



Health & Consumer Voice

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Headlines

Food fraud: EU conference confronts the growing problem of food crime 1

Top stories

Making long life, good life: EU responds to the ageing challenge 2

New written health warnings for tobacco products 2

EU conference on environmental monitoring of GM crops 3

Switching bank accounts still too difficult, says EU study 3

EU Commission calls for more collaboration to tackle rare diseases 4

DG Health & Consumers at "The Economist" conference in Geneva 4

In brief

Commissioner Dalli in China 2

Schmallenberg: Russian ban on EU live animal imports "unjustified" 2

EU Commission at French Salon de l'Agriculture 2

EP News

Hearing on the Consumer Agenda 3

Coming up

Health & Consumer Agenda 4

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Food fraud: EU conference confronts the growing problem of food crime



Food-related crime: EU Commissioner John Dalli described it as «one of the most important challenges»

A high-level EU conference on managing the growing challenge of food crime took place in Brussels on 27-28 February. It brought together policy makers, legal experts, police forces and food control authorities from across Europe.

Tackling what John Dalli, the EU Commissioner for Health & Consumer Policy, described as «a significant problem driven by the lure of vast potential profits,» the purpose of the conference was to raise awareness of food crime and bring together authorities and stakeholders to share good practice, information & experience.

What is food crime? Why focus now?

«Food crime» is the production, processing, distribution or marketing of any counterfeit or sub-standard foodstuff, i.e. anything in breach of food legislation. Examples include the contamination of raw materials with pesticide or drug residues or other illegal substances and breach of sanitary rules, labelling, storage and transport regulations.

A lack of reliable global data means it is difficult to estimate the true extent of food crime, but the figures that do exist point to a significant increase in the number of confirmed cases each year. In the EU alone, they went up by 26% between 2007 and 2008.

The conference also followed «Operation Opson», an investigation into food crime led by *Europol* at the end of 2011 which seized thousands of counterfeit food products in just one week.

Future efforts

Food crime is best tackled from multiple angles concluded the conference. The next steps focus on three objectives: raising awareness of food crime, improving existing mechanisms for tackling it, and improving information flows. Specific actions under consideration include expert training, the creation of specialised crime units, better monitoring and data collection and co-ordinated internet surveillance structures.

Food for thought

Operation Opson (2011) seized...

- 13 000 bottles substandard olive oil
- 30 tonnes of fake tomato sauce
- 77 000 kg counterfeit cheese
- 12 000 bottles substandard wine
- 5 tonnes substandard fish/seafood

...in just one week



In brief

Commissioner Dalli in China

John Dalli met with top Chinese officials when he visited the country in March to discuss safety of food & non-food products, health & consumer issues. Key meetings included Minister Zhi Shuping (Head of the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection & Quarantine), Vice-Minister for Agriculture, Gao Hongbin, and Health Minister, Chen Zhu. Dalli & Shuping also signed a letter of intent to launch the first joint market surveillance exercise for non-consumer goods (e.g. basic materials to be transformed into products for the consumer market).

Schmallenberg: Russian ban on EU live animal imports «unjustified»

The Russian embargo on all EU live animal exports following the outbreak of Schmallenberg virus should be «immediately lifted» said EU Commissioners John Dalli and Karel de Gucht (Trade), because it is «disproportionate and not based on scientific evidence.» Schmallenberg, which has been detected in 8 EU countries, is linked to birth defects in cattle, goats and sheep. EU experts are monitoring the situation continuously and will use every opportunity to push Russia to lift its unjustified ban.

EU Commission at French Salon de l'Agriculture

The EU Commission's DG Health & Consumers promoted food quality, safety and animal welfare at the International Salon de l'Agriculture in Paris from 25 February to 4 March. The Commission's interactive stand featured demonstrations from top chefs, educational activities and presentations by Commissioner John Dalli and Director-General Paola Testori-Coggi. Over half a million people visited the «Salon».

Making long life, good life: EU responds to the ageing challenge



A priority, says the Commission, is supporting longer life and maintaining healthy and active years for as long as possible.

