

Beef: identification and registration of animals and labelling of beef

1999/0204(COD) - 13/12/2019 - Follow-up document

Pursuant to Article 23a of Regulation (EC) 1760/2000, the Commission presented a report dealing with the implementation and impact of the provisions on voluntary beef labelling, including the possibility of their review.

Regulation (EC) No 1760/2000 was adopted in the aftermath of the Bovine Spongiform Encephalitis (BSE) crisis, in order to improve transparency and strengthen the confidence of consumers in beef.

Regulation (EU) 653/2014 amended Regulation (EC) No 1760/2000 and significantly simplified the provisions on voluntary beef labelling, with the main aim of reducing the administrative burden for operators and competent authorities, as well as to reduce costs borne by operators to provide such voluntary information. The amended rules do not foresee the requirement for authorisation of voluntary beef labelling any more. Such voluntary information must comply with the horizontal legislation on labelling and in particular Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 on food information to consumers.

Analysis of previous evaluations and reports

Following two evaluations carried out in 2004 and 2009, a third detailed evaluation “Evaluation of EU beef labelling rules” was carried out for the Commission in 2014, a few months after the adoption of Regulation (EU) No 653/2014.

In relation to the voluntary labelling system, the main outcomes were:

- the volume of beef subject to voluntary schemes represented an average of 23% of all beef sold in the national markets of the six case study Member States (DE, FR, IT, ES, UK, IE);
- stakeholders had diverging views on the consequences of the implementation of Regulation (EU) No 653/2014 simplifying voluntary labelling rules: some appreciated the simplified procedure; others saw the risk of deteriorating the whole system and loss of consumer confidence;
- consumers were generally able to understand indications provided in accordance with voluntary rules. However, some consumers interviewed complained that labels provided in accordance with the voluntary rules often resulted in crowded labels. This led to the paradox whereby labels on beef simultaneously provide too much information without sufficient explanation, rendering them difficult to understand;
- in general, voluntary indications did not feature as factors that have a major influence on consumers’ self-described purchasing behaviour;
- most stakeholders highlighted that Regulation (EU) No 653/2014 brought voluntary labelling rules for beef in line with general food labelling rules;
- in some cases, voluntary labels were used only in business to business sales;
- some retailers feared that the 2014 simplification of voluntary labelling would lead to a proliferation of labels with low levels of guarantee that the information provided on the voluntary label is objective, verifiable and comprehensive for consumers, which could damage the image of the sector. Others

considered it a positive development: the simplification of procedures allows for economic operators to develop new voluntary claims, responding to consumers' demand.

Results of the consultation

The report highlighted the following issues:

- in addition to voluntary beef labelling now following horizontal rules in all Member States, some national specifics were maintained in four Member States. Portugal and Slovenia kept a full national system of notification and control, Italy simplified the national system and, in France, many operators continued using the specifications approved before 2014 with controls from an independent body;
- overall, the effects of simplification were evaluated positively by Member States and stakeholders. Competent authorities and operators did not find difficulties to introduce the new rules at administrative and operational levels;
- the new rules were considered positively by most respondents, allowing to achieve simplification, harmonisation with other sectors, reduction of the administrative burden and improved capacity of operators to respond to consumers' demand, without causing problems at intra-EU trade level or undermining the effectiveness and reliability of the system;
- a risk of more frequent non-conformities was mentioned by some respondents but without supporting evidence confirming it. The analysis of available data on nonconformity rates before and after the introduction of the new rules showed comparable levels of non-conformity.

Conclusion

On the basis of the analysis carried out during previous evaluations and of replies to the questionnaires received from Member States and stakeholders, the Commission considers that the simplification of voluntary beef labelling under Regulation (EU) No 653/2014 is functioning satisfactorily and there is no need to review current provisions on voluntary beef labelling.