



Health & Consumer Voice

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Headline News

Future challenges for EU health, consumer and food policies _____ 1

Top Stories

Farmland: the fun way for kids to learn about animal welfare _____ 2

Better protection for holidays _____ 2

EU school milk campaign launched _____ 3

Health risks from music players _____ 3

Europeans sceptical on cloning _____ 4

Citizens' Energy Forum _____ 4

In brief

EC hosts International Product Safety Week in Brussels _____ 2

Feeling ripped off? New public website on unfair commercial practices can help _____ 3

SANCO Vet Week 2008 _____ 4

Future challenges for EU health, consumer and food policies

On 29-30 October 2008, DG SANCO organised one of its biggest high-level conferences entitled: 'Delivering for Tomorrow's European Consumers'. This conference served as a concluding event of a 2-year reflection on Future Challenges, which looked at the tasks and opportunities that lie ahead for the next Commission (2009-2014) in terms of consumer, health and food safety policy.

The purpose of this conference was to review the main drivers of change and trends and to contribute to the Commission's vision in the next 10 years. The main four drivers identified are: globalisation, governance, changing society and confidence.

The following key concluding points came out of the discussions:

- There is a need to examine more closely and include social and health inequalities in our policy delivery.

• Sustainability is a real challenge not only for the future, but to be acted upon today.

• The Commission faces the challenge of obtaining public acceptance if it is to become more entrepreneurial as well as Member State acceptance if it is to implement a process whereby delivery is more closely monitored to achieve quality.

• Consumers are increasingly in control of their communications agenda: in reality they behave more like cats than dogs!* Indeed, they are more independent and prefer a more invitational style of communication.

• Implementing a common culture of working together whereby cooperation and tolerance are ensured is a challenge but need to be further developed.

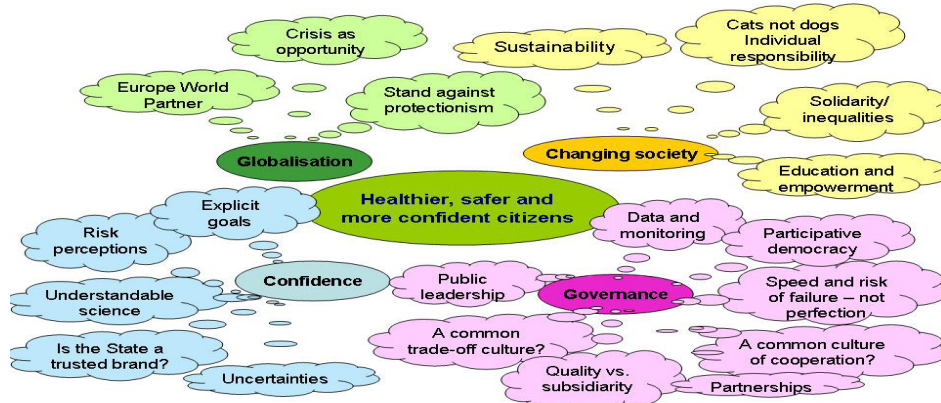
** Concept used by Mr Brian Fetherstonhaugh, Chairman & CEO, OgilvyOne Worldwide.*

For further information please check:

<http://www.sanco-tomorrow.eu>

Future Health and Consumer Challenges

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health_consumer/future_challenges/future_challenges_en.htm





In brief



EC hosts International Product Safety Week in Brussels

From 17 to 21 November 2008, the European Commission is hosting the International Product Safety Week in Brussels. This event will bring together a broad range of (non-food) consumer product safety professionals from around the globe, representing regulators, businesses, consumer organisations, standard makers and test laboratories.

The week begins with a high-level, trilateral meeting, hosted by Meglena Kuneva, European Commissioner for Consumers, between the European Commission, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission and the Chinese government, to enhance global governance of product safety. Other events scheduled to take place during the week include, inter alia, a meeting of regulators of the International Consumer Product Safety Caucus (ICPSC), the 4th European Meeting and Training Symposium of the International Consumer Product Health and Safety Organization (ICPHSO) and the closing conference of a PROSAFE project on Enhancing Market Surveillance through Best Practice (EMARS).

All participants are required to register in advance for the events.

For further information please view:

http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/safety/int_coop/productsafetyweek_en.htm



Farmland: the fun way for kids to learn about animal welfare

In an effort to raise awareness among children about the importance of treating farmed animals in a respectful and humane way, the European Commission launched on 10 November "Farmland," the European children's website on animal welfare. "Farmland" is an interactive and informative online computer game targeting children aged between 9 and 12, which also aims to help tomorrow's consumers be in a position to make informed choices about the food they will be buying.

