Food law in the European Union. Green paper

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In adopting the report by Mrs Ilona GRAENITZ (PSE, A) on the Green Paper on food law, the European Parliament called on the Commission to submit proposals for the adoption of a European food policy designed to ensure that food is healthy and of good quality and to introduce a general legal requirement to offer for sale only food which was safe, wholesome and suitable for human consumption. Accordingly, it called for clear principles to be formulated regarding the safety, health and labelling of foodstuffs by means of a framework directive. In Parliament's view, the prime objective must be to maintain a high level of protection. Consequently, foodstuffs authorized and placed on the market must accord with principles of quality, safety and preventive health protection. Parliament called on the Commission to adopt a coordinating structure to prevent the marketing of foodstuffs which posed a potential threat to the consumer, and to establish a food alert network and a system for the rapid withdrawal of products from the market. It called for the risk assessment unit whose establishment had been announced to work within an institutional system linking up the scientific committees, the product authorization authorities and the coordinated food alert system. On the subject of liability, it called on the Commission to dispel ambiguities and consider the possibility of persons being jointly and severally liable if the producer of the product can no longer be identified. Parliament regarded it as a fundamental principle that food producers be able to provide scientific evidence that their products pose no risk to consumers' health, and called for additional information to be provided concerning pre-production inputs used in agriculture (seeds, plant protection agents, fertilizers, animal feed, etc.) and for it to be ensured that the producers of these products accepted liability for them. It called on the Commission to submit a proposal on general liability for food safety and health, laying down clear rules concerning the producer's liability for food safety. All operators who fully complied with Community legislation should have means of appealing against any action brought against them on the basis of the directive on defective products. Within the framework of an integrated 'farm-to-table' approach to food safety and quality, Parliament called for environmental protection to be incorporated into food policy, the ultimate objective being sustainable food production. This concept should result in the provision of information about production and manufacturing methods. With regard to inspections, Parliament called on the Member States to incorporate Community law effectively into national law and to penalize those who committed fraud. It called for more funding for organic and sustainable farming, and for strict Community regulation of animal feedstuffs. It condemned the use of antibiotics on animals for prophylactic purposes, and called for a revision of Community rules on the use of antibiotics in animal feed in order to prevent any non-therapeutic use. Parliament also called for rules on the use and composition of artificial inputs to crop production such as pesticides, herbicides and chemical fertilizers. It called on SMEs to familiarize themselves with the HACCP (hazard analysis and critical control point) system and called on the Commission to ascertain to what extent this system could be applied to small farms. It called for the standards applicable to foodstuffs produced in the Community and intended for the internal market also to apply to imports from third countries and exports to them. International trade in food products must not be developed at the expense of the protection of public health, animal welfare or the environment. The applicant countries must accept the link established between agricultural policy, public health policy and food policy. In the field of consumer information, efforts must be made to increase public awareness and educate consumers. Parliament called for clear and simple legislation on labelling and the establishment of new sources of information. In particular, it called for the Directive on the labelling of foodstuffs to be revised, and for a system to be developed for the precise identification of genetically modified foods or food ingredients and to provide full information about the ingredients suitable for consumption. This system should be based on derivation from genetic engineering techniques and not on arbitrary measurements of residues in the final product. Parliament called for the development of detailed Community criteria for labelling of foods and food ingredients produced without genetic engineering, as provided for in Recital 10 of the novel food Regulation and in line with the intended exclusion of the use of genetic engineering from organic agriculture. From the international point of view, Parliament called on the Commission and the Fifteen to assign priority to the

safety of consumers and to ensure that WTO trade agreements and negotiations acknowledged the importance of legitimate consumer concerns, including ethical and religious concerns about certain methods of production. It called for greater consumer involvement in all stages of the Codex Alimentarius decision-making process. It called on the Commission on no account to lift the ban on meat treated with hormones and if necessary, as an emergency measure, to accept the need to pay fines and levies. It called on the Union to seek a review of the WTO agreement on health and plant-health measures in order to affirm that the precautionary principle and the imperatives of health and safety must take precedence over free trade.