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**European Union**  
**Agricultural Situation**  
**European Food Safety Campaign**  
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**Report Highlights:**

**In response to a food issues survey, the European Commission has launched an EU-wide information and education campaign on food safety.**

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Includes PSD changes: No  
Includes Trade Matrix: No  
Unscheduled Report  
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# European Food Safety Campaign

## Summary

In an attempt to restore consumer confidence in its regulatory abilities, the European Commission has launched an EU-wide information and education campaign on food safety which will be implemented at the national level. The first phase of the campaign will run in the last quarter of 1998 with a total budget of 4 million ECU, with possible continuation into 1999. The main objective of the campaign is to bring consumers and the food industry together and to convey the message that food safety is a shared responsibility. National studies have revealed that food poisoning is often caused by the way the consumer handles and prepares food. By making the consumer more aware of basic food safety practices, the campaign aims to reduce the number of food poisoning cases in Europe. Most national campaigns emphasize the importance of following instructions given on food labels and observing the basic rules of hygiene. The Commission also wants to highlight the responsibility of the member states in carrying out food safety checks.

## Background

The European Commission carried out a survey on consumer issues in 1997 and on food issues in 1998. These surveys revealed that 68 percent of European consumers are concerned about food safety. The BSE crisis in particular changed consumers' attitudes towards food safety. Increasing awareness through media coverage on BSE and other food issues such as E-coli, salmonella, contaminants, pesticide residues and the use of GMO's forced the European Commission to more transparency. Consumer groups want simplified food laws without deregulating the existing protective system and more influence in the decision making process.

Results of the survey "Eurobarometer 49 - Food Safety" are published on DG-XXIV's website at [europa.eu.int/comm/dg24/library/pub/eurobarometer/index\\_en.html](http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg24/library/pub/eurobarometer/index_en.html)

The BSE crisis demonstrated the need to reform the EU's legislative system. Against this background, DG VI (Agriculture) and DG XXIV (Consumer Affairs) were reorganized to separate policy-making from advisory and enforcement responsibilities. In response to the demand for more openness, DG XXIV re-designed its website ([europa.eu.int/comm/dg24/](http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg24/)) to make reports, opinions and conclusions of advisory/scientific/standing committees and evaluations of control systems available to the public. The Treaty of Amsterdam obliges the EU institutions to consider consumer requirements when defining and implementing EU policies and activities. Article 153 of the Treaty states that the promotion of health, safety and economic interests of consumers are the fundamental objectives of EU consumer policy.

## Precautionary Principle

The Treaty of Amsterdam provides a basis for the application of the precautionary principle in environmental legislation. Consumer groups are pressuring the EU to base food law on the precautionary principle claiming that, as was the case with BSE, the absence of proof can not be considered as the absence of risk. The recent scientifically unjustified ban on antibiotics was a political decision demonstrating the EU's new approach to food safety.

The European Commission has recently published six guidelines on the application of the precautionary principle of which a summary follows:

1. Implementation of an approach based on the precautionary principle should start with an objective risk assessment, identifying at each stage the degree of scientific uncertainty.
2. All the stakeholders should be involved in the decision to study the various management options that may be envisaged once the results of the risk assessment are available and the procedure be as transparent as possible.
3. Measures based on the precautionary principle must be proportionate to the risk which is to be limited or eliminated.
4. Measures based on the precautionary principle must include a cost/benefit assessment with an eye to reducing the risk to a level that is acceptable to all the stakeholders.
5. Measures based on the precautionary principle must be able to establish responsibility as to who must furnish the scientific proof needed for a full risk assessment.
6. Measures based on the precautionary principle must always be of a provisional nature, pending the results of scientific research performed to furnish the missing data and perform a more objective risk assessment.

### **Trade Impact**

The politics of a wide range of U.S.-EU trade disputes, including the beef hormone ban, the veterinary equivalency agreement, rules on residues, the SRM ban, GMO restrictions, and most recently the ban on certain antibiotics in animal feed, are made more complicated by consumers' lack of confidence. In some cases, the EU justifies its ignoring of scientific evidence and Codex food standards by stating that consumer anxieties take precedence over science, invoking the "precautionary principle."

More details on current trade issues are available on our website: [www.useu.be/agri/issues2.html](http://www.useu.be/agri/issues2.html)

### **Strategy**

The European Commission will use this campaign to promote the role of national consumer associations as advisers to the general public. These associations were closely involved in planning and implementing the national campaigns. A consortium has been created per member state to cover the entire food production chain : from farmers, processors, distributors, retailers to consumers. The campaign tries to reach not only consumers in general but specific target groups such as school children, women, young families and young people living independently. The actions that will be undertaken to implement the campaign include the creation of Internet websites, press services, hot lines, brochures, posters, video clips, TV-spots, study materials for schools and school competitions.

Depending on the results of the first phase, the campaign could be extended into 1999.

### **National Campaigns**

Directorate General XXIV (Consumer Policy and Consumer Health Protection) is coordinating the campaign at the European level.