"Farmland" consists of an illustrative part with information on the needs of farmed animals. In the different computer games, the children can apply the underlying welfare concepts they have read about. These

games concern farming, animal transport and the supermarket and aim to reproduce the different moments in the animals' life along the food production chain.

The website currently exists in nine EU languages and if there is demand, it will be further developed in all EU languages.

To enter "Farmland" please visit:
<http://www.farmland-thegame.eu/>



Better protection for holidays: Timeshare Directive approved by the EP

Consumers across the EU are set to benefit from greater holiday protection - when they buy and resell timeshare holidays, or timeshare-like holidays on cruise boats, canal boats, caravans and "discount holiday clubs" - under new rules voted by the European Parliament on 22 October. The aim of the Directive is to further boost consumer confidence in the Timeshare industry (worth over €10.5 billion and responsible for more than 40,000 jobs across the EU) and to eliminate the rogue traders who cause problems for consumers and bring legitimate operators into disrepute.

Timeshare is the right to spend a period of time (i.e. one or more weeks) in a holiday property for a specified period of the year for three years or longer.

Since the adoption of the current Directive in 1994, there have been

major developments in the marketplace. New products and contracts have been developed that fall outside the scope of the legislation. Therefore, consumers who buy them do not get the same rights or levels of protection. For instance, the new products may allow the consumer to use different kinds of property (e.g. cruise boats, caravans or canal boats), or the contracts may last for less than three years. A further problem is that the re-sale and exchange of timeshare schemes are not covered by the existing rules.

The new Directive replaces the old one with a modern, simplified and coherent framework, covering timeshare and long-term holiday products, as well as exchange and resale.

For further information, please check:
http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/cons_int/safe_shop/timeshare/index_en.htm

EU school milk campaign launched

On 17 October in Cyprus, European Commissioner for Agriculture, Mariann Fischer Boel, launched an EU-wide campaign to promote the School Milk Programme. Under the slogan "Milk – Drink it up", the information campaign aims to raise awareness of the benefits of milk consumption and the availability of EU funds to schools. During a day dedicated to balanced diet and good eating habits organised by pupils of Panagia Triherousa school in Limassol, Commissioner Fischer Boel, Commissioner for Health, Androulla Vassiliou, and Dr Michalis Polynikis, Minister for Agriculture of Cyprus, kicked off a series of entertaining and educative events.

Obesity, overweight and bad eating habits among young people are problems faced now by young people in the EU.

In this context, the EU has made a priority of supporting the development of good eating and nutritional habits.

The newly expanded EU School Milk Programme aims to encourage children to consume dairy products as part of a balanced diet and provides subsidies for distribution of dairy

products in schools and other educational establishments. A new regulation published on 11 July this year provides for a larger range of products covered by the subsidy, thus responding to requests from the European Parliament and the Council. The new rules of the programme came into force in the beginning of the 2008-2009 school year.

Along the lines of the School Milk Scheme, the European Commission has recently also proposed to establish a European Union-wide scheme to provide free fruit and vegetables to school children. Besides providing free fruit and vegetables, the scheme would require participating Member States to set up national strategies including educational and awareness-raising initiatives and the sharing of best practice. This programme will be implemented in 2009 as soon as adopted by the Council.

Together the two schemes will contribute to improve health and nutrition, as set out in the 'Strategy for Europe on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity and related health issues'.

For further information, please view:
<http://www.drinkitup.europa.eu>

Health risks from music players

Listening to personal music players at a high volume over a sustained period can lead to permanent hearing damage, according to an opinion of the EU Scientific Committee on Emerging and Newly Identified Health Risks (SCENIHR) released on 13 October.

The scientific opinion shows that 5-10% of personal music player listeners risk permanent hearing loss, if they listen to a personal music player for more than one hour per day each week at high volume settings for at least 5 years. The European Commission had asked the independ-

ent scientific committee to examine this issue, given the widespread use of personal music players and the surge in the number of young people exposed to such noise. Scientists confirm that there is cause for concern and the EC will now examine with Member States and stakeholders, possible measures that could be taken to better protect children and adolescents from exposure to noise from personal music players and other similar devices.