Possible areas of EU intervention include:

- Regulatory & standardization issues;
- Funding, monitoring, assessment and research initiatives;
- Improving stakeholder involvement;
- Creating a new marketplace for innovative ideas to promote active & healthy ageing.

To facilitate this, the Commission launched a new website, «Marketplace for Innovative ideas», at an EU conference on Active & Healthy Ageing on 3 April. It helps stakeholders find partners and share good practice.

<http://europa.eu/ey2012/>

New written health warnings for tobacco products

14 new health warnings for tobacco products were adopted by the European Commission on 7 March to raise public awareness of the risks associated with smoking.

They were selected following tests on focus groups in all 27 EU countries through a Eurobarometer study.

The new messages include: "Smoking causes mouth & throat cancer", "Smoking reduces fertility" and "Smoking can kill your unborn child".



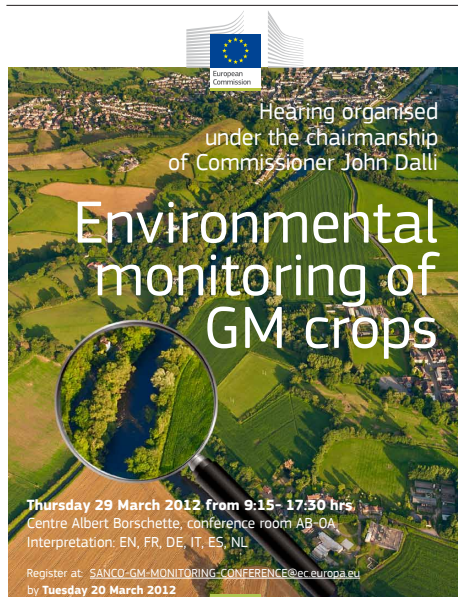
They primarily target teenagers and young people who may be tempted to smoke because they think it's 'cool' (80% of smokers start before they turn 18).

Written health warnings on tobacco have been compulsory in the EU since 2003.

13 million Europeans suffer from smoking related diseases and tobacco remains the largest single preventable cause of premature death in the EU.

http://ec.europa.eu/health/tobacco/law/pictorial/index_en.htm

EU conference on environmental monitoring of GM crops



Environmental monitoring of GMO cultivation was the subject of the EU Commission's third public conference on GMOs, held on 29 March. It brought together national experts, MEPs, NGOs, business, media and the scientific community for what

Commissioner Dalli described as an «open and constructive dialogue».

With a particular focus on post-market monitoring mechanisms for GM crops - i.e. those used after an authorised product has been released onto the market - the conference examined ways of improving the existing tools to make them more effective and cost-efficient, as well as improving links between the different surveillance systems already in place.

In a next step towards improving environmental monitoring of GM crops, the Commission will prepare a Recommendation based on the conference discussions and recent reflection process. A first draft will be discussed with EU countries in the coming months with a view to possible adoption later this year. All presentations and the webstream are available on the website.

http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/biotechnology/index_en.htm

Switching bank accounts still too difficult, says EU study

- 81% of sample group had difficulties switching accounts
- 71% of banks would not assist in the transfer
- 14% of customers received no information

Switching bank accounts is not as easy you think according to the results of an EU consumer market study published in February.

The study, which was launched in December 2010 to monitor self-regulation in the retail banking sector, found that 80% of the sample group experienced significant difficulties when they tried to change bank accounts.

The primary problems were a lack of assistance and a lack of information: 71% of banks would not help customers with the transfers and 14% of customers could get no information on bank switching. For those who could, advice varied widely between the different information sources (online, by telephone or in-branch).

«Banks need to do more to make switching banks easier for European consumers. Limiting their choice limits the potential of the single market,» said EU Commissioners John Dalli & Michel Barnier.

The European Commission is currently reflecting on the next steps to address these problems.

http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/enforcement/sweeps_en.htm

EP News

EP Hearing on Consumer Agenda

The future EU Consumer Agenda was under discussion at a Public Hearing organised by the European Parliament's Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee (IMCO) on 9 February.