Summaries of the national campaigns follow:

### **Austria**

Target group: school children

Key message: concentrate on food safety in general, novel foods in particular, hygiene aspects, ingredients, storing and E-codes

Strategy: brochure and Internet

[www.adis.at/vki/foodfrag.htm](http://www.adis.at/vki/foodfrag.htm)

Co-ordinator: Verein für Konsumenteninformation (VKI)

### **Belgium**

Target group: members of consumer associations and 12-16 years old school children

Key message: respect “best-buy date”, read labels

Strategy: folders, posters, interactive games and training sessions

Co-ordinator: CRIOC/OIVO

### **Denmark**

Target group: the general Danish public

Key message: biotechnology in the food process and labeling of GMOs

Strategy: brochure, Internet (homepage and Internet conference), debating forum

[www.fbr.dk/genmad](http://www.fbr.dk/genmad)

Co-ordinator: Forbrugerrådet

### **Finland**

Target group: young people and families

Key message: importance of labeling, E-codes, novel food and origin of product and the hygiene of foodstuffs

Strategy: information network organizing happenings, Internet, magazines

[www.kuluttajaliitto.fi](http://www.kuluttajaliitto.fi)

Co-ordinator: Suomen Kuluttajaliitto (SK)

### **France**

Target group: the general French public

Key message: the responsibility of consumers when purchasing food products

Strategy: posters, food safety days in supermarkets, information material in schools, work with farmers’ associations

[www.conso.net](http://www.conso.net)

Co-ordinator: Institut National de la Consommation

### **Germany**

Target group: 12-16 years old school children and their parents, teachers and journalist

Key message: product labeling and the origin of the product

Strategy: talk show, Internet, Hot line, posters, TV-spots and newspaper articles

[www.talkingfood.de](http://www.talkingfood.de)

Co-ordinator: Auswertungs- und Informationsdienst für Ernährung, Landwirtschaft und Forsten

### **Greece**

Target group: 25-44 years old women, 12-16 years old children

Key message: necessary information for purchasing products, how to store and preserve them, contact points for

food safety related issues

Strategy: debates on TV and radio, booklets, Internet

[www.netmi.com/asfaliatrofimon](http://www.netmi.com/asfaliatrofimon)

Co-ordinator: General Federation of Consumers in Greece

### **Ireland**

Target group: school children and the general public

Key message: food safety and personal hygiene in (household) kitchens

Strategy: information packages for secondary schools, school competition, Internet

Co-ordinator: Consumers' Association of Ireland

### **Italy**

Target group: school children and the general public

Key message: awareness and safety, E-codes, control of new products

Strategy: establishment of a call centre, information package and Internet

[www.sicurezzalimentare.it](http://www.sicurezzalimentare.it)

Co-ordinator: Unione Nazionale Consumatori

### **Luxembourg**

Target group: the general public

Key message: developing information on labels, difference between pre-packed and fresh products, GMOs, co-operation between national and European authorities

Strategy: disseminate information in supermarkets, associations' newsletters, TV-spots, food fairs

[www.ulc.lu](http://www.ulc.lu)

Co-ordinator: Union Luxembourgeoise des consommateurs

### **Portugal**

Target group: the general public and schools

Key message: food labeling and food hygiene

Strategy: video clips, radio, press

Co-ordinator: DECO

### **Spain**

Target group: individual consumers and schools

Key message: the existence of a system of control of foodstuff and the role of the consumer in the food chain

Strategy: brochures, videos in sale points, posters, debating forum, Internet, school competition

[www.seguridadalimentaria.com](http://www.seguridadalimentaria.com)

Co-ordinator: Asociacion de Ideas

### **Sweden**

Target group: school children and "as many consumers as possible"

Key message: food labeling and hygiene, E-codes, expiring date, GMOs and additives

Strategy: Internet, study materials for schools and information printed on tray-paper and milk cartons at McDonalds

Co-ordinator: Livsmedelverket

### **The Netherlands**

Target group: young people living independently, young families, pregnant women, elderly and physically weak people

Key message: food labeling and hygiene and biotechnology

Strategy: Internet, press, TV-programs, telephone information lines, magazines

C-ordinator: Voedingscentrum

### **United Kingdom**

Target group: school children

Key message: importance of the basic rules of food hygiene and understanding underlying principles

Strategy: teaching materials and guidelines for teachers, Internet, press conference

Co-ordinator: Health Education Authority

More detailed information on the national food safety campaigns is available on DG-XXIV's homepage at [europa.eu.int/comm/dg24/events/event05\\_en.html](http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg24/events/event05_en.html).

### **Follow-up - Consumer Policy Action Plan**

Emma Bonino, Commissioner for Consumer Policy and Health Protection (DG XXIV) sees it as the European Commission's task to improve and simplify existing food legislation and to reinforce controls of its implementation. One of the Commission's initiatives is to present a three-year Consumer Policy Action Plan (1999-2001) to the Council and the European Parliament. The three key elements of the Action Plan are:

1. A stronger voice for the consumer and consumer organizations: procedures will be developed to involve consumers in European decision making and an EU network of expertise in consumer affairs will be created.
2. A high level of health and safety: this will include the development of guidelines for the application of the precautionary principle and concerns about labeling, hygiene and food inspections will be addressed in the Communication in follow up to the Green Paper on food law.
3. Full respect for the consumer's economic interests: a consumer-friendly market in financial services will be promoted.

The full text of the Consumer Policy Action Plan is published on DGXXIV's website.