

FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR EUROPE

16/05/2022 – 20/05/2022

Agenda Item 4:

Food safety and quality in the region including current
and emerging issues – country updates

(CX/EURO 22/32/04)

**Mixed Competence
Member States Vote¹**

The European Union and its Member States (EUMS) welcome the opportunity to provide updated information about current and emerging issues related to food safety and quality in the European region.

The EUMS consider that the priority areas identified by CCEURO 31 are still relevant for characterising the food safety and quality situation in the region. It is in particular noted that the FAO/WHO Side Event on Food Fraud that will be held during CCEURO32 will enable to exchange on ongoing work and challenges in this area.

The EUMS also welcome the completion of the mandate of the TFAMR and look forward to develop regional cooperation on the fight against AMR during this meeting. In order to ensure that identified priorities remain well characterised and current, an in-depth inquiry would be necessary to objectivise the evolution of the situation at regional level and we would encourage the Codex secretariat in its efforts to repeat this exercise in the future.

The EUMS do note that new food safety and quality issues have appeared since the 31st session of CCEURO, in September 2019. While not being a foodborne disease, COVID-19 had a huge impact on food production, food supply chains, and consumption patterns. It is still difficult to predict to what extent those developments will result in long-term changes or remain temporary modifications. However, there is much to learn from the approach implemented by national authorities, food business operators and consumers in the face of this situation in order to strengthen the resilience of food systems.

The EUMS strongly condemn the aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine. This aggression has a severe disruptive impact on the global food supply chain and is driving food prices up to an all-time high, with the number of people facing acute food insecurity is growing at an alarming rate. FAO and WHO are also reporting that food safety and quality is compromised in some regions of Ukraine. This goes against the very purpose of this Committee that is to improve food safety and quality in the Region through the developments of food standards.

¹ This is without prejudice of the substantive competence that the European Union has for individual issues addressed under this agenda item.

Emergency situations also underlined the need to assess possibility for allowing some flexibility to ensure the continuity of food supply, in particular regarding food labelling. This raises the question as how *Codex Alimentarius* can contribute to alleviating sudden disruptions of the production and distribution chains. One avenue that could be explored is allowing temporary flexibility in the enforcement of mandatory labelling requirements. In this context, the EUMS underline the timeliness of the on-going work conducted in CCFL regarding “food labelling exemptions in emergency situations” (see CL 2022-09-FL).

With respect to new developments in the EU, the EUMS see that new consumer behaviours can facilitate the occurrence of food safety events. In recent years, there have been significant changes in food preparation and preservation methods and in eating habits: the rise of vegetarian and vegan diets, the consumption of raw or lightly cooked foods, the popularity of low-temperature cooking or microwave cooking, etc. These new trends can expose consumers to various contaminants, favour the development of pathogenic micro-organisms that may be present in food and cause food poisoning. In the last few months, two alerts have proven this tendency: one concerning frozen corn consumed raw, and the other concerning pizzas consumed undercooked.

Finally, the EUMS recognizes the benefit of alert-systems in emergency situations, as well as sharing knowledge and experience to build more resilient food control systems. In this context, the EUMS would like to refer to the annual report 2021 of the Alert and Cooperation Network (ACN) that summarizes the information shared between members of its components: the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF), the Administrative Assistance and Cooperation network (AAC) and the Agri-Food Fraud Network (FFN). Under the ACN, information related to non-compliances with the EU legislation of cross-border nature detected throughout the agri-food chain are shared between Member States through an online platform managed by the European Commission. In particular the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed enables competent authorities to rapidly exchange information about food and feed safety events.

In 2021, pesticide residues have been the most reported issue in RASFF with a number of notifications (1231) increased by 61% in comparison with 2020 and more than quadruplicated in comparison with 2019. The ethylene oxide incident, started in 2020, still represented a major challenge for MS competent authorities while most of the other findings were related to pesticides for which the European Union has recently repealed the authorisation for the EU market. Pathogenic microorganisms remain a very important hazard category in food products even if the total number of notifications (863) has been slightly decreasing over the last few years. Three-quarters of the notifications transmitted were due to the presence of *Salmonella*. *Listeria monocytogenes* accounted for 16% of the notifications related to pathogenic microorganisms in food, while 10% of the notifications were related to the detection of *Escherichia coli* (of which more than half about the more dangerous Shigatoxin-producing *Escherichia coli*). The presence of mycotoxins in food was notified in 450 cases representing the third most notified hazard category, similarly to previous years. Three-quarters of the notifications were border rejections. Most of the cases related to the detection of aflatoxin B1, in particular in nuts. In the remaining cases, notifications were mainly due to ochratoxin A (detected in particular in spices and dried figs).