Beef: identification and registration of bovine animals, labelling of beef and beef products

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Since beef consumption can be brought back to normal only through a package of measures, the Committee backs in principle the Commission's efforts in submitting two draft directives designed to create, within a short space of time, an EU-wide basis for improving cattle identification and the labelling of beef and beef products. The Committee is in no doubt that a comprehensive identification system must start by securing the adequate identification of livestock. Attention must also be paid however to ease of implementation in the individual Member States and also to existing labelling systems. Moves must be made to avoid overburdening beef farmers and dealers so as to ensure acceptance of the system from the start. The Committee broadly backs the Commission proposal on the labelling of beef and beef products since it believes that this can meet the information requirements of many consumers and go a long way to helping restore consumer confidence in European beef. The ESC would point out, however, that consumer confidence can only be restored in the long term if labelling of the origin of beef is obligatory. The Committee feels that the Commission proposal should be geared towards a new objective: - general obligation to identify carcasses; - in the case of fresh meat, obligatory identification at every stage, ending with the final consumer. The Committee feels that the identification arrangements for beef products could be optional.