



Safe for European consumption

Following World War II, the security of food supplies was of paramount concern to Europeans. Today, attention is mostly focused on food quality and safety, and the EU has a versatile and robust framework for ensuring that the food landing on citizens' plates is safe and healthy.

Facts and figures

For most Europeans, food is high on the menu of their concerns. This is unsurprising considering that what we eat is essential for our survival and a balanced diet is crucial for our good health.

Fortunately, the food available in Europe has never been safer, healthier, or of such good quality. This may explain why Europeans tend to associate food with positive attributes, such as taste and pleasure, according to Eurobarometer¹.

Stringent legislation and major leaps in technology have enabled us to differentiate between the good, the bad and the inedible, before any harm can be done.

In addition, consolidated production and distribution chains help filter out sub-standard produce and ensure that the food served on our dinner tables is consistently of the highest quality. Despite these advances, recent years have seen a number of food scares, ranging from mad cow disease (BSE) and dioxin contamination, to the latest 'blue mozzarella' scare. Concern over such issues is reflected in the fact that more than 40% of Europeans think that their health could be damaged by the food they eat.

Moreover, food is important to our economic health. The European food and drink industry is the EU's largest industrial sector in terms of turnover (€800 billion per year), and produces around €190 million of value added². It is made up of about 280 000 companies, over 90% of which are SMEs, and provides jobs for 4 million people³.

Nevertheless, the increasing complexity of the European food supply chain and its transnational nature not only requires stringent quality control at every link, but it also necessitates efficient and effective cross-border co-operation.



► Safety on the European menu

Ensuring the food we eat directly and the feed we consume indirectly is safe requires constant vigilance and monitoring. Since 2002, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)²⁵ has been the EU's independent scientific body tasked with assessing safety risks along the European food supply chain.

Based in Parma, Italy, the EFSA provides independent and objective scientific opinions – of which it has issued over 2 000 – on food-related risks so as to lay a sound foundation for European policies and legislation and to support the European Commission, European Parliament

and EU Member States in taking effective and timely risk-management decisions.

The Agency is the European reference point on food and feed safety, nutrition, animal health and welfare, plant protection and plant health. The EFSA employs 400 staff members, draws on the expertise of 15 000 external experts and has established a network of over 300 scientific institutions.

Thanks to its work and that of other competent bodies, European consumers are among the best protected and best informed in the world as regards risks in the food chain.



EU policy

To rise to the challenge of providing Europeans with safe, good-quality food, the EU has been working closely with Member States to develop a joint approach to this common need.

In order to better coordinate national efforts at the European level, in 1997, the European Commission created a dedicated Directorate-General for Health and Consumer Affairs.

In 2000, the Commission published the forward-looking 'White Paper on Food Safety'⁴ which pursues an integrated approach to food safety across the entire food supply chain, from 'farm to fork'⁵. The strategic document also sets out a master plan to reform European legislation into a coherent and transparent set of rules.

Safe policy recipes

Two years later, in 2002, the EU created⁶ the EFSA, its very own European Food Safety Authority (see page 3).

The EU possesses an entire body of coherent legislation relating to general food and feed safety⁷ and related areas, such as animal health⁸ (including an animal health strategy for 2007 to 2013⁹) and nutrition¹⁰, as well as contamination and environmental factors¹¹. In the area of hygiene, the EU updated its existing legislation in 2004¹² which ensures the hygiene of foodstuffs at all stages of the production process.

Other important recent policy milestones include a 2007 Regulation on the production and labelling of organic products¹³ and the EU's Ecolabel¹⁴, created in 2009, as well as guarantees for traditional specialities¹⁵ and the protection of geographical indications and designations of origin¹⁶.

These efforts have gone down well with European citizens. According to Eurostat, 62% of EU citizens believe that food safety laws in the EU are strict¹⁷. In addition, 58% are confident that public authorities account for the most recent scientific evidence in taking decisions regarding food risk, while one in two praises public authorities for their work in informing citizens about food-related risks.