Chaired by MEP Malcolm Harbour, the key issues discussed were the review of the General Product Safety Directive (foreseen for later this year), consumer empowerment and enforcement of the relevant legal framework.

The event was covered live on the official Twitter account of DG SANCO, @EU_Consumer. «The Consumer Agenda should be organised around four pillars: safety, information, rights & enforcement,» said Commissioner Dalli. «The objective is for the EU to be able to boast the best framework that empowers consumers.»

Proposals for the «Consumer Agenda» – both legislative and non-legislative - will be presented later this year.



MEP Malcolm Harbour, Chair of the Internal Market & Protection Committee & Paola Testori-Coggi, Director-General for Health & Consumers, (Source: EP Audiovisual Service)

Top tip!

Make the most of longer days and better weather to start a new exercise regime. It'll help you feel better and maintain a healthy weight. Set yourself a target like our ex-smokers: some of them will be joining the EU Commission's team for the annual Brussels 20km race in May.

www.exsmokers.eu

EU Commission calls for more collaboration to tackle rare diseases



At an EU symposium organised as part of the fifth International Rare Disease Day on 29 February, Director-General for Health & Consumers, Paola Testori-Coggi, stressed that rare diseases should be made a priority in the next Public Health Programme.

The event, organised by the European Organisation on Rare Diseases (EURORDIS), brought together policy makers, health experts & patients to examine recent research into rare

diseases and ways of improving the existing structures at national and international level. Mrs Testori-Coggi said that "the specific nature of rare diseases makes this an ideal area for European co-operation" that can offer "real benefits to patients".

64 countries took part in Rare Disease Day. 2012's global theme was solidarity: "Rare but strong together".

What is a "rare" disease?

- A disease or disorder that affects fewer than 1 in 2000 people
- 8 461 "rare" diseases currently identified in the 'Orphanet' database
- More than 30 million EU citizens suffer from a "rare" disease

Watch our video stories!

http://ec.europa.eu/health/rare_diseases/videos/index_en.htm

http://ec.europa.eu/health-eu/health_problems/rare_diseases/index_en.htm

DG Health & Consumers at «The Economist» conference in Geneva



D. Meth-Cohn (CEMEA), C. Adams (Union for International Cancer Control), D. Spanou, A. Parvanova, MEP Healthcare experts from government, industry, patient groups and NGOs met in March at the second annual "Healthcare in Europe" conference to look at innovative ways of creating more sustainable healthcare systems for Europe's ageing population.

Discussions drew on research published in a new report by *The Economist* Intelligence Unit, "Never too early: tackling chronic disease to

extend healthy life years".

Optimal healthy ageing, it says, can be achieved through a prevention-oriented, evidence-based approach, which considers all stages of an individual's life. Integrated care systems – bridging health, social and community care – are also critical.

Despina Spanou, Principal Advisor in DG Health & Consumers, said that the EU Commission regards healthy ageing as an "urgent challenge". The European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing (see page 2), also recognised in "The Economist's" report, provides a new framework for continued stakeholder action, she said. Primary, secondary and tertiary prevention of chronic diseases is also imperative to secure sustainable healthcare systems.

<http://cemea.economistconferences.com/event/healthcare-europe-2012>

Coming up in 2012

May

- 3rd: Health Programme Conference (incl. launch of HEIDI)
- 12th: EU Institutions' Open Day: visit us in the EU's Berlaymont building in Brussels
- 27th: Brussels 20km race
- 31st: World No Tobacco Day: follow Commissioner Dalli's press conference
- 7th Consumer Conditions Scoreboard
- High Level Conference on EU Health Programme
- Adoption of Consumer Agenda Communication by the Commission
- 6th European Conference on Rare Diseases & Orphan Drugs
- EU Presidency Conference on diabetes
- Consumer summit

June

- World Blood Donor Day
- European Week Against Cancer, including the 2nd Forum for European Partnership for Action Against Cancer in Rome, Italy

Follow DG Health & Consumers' work:

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health_consumer/index_en.htm



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