

The need for high standards

Choose with confidence

Thanks to the CAP and the globalisation of trade, we have an ever-growing array of food from across Europe and beyond from which to choose. Some foodstuffs are produced according to new methods and technologies. EU citizens must be confident that the food they buy, whatever its origin, complies with EU high safety standards and is safe to eat.

Rapid response

Despite the application of the highest standards, food crises can happen. When they do, the EU has the capacity to act quickly to bring an outbreak or a health issue under control.

Controlling the threat

When a threat is spotted, alerts go out across the EU thanks, among others, to the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF)¹. If necessary, deliveries of foodstuffs from the farm, factory or port of entry can be stopped. Products already on sale can be recalled and destroyed if necessary.

Diversity and quality are promoted

Although it sets common rules, the EU accommodates diversity. It ensures its food standards are sufficiently flexible to promote traditional and regional specialities, innovation or better food quality. Furthermore, some derogations to the hygiene rules for food premises can be given to plants processing traditional products.



The EU formula for safe food

The food we eat is as safe as can be – and the European Union deserves much of the credit. It has developed a food safety strategy that sets the highest standards right along the food chain – from farm to dinner table.

The EU strategy deals not just with safe food at all stages of production, processing and distribution, but with animal health and welfare, and plant health as well. The EU sets a global benchmark for food safety, plant and animal health.

The EU's common agricultural policy (CAP) requires farmers to apply high production standards and sustainable farming methods. Thanks to the rules and standards developed under the European Food Safety policy, our food can, in case of problems, be traced back to the food manufacturer or the farm of origin. In order to be more coherent with society expectations the CAP reform introduced the cross compliance scheme. This means that, farmers not respecting certain EU rules on food safety, the environment, plant or animal health and animal welfare will see their CAP payments reduced.

Should problems arise, the EU is ready to act.

To find out more:

http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/index_en.htm
http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/markets/sfp/index_en.htm



European Commission
Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development

<http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/>

European Commission
Directorate-General for Health and Consumers

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

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There to protect you



The European Union makes sure that your food is safe from farm to fork

¹ The purpose of the RASFF is to provide the control authorities with an effective tool for exchange of information on measures taken to ensure food safety.

An all-in approach

Checking that the actual food on our tables is safe is one thing. EU consumer protection goes much further. It extends to animal feed as well as food and covers food hygiene too. It has three core elements:

1 Binding legislation to ensure that food and feed, including imports, are safe. These laws also cover animal and plant health, the use of antibiotics, the hormones' ban, traceability, labelling and the risk of contamination from external substances or from the environment.

2 Reliance on sound independent scientific advice when handling crises or drafting new legislative proposals.

3 Enforcement and control of EU rules, including on-the-spot inspections of national competent authorities dealing with production and processing facilities inside the EU and in third countries that supply the European market.

Extra care

The EU goes further, applying special measures to protect consumers in areas such as the use of pesticides, additives, colourings and food contact materials. Specific rules apply when adding vitamins, minerals and other substances to food. Products in contact with foodstuffs, like plastic packaging, also get special attention.



At your service

Know what you eat

Common EU standards for labelling require key ingredients to be listed on labels. We can therefore avoid ingredients to which we may be allergic or intolerant. The harmonisation of nutrition and health claims means that you can be sure what terms like 'low fat' or 'high fibre' actually mean. Any genetically-modified ingredients must be identified.

Organic farming

The CAP encourages organic farming, which uses only natural inputs to produce wholesome food, and gives financial support to farmers who switch from intensive to eco-friendly production methods.

CAP support requires cross compliance

CAP payments to farmers require them to respect certain EU rules on environment protection, food safety, plant and animal health, as well as animal welfare standards. If not, CAP payments are reduced or even completely withdrawn.



Keeping animals safe

Because Community legislation applies high standards across the EU for animal health and welfare, live animals and animal products can safely be traded across EU frontiers. Welfare standards apply not only on the farm, but also to animals on the move. Transport conditions must be adapted to animals, journey times limited, and regular feeding and watering provided.

Quick response time

The European Commission can act quickly in the event of a food crisis, stopping the movement of animals or the transport and distribution of the food item concerned. It also has a rapid alert system in cases involving unsafe food products. This covers foodstuffs containing banned substances or excessive amounts of residues of pesticides, veterinary products or other contaminants.

Prudence prevails

When there is an outbreak of animal disease or a case of contaminated food, the Commission decides how to respond and whether there is any need for scientific advice from the European Food Safety Authority. When assessing risk levels, it takes account of the precautionary principle: it does not wait for scientific certainty if the experts say there is evidence even of a potential danger.

