

Transparency and speed are vital when dealing with food safety

Speaking today after agreement in trilogue negotiations on the Regulation on Transparency and Sustainability in the EC Risk Assessment Process, EuroCommerce Director-General Christian Verschueren said:

“Retailers and wholesalers in Europe support the work of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) in its role as the independent European voice for food safety. Ensuring that the food we sell is safe and maintaining consumer trust is central to our business. EFSA provides a vital scientific reference for us in our concerted efforts to prevent unsafe food products entering the market and harming consumers.”

The added transparency this regulation will provide for is a welcome step in underpinning consumer trust in the food they buy. It also acknowledges the need for better communication about risk, which is very important for maintaining consumer confidence and improving their perceptions of risk. Past food crises, such as with fipronil and eggs in 2017, showed serious shortcomings in how quickly a risk was communicated and how the responses were coordinated between national and EU authorities, and with key stakeholders in the supply chain. The agreement today needs to lead to clear and coordinated messaging when problems arise.

Verschueren added:

“In these times when unfounded or alarmist statements on social media can cause consumers real concern and confusion, it is paramount that we can all respond quickly with clear and accurate information. All parts of the supply chain, particularly retailers who are in the front line in dealing with consumers, need to be kept in the loop. EFSA has been successfully piloting improved transparency for some years, and the Commission needs to make sure that this is extended fully to the decision-making process. Stakeholders, in particular food businesses, should be able to provide informed views on how best to develop and implement new rules.”

-ENDS-

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EuroCommerce is the principal European organisation representing the retail and wholesale sector. It embraces national associations in 31 countries and 5.4 million companies, both leading multinational retailers such as Carrefour, Ikea, Metro and Tesco, and many small family operations. Retail and wholesale provide a link between producers and 500 million European consumers over a billion times a day. It generates 1 in 7 jobs, providing a varied career for 29 million Europeans, many of them young people. It also supports millions of further jobs throughout the supply chain, from small local suppliers to international businesses. EuroCommerce is the recognised European social partner for the retail and wholesale sector.