

Food safety: feed and food law, animal health and animal welfare rules, official controls

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The committee adopted the report by Marit PAULSEN (ELDR, S) amending the proposal under the 1st reading of the codecision procedure: - it should be clearly stated that feed and food labelling should be included in the scope of this legislation; - every company should be inspected at least once a year. Under the "name and shame" principle, inspection reports and lists of firms that break the rules should be made public. Moreover, in the interests of transparency, business operators should be given access to the documented control procedures. The committee adopted a number of other amendments at various points in the text with the aim of ensuring maximum transparency, arguing that this was necessary to guarantee consumer confidence; - in addition to controls of the final product, systematic process controls - along the lines of those implemented for the organic farming sector - should be carried out through the whole food and feed chain; - it should be possible for official national inspectors and, where necessary, Commission inspectors to carry out spot checks at any stage of production, processing or marketing of food and feed products; - the Commission may prohibit the marketing of products and ingredients from a Member State which has not set up a national control programme, although special exemptions may be granted for specific named feed and food businesses; - as regards the cost of inspections, MEPs argued that the current system of equal fee levels for all business operators placed a greater burden on small and medium-sized firms than on larger food companies. They therefore proposed a fee system, to apply from 1 January 2007, that takes account of the category of the risk and the turnover of a company as well as the cost for the authorities. The fee would be calculated as a proportion of the turnover of the businesses, grouped according to risk category, and the fees in Member States would not be able to differ by more than 10% from the average within the Community. As an incentive for companies to invest in food safety, risk categorisation could include rules for upgrading and downgrading, so that, for example, a good inspection result could mean that a business would be downgraded to a lower risk category and hence have to pay less for the inspections. One amendment also introduced a new clause providing for the Commission to monitor the imposition of fees and take any necessary steps to ensure that such imposition does not distort trade or hamper the proper functioning of the internal market; - all imports of feed and food should be subject to official controls and a consignment should be destroyed immediately "where there is a well-founded suspicion that direct danger to human or animal health cannot be excluded"; - it should be possible to allow access to the internal market for individual businesses from non-EU countries that do not comply with EU rules, if those businesses have invested in food safety to EU standards. A list of such businesses should be drawn up and subject to regular inspections by the competent authorities.