The text of the opinion can be found at:
http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_risk/committees/04_scenihr/docs/scenihr_o_018.pdf



In brief



Feeling ripped off? New public website on unfair commercial practices can help

On 7 November the European Commission launched a new website (www.isitfair.eu) which offers consumers of all ages help and advice if they think that they may have been misled or ripped off by rogue traders or just want to find out which scams they need to watch out for. The idea is to boost the confidence of consumers by providing them with clear information about their rights and where to seek help if they find out that they have fallen victim to a scam. The site contains practical day-to-day examples of unfair practices, including a Black List of practices, which have been banned under the Unfair Commercial Practices (UCP) Directive. The Black List contains the practices which are clearly illegal and most damaging to consumers, e.g. bait advertising, fake "free" offers, or pyramid schemes. As well as getting practical advice about their cases, visitors to the site can also test their knowledge about what is a legitimate practice and what is not, or view entertaining film clips depicting some common scams. The site is available in 22 official EU languages.

You can help spread the word about the site, for example by adding the website link in your e-mail signature or placing the campaign banner on your own site.

For more information please visit:
<http://www.isitfair.eu>

More details about unfair commercial practices are available here:
http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/rights/index_en.htm



Europeans sceptical on cloning

A Flash Eurobarometer study, presented by the European Commission on 9 October, reveals that European citizens have a generally negative perception of animal cloning for food production.

The study was carried out to assess citizens' attitudes towards animal cloning. It indicates firstly, that the vast majority of citizens has a good degree of knowledge of what is animal cloning (8 out of 10 stated correctly that "cloning is making an identical copy of an existing animal"). Secondly, the study shows that a very high percentage of citizens is negative about cloning for human consumption as 81% feels that the long term effects of animal cloning on nature are unknown, while 84% states that we don't have enough experience about the long-term health and safety effects of using cloned animals for food.

With regard to when cloning may be justified, respondents noted that animal cloning for food production should never be justified by an average of 58% while 41% thought that it may be justified to improve the robustness of animals against diseases and 44% thought it would be justified if used to preserve rare animal species.

EU Health Commissioner Androulla Vassiliou welcomed the valuable insights provided by the survey into the attitudes of EU citizens toward the use of animal cloning technology for food production. The EC has now before it also the Eurobarometer survey and will now proceed with the analysis of these elements before considering whether and what action may be necessary.

For more information, please see:

http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/resources/docs/eurobarometer_cloning_en.pdf

Citizens' Energy Forum

EU Consumer Commissioner Meglena Kuneva and the Energy Commissioner Andris Piebalgs opened, on 28 October in London, the first ever meeting of a new Citizens' Energy Forum, a platform designed to implement and enforce consumer rights on the energy market across the EU. The aim of the forum is to tackle consumer problems and propose practical solutions so that current EU-wide consumer rights exist in practice and not only on paper and improve regulatory conditions in the retail markets.

The Commission has calculated that, with smart choices, an average EU family can save 1000 euros or more in gas and electricity bills per year. The impact of such choices is all the more important given that around 40 per cent of the EU's energy is used in buildings – including our homes and businesses. The resulting cuts in carbon emissions are a further posi-

tive spin off.

The Citizens' Energy Forum has been launched to help consumers by working to enforce their existing EU-wide rights and to provide them with clear, straightforward information on what choices are available to them when it comes to buying their gas and electricity.

In parallel, the EU will continue to watch energy markets, and comprehensive market monitoring consumer data - gathered by the European Commission – indicating how gas and electricity markets are delivering for consumers, will feed into the work of the Forum. Member States will also report to the Forum on their monitoring of household prices, switching rates or complaints, a new power given to them under the Third Energy Package.

For more information, please see:

<http://www.agathepower.eu/>



In brief



SANCO Vet Week 2008

The high-level conference "One Health: Healthy Animals = Healthy People" - held on 10 November at AUTOWORLD museum, Brussels - is the opening event of DG SANCO first European Veterinary Week, taking place from 10 to 16 November in partnership with the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) and the French Presidency.

This event aims to stimulate dialogue on successful information diffusion and cooperation between the different players in the animal health field for the implementation of effective bio-security measures at borders and on-farm. It will examine the positive impacts of high animal health standards on human health and consumer wellbeing. Panel discussions will look at issues such as on-farm bio-security, import controls and the "One Health" concept.

For more information about European Veterinary Week, please go to the following page:

http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/events/vetweek2008/index_en.htm



EU Veterinary Week 2008
Animals + Humans = One health



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Chief Editor: Eric Thévenard.

Editors: Rosita Scanferla, in cooperation with the EC Health and Consumers DG.

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Email: sanco-newsletter@ec.europa.eu