

Official controls: cooperation with business is the key to success

Today, the Commission published its Food and Feed Safety package, which includes a legislative proposal on official controls for food and feed. The proposal introduces new concepts such as ensuring sufficient resources to implement official controls by transferring its costs to the private sector, transparency of control results, and the possibility for the Commission to introduce additional compulsory testing regimes in the food chain.

EuroCommerce fully supports the Commission's intention to harmonise and enhance official control systems along the food supply chain. We believe that the current weaknesses in the system can be addressed by reinforcing the risk-based approach and by increasing the efficiency of the control systems, not by transferring the financial burden to the private sector.

Christian Verschuere, EuroCommerce Director-General said, *"Assuring consumer trust in the food that they eat is an absolute priority for the commerce sector. Quality sourcing practices, good hygiene standards and regular controls are consistently and effectively being implemented by many companies. Imposing additional compliance costs will not, de facto, improve food safety levels; it also overlooks the good practices already in place."*

EuroCommerce considers food safety to be a shared responsibility between public authorities and private operators. The Commission should therefore be applauded for harmonising the legal framework by bringing together all food chain actors and official controls. Nevertheless, we would like to emphasise the need for full cooperation with business operators in the further development of member state official control plans and compulsory EU testing regimes.

Commerce is adamant that no compromise should be made on consumer safety, and, therefore, on building up efficient food-safety systems. Quality and safety are the lifeblood of any food business and are critical for their brand reputation. Many retailers and wholesalers have proactively invested in state-of-the-art quality control systems. Any additional financial burden on business operators is therefore unacceptable and unnecessary.

To make this new legislation a success, EuroCommerce insists that, once implemented, a risk-based approach should remain the guiding principle in all control systems, taking a company's risk profile into account. Additional testing schemes should only be considered once the risk to public health has been established. This is the most efficient way to achieve a truly effective and sustainable controls system.

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EuroCommerce and the commerce sector

EuroCommerce represents the retail, wholesale and international trade sectors in Europe. Its membership includes commerce federations and companies in 31 European countries.

Commerce plays a unique role in the European economy, acting as the link between manufacturers and the nearly 500 million consumers across Europe over a billion times a day. It is a dynamic and labour-intensive sector, generating 11% of the EU's GDP. One company out of three in Europe is active in the commerce sector. Over 99% of the 6 million companies in commerce are small and medium-sized enterprises. It also includes some of Europe's most successful companies. The sector is a major source of employment creation: 33 million Europeans work in commerce, which is one of the few remaining job-creating activities in Europe. It also supports millions of dependent jobs throughout the supply chain from small local suppliers to international businesses.