated the RASFF system in action and food products adulterated with horsemeat were traced back to source and withdrawn from the market". To conclude: "Today we get closer to European consumers through an innovative online tool - the new RASFF consumers' portal - giving them access to information about recall notices and public warnings by public health authorities and business operators in a given EU country".

35 years of protection

Launched 35 years ago, RASFF is a network that facilitates the cross-border flow of information between its members and plays a key role in ensuring a high level of food safety for Europe's citizens.

The 2013 RASFF Annual Report, that has been recently published, sums up a total of 3 205 original notifications transmitted through the RASFF. The vast majority of all cases flagged concern food for human consumption (85% of cases in 2013), followed by animal feed (8%) and 7% for packaging, machines, etc. that come into contact with food (food contact materials). According to the RASFF 2013 report, the overall number of notifications transmitted through RASFF in 2013 compared to 2012 decreased by 9%.

Fighting food fraud

The horsemeat scandal which rocked Europe early in 2013 underscored the importance of the network – information acquired on meat adulterated with horsemeat was hailed as pivotal in bolstering investigations and tracing the source of the fraud. The scandal nevertheless brought to light how difficult it is to **trace food fraud in an age of complex global supply chains**. The

current early warning system already receives crucial clues for tracing back products from follow-up notifications on reported cases.

Next steps

In order to give access to a searchable database of the latest public health warnings received by RAFSS, a new consumer website has been launched. The website can be accessed [here](#).

In addition, the European Commission is developing a food fraud IT system, inspired by RASFF that will underpin the work of the recently created EU Food Fraud Network. This IT system will provide a platform for cross-border administrative cooperation between national authorities to swiftly exchange information on deceptive and fraudulent activities in the food sector to pursue them across borders.

Source and further information:

- http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-14-675_en.htm
- http://ec.europa.eu/news/environment/140613_en.htm
- http://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/rasff/reports_publications/index_en.htm