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Authorities Begin Investigation into if Romanian Horse Meat Mislabeled

Report Categories:

Agriculture in the News

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Report Highlights:

Lasagna products sold in France contained horsemeat that may have originated from Romania and any of the country's 35 slaughterhouses officially registered to process horses. Trade data show only two of the Romanian slaughterhouses engaged in trade of horse meat to other member states in the recent period. An investigation is underway to determine if all facilities properly documented and labeled products moved into commercial channels.

General Information:

On February 8th, the European Commission notified through the Rapid Alert System all member states on the recent non-conformity issue revealed at lasagna product containing horse meat instead of beef.

Presently, there are 35 slaughterhouses in Romania which are authorized by the National Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Authority to slaughter horses, and they are registered in Prahova, Botoșani, Argeș, and Călărași counties. Despite the fact that all 35 hold this authorization, horse slaughtering is an occasional request.

According to Romanian Ministry of Agriculture, there are two Romanian slaughterhouses which delivered horse meat to other member states in the recent period. The same authority confirms that one of them is excluded because they exported to the EU market only horse meat, and there could not have been any possibility to wrongly label it as beef meat.

According to local media, meat exports from Romania reached France through more trading companies. A Dutch trader purchased and delivered the Romanian meat to a Cyprus trader, which sold it to the French company Maison Spanghero. The French buyer confirmed buying the Romanian beef meat and reselling it to Comigel company in their Luxemburg branch, processed it and produced the lasagna products sold in the international food chain Findus.

Following the horse meat detection on Feb. 8th, the packages were withdrawn from French and Swedish markets.

Horse meat is traded within the EU without passing border control. The shipment must have a veterinary mark provided by the state-official veterinarian, who is the official state inspector of the slaughterhouse. In addition, the shipment must be accompanied by a series of commercial and traceability documents.

Romanian Meat Associations representatives declare that all meat exported from Romania was properly

labeled and differences between the two types of meat are visible for processors.

Trade data indicate that Romania exported around 5,000 tons of horse meat valued at USD 14 millions to the EU countries during the first ten months of 2012. According to EUROSTAT data, the main export destinations for the Romanian horse meat were Belgium, Bulgaria, Italy, Poland, and the Netherlands.

Romania Export Statistics							
Commodity: 0205, Meat Of Horses, Asses, Mules Or Hinnies, Fresh, Chilled Or Frozen							
Year To Date: January – October							
Partner Country	Unit	2010		2011		2012	
		USD	Quantity	USD	Quantity	USD	Quantity
World	T	10918300	3999	14038295	4715	14179848	4993
Belgium	T	5695091	1478	5400001	1079	5096387	1083
Bulgaria	T	249202	170	3090506	1524	3840948	1812
Italy	T	4564236	2138	3762315	1498	2304544	938
Poland	T	0	0	88093	18	1759709	746
Netherlands	T	211760	107	1273646	440	910362	316
Germany	T	0	0	55150	21	159088	59
Greece	T	68	0	13933	4	49432	16
Hungary	T	34006	25	55323	26	38700	17
Austria	T	0	0	0	0	20678	6
Ireland	T	92636	42	0	0	0	0
Czech Republic	T	65556	30	127969	44	0	0
France	T	5745	9	171360	62	0	0

Source of Data: Eurostat

Referring to the numerical evolution of horses, the Romanian Ministry of Agriculture declares that horse livestock slightly decreased in 2012 compared with the previous year. The same source specifies that during the first nine month of 2012 Romania had less than 600,000 horses registered.

The Romanian Ministry of Agriculture and the National Sanitary-Veterinary and Food Safety Authority are working to establish if the raw horse meat was exported by a Romanian trader and if the company fulfilled all the legal requirements when performing the export.