Policy milestones

- 1997: European Commission's Health and Consumer Affairs Directorate-General established
- 2000: Release of Commission White Paper on Food Safety
- 2002: European Food Safety Agency established
- 2002-2006: Sixth Framework Programme for Research funds numerous food safety projects
- 2004: Revised EU legislation on the hygiene of foodstuffs
- 2006: EU Regulations on 'traditional speciality guaranteed', as well as geographical indications and designations of origin
- 2007: EU Regulation on the production and labelling of organic products
- 2009: Creation of the EU's Ecolabel



Future challenges

- Implementing food safety research projects under the Seventh Framework Programme (2007-2013)
- Implementing the animal health strategy (2007-2013)

Speed is of the essence

If your white cheese turns blue, then there is probably something wrong with it. This is exactly what happened to a batch of around 70 000 mozzarella balls confiscated in Italy in June 2010²¹. As the cheese was produced by a German company for an Italian distributor, the Italian authorities took advantage of the EU's Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF)²² to send out a warning about the potentially contaminated batch²³.

Thanks to this service, which enables the quick and effective exchange of information between Member States and the Commission when risks to human health are detected in the food and feed chain, food safety risks can be averted before they cause harm to consumers.

In 2009, the RASFF celebrated its 30th anniversary, and over the past three decades it has been going from strength to strength. Statistics reveal that the rapid alert system is constantly improving its efficiency. For example, the number of alerts in 2008 was almost halved compared to the previous year, despite the fact that the total number of notifications remained stable at around 7 000²⁴. This increased focus enables Member States to dedicate their resources to taking rapid action when it is actually required to mitigate the risk.



► The golden research egg

'Which came first: the chicken or the egg?' is a question that has sparked much fun debate over the years. A more serious question relating to poultry and what they lay is how we can meet our huge collective appetite for eggs while respecting the health and welfare of hens.

The LayWel project¹⁸ investigated the welfare implications of the different poultry farming systems in order to ascertain which were best for the hens and to suggest improvements. Among its output, the project produced a manual for assessing the welfare of laying hens and a hen welfare database.

LayWel is just one of numerous EU-funded food quality and safety projects. Under the previous Sixth Framework Programme (FP6, 2002-2006), the Commission committed some €750 million for research into food quality and safety¹⁹. The current FP7 (2007-2013) has earmarked €1.9 billion for food, agriculture, fisheries and biotechnology²⁰.



Further information

- From farm to fork – safe food for Europe's consumers²⁸
- Eurostat pocketbook on food safety statistics²⁹
- Information sheet on food-related research under FP7³⁰
- Q&A on the RASFF³¹
- EFSA at a glance³²
- The EU and GMOs³³
- Information on nutrition and health claims³⁴
- European Food Information Council³⁵
- Fact sheet on food contaminants³⁶

► High-tech food

Genetic manipulation is, in essence, nothing new. It is as old as the advent of agriculture at the dawn of human civilisation. All of the crops and domesticated animals we take for granted today possess genes that vary quite significantly from their wild ancestors. They were 'genetically modified' through millennia of careful selection and breeding.

However, our new-found ability to manipulate organisms at the genetic level has sparked a public debate about the safety of what are known as genetically modified organisms (GMOs), i.e. organisms in which the genetic material (DNA) has been altered in a way that does not occur naturally by breeding or natural recombination.

Genetic manipulation offers a number of actual and potential benefits. It can be used to create safer and healthier food; novel food products for people with special health needs, such as diabetics; they can improve agricultural productivity by modifying plants to yield greater crops; and they can enhance environmental performance by reducing or eliminating the need for pesticides, fertilisers and water; and much more.

To ensure that the development of GMOs is safe and beneficial, the EU has established a legal framework on genetically modified food and feed²⁶, as well as the complementary legislation on the traceability of GMOs²⁷, which is designed to ensure full consumer knowledge and maximum choice.



