

Nutrition and health claims made on foods

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The German delegation, supported by the Italian, French, Irish, Finnish and Portuguese delegations, drew the attention of the Council and the Commission to the fact that, in its opinion, current Community rules on food labelling did not go far enough in requiring information on the place of origin or provenance of pre-packaged foodstuffs; consumers' information needs were not being given due weight. In this context, the Commission was accordingly requested to submit a progress report on its efforts to improve information on provenance. These delegations argued that information on provenance should not be confined to processed food: it should also cover agricultural products, as with current beef labelling rules.

The Swedish delegation, welcoming the review of the marketing rules for foodstuffs and supporting the German delegation's request for encouragement of husbandry methods which are especially sensitive to animal welfare and the environment, said that it would look favourably on any initiative aiming at applying the same labelling rules to all foodstuffs.

The Spanish delegation emphasised the complex nature of food labelling and suggested that an evaluation of the true extent of consumer demand in this area was needed and that the outcome of the negotiations in progress within the Codex Alimentarius should be awaited before undertaking any review.

Commissioner Kyprianou said that since his area of responsibility covered horizontal provisions on product labelling, review of Community legislation in this field was at present under discussion by his department with a view to the Commission's adoption of new legislation by the end of 2006.

With this in mind, he stressed the need to analyse needs by consulting citizens. He reminded delegations of the principle that the labelling requirement was justified only where its absence would mislead the consumer.

Commissioner Fischer Boel, whose area of competence included the vertical provisions governing certain agricultural products, said that, while she recognised that labelling provided the consumer with better information and that a statement of origin was compatible with WTO rules, the matter required more detailed discussion; she would examine the matter as soon as possible.