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European Union

FAIRS Product Specific

Stricter Labeling Rules for Meat Products

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Report Highlights:

New labeling rules tightening up the definition of the term "meat" for the labeling of products that contain meat as an ingredient such as sausages, pâtés, cooked and canned meats and prepared dishes, entered into force in EU Member States on January 1, 2003.

Includes PSD changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
Brussels USEU [BE2], E2

Until January 1, 2003 the only existing Community definition of meat made no distinction between muscle-meat, fat and offal, whereas consumers generally perceive meat to mean muscle-meat. Some Member States had adopted their own definitions of meat for the labeling of products that contain meat, such as sausages, pâtés, cooked and canned meats and preserved dishes. Commission Directive 2001/101/EC, published in November 2001 but effective since January 1, 2003 harmonizes the definition of meat at EU level. The new rules apply to products that contain meat as an ingredient, while meat sold without further processing is excluded. During the transitional period, which ends on June 30, 2003, goods produced both following the old and the new rules will be allowed on the market. The full text of the directive is available at http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/fl/fl06_en.pdf

The directive restricts the definition of meat to the skeletal-attached muscles, which is a major development. Other parts of human consumption, such as offal (including the heart, intestine and liver) or fat, will now have to be labeled as such and not as "meat".

However, there is a provision for a certain part of the fat content, where it adheres to the muscles, to be treated as meat, subject to the maximum limits laid down in the definition.

Maximum fat and connective tissue content for ingredients designated by the term "meat"

Species	Fat (%)	Connective Tissue (%)
Mammals (other than rabbits and porcines) and mixtures of species with mammals predominating	25	25
Porcines	30	25
Birds and rabbits	15	10

The directive also provides for a systematic indication of the species from which the meat comes so that for example "beef meat" is distinguished from "pig meat".

Finally, the definition excludes "mechanically separated meat". In beef, mechanically separated meat has been banned entirely due to BSE. For other species, mechanically separated meat will in the future have to be labeled separately and cannot form part of the meat content of any products in which it occurs.

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