Communicator's toolkit

- Video on organic farming³⁷
- 'Health and Consumer Voice' newsletter³⁸
- Farmland (game about animal health and well-being)³⁹
- Cool Food Planet (game for kids)⁴⁰
- Video clip on labelling⁴¹
- Food safety brochures and fact sheets⁴²

▶ Did you know that ...

- More than 40% of Europeans believe that their health could be damaged by the food they eat
- The food and drink industry is the EU's largest industrial sector, with a turnover of some €800 billion a year
- 62% of EU citizens believe that food safety laws in the EU are stringent
- 58% of EU citizens are confident that public authorities take into account the most recent scientific evidence when taking decisions regarding food risk



¹ <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/riskperception/document/riskperceptionreport.pdf>
² http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-30-08-339/EN/KS-30-08-339-EN.PDF
³ <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/1089&format=HTML&aged=0&language=en&guiLanguage=en>
⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/intro/white_paper_en.htm
⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/food/intro_en.htm
⁶ http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/food_safety/general_provisions/f80501_en.htm
⁷ http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/food_safety/general_provisions/index_en.htm
⁸ http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/food_safety/animal_health/index_en.htm
⁹ http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/food_safety/animal_health/l67002_en.htm
¹⁰ http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/food_safety/animal_nutrition/index_en.htm
¹¹ http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/food_safety/contamination_environmental_factors/index_en.htm
¹² <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2004:139:0001:0054:en:PDF>
¹³ http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/food_safety/general_provisions/f86000_en.htm
¹⁴ http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/food_safety/general_provisions/co0012_en.htm
¹⁵ http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/food_safety/general_provisions/l66043_en.htm
¹⁶ http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/food_safety/general_provisions/l66044_en.htm
¹⁷ <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/riskperception/document/riskperceptionreport.pdf>
¹⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/research/agriculture/success_laywell_en.htm
¹⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/research/biosociety/food_quality/introduction_en.html
²⁰ http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/kbbe/home_en.html
²¹ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/world/europe/10359001.stm>
²² http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/rapidalert/index_en.htm
²³ https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/rasff-window/portal/index.cfm?event=notificationDetail&NOTIF_REFERENCE=2010.0746
²⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/rapidalert/report2008_en.pdf
²⁵ <http://www.efsa.europa.eu>
²⁶ http://eur-lex.europa.eu/pri/en/oj/dat/2003/L_268/L_26820031018en00010023.pdf
²⁷ http://eur-lex.europa.eu/pri/en/oj/dat/2003/L_268/L_26820031018en00010023.pdf
²⁸ http://bookshop.europa.eu/is-bin/INTERSHOPenfinity/WFS/EU-Bookshop-Site/en_GB/-/EUR/ViewPublication-Start?PublicationKey=NA5904540
²⁹ http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-30-08-339/EN/KS-30-08-339-EN.PDF
³⁰ ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/fp7/kbbe/docs/fiche-food-080305_en.pdf
³¹ <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/09/339&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>
³² <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/aboutefsa/document/corporatebrochure.pdf>
³³ <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/gmotopics/topic/gmo.htm>
³⁴ <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/ndatopics/topic/nutrition.htm>
³⁵ <http://www.eufic.org/>
³⁶ http://bookshop.europa.eu/is-bin/INTERSHOPenfinity/WFS/EU-Bookshop-Site/en_GB/-/EUR/ViewPublication-Start?PublicationKey=ND7907225
³⁷ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ScOoSfnz-k>
³⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health_consumer/dyna/consumervoic/consumervoic.cfm
³⁹ <http://www.farmland-thegame.eu/>
⁴⁰ <http://www.coolfoodplanet.org/>
⁴¹ <http://www.europartv.europa.eu/yourparliament.aspx?action=viewVideo&packageId=cf6055fb-c382-4688-a776-c962386b4007>
⁴² http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health_consumer/press/brochures_en.htm#fs