Basic information

2008/2220(INI) INI - Own-initiative procedure	Procedure completed
Ensuring food quality - Harmonisation or mutual recognition of standards **Subject** 3.10.10 Foodstuffs, foodstuffs legislation 4.60.04.04 Food safety	

Key players

European Parliament

Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
AGRI Agriculture and Rural Development	PETRE Maria (PPE-DE)	24/06/2008

Committee for opinion	Rapporteur for opinion	Appointed
ENVI Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (Associated committee)	CSIBI Magor Imre (ALDE)	07/10/2008

European Commission

Commission DG	Commissioner
Agriculture and Rural Development	FISCHER BOEL Mariann

Key events

Date	Event	Reference	Summary
23/09/2008	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
23/09/2008	Referral to associated committees announced in Parliament		
17/02/2009	Vote in committee		Summary
23/02/2009	Committee report tabled for plenary	A6-0088/2009	
09/03/2009	Debate in Parliament		
10/03/2009	Decision by Parliament	T6-0098/2009	Summary
10/03/2009	Results of vote in Parliament		
10/03/2009	End of procedure in Parliament		

Technical information

Procedure reference	2008/2220(INI)
Procedure type	INI - Own-initiative procedure
Procedure subtype	Initiative
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 55-p4 Rules of Procedure EP 55
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	AGRI/6/66705

Documentation gateway

European Parliament

Document type	Committee	Reference	Date	Summary
Committee draft report		PE414.335	18/12/2008	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE419.848	30/01/2009	
Committee opinion	ENVI	PE418.128	11/02/2009	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A6-0088/2009	23/02/2009	
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T6-0098/2009	10/03/2009	Summary

European Commission

Document type	Reference	Date	Summary
Commission response to text adopted in plenary	SP(2009)3244	06/10/2009	

Ensuring food quality - Harmonisation or mutual recognition of standards

2008/2220(INI) - 10/03/2009 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted, by 547 votes to 37 a with 49 abstentions, a resolution on ensuring food quality including harmonisation or mutual recognition of standards, in response to the Commission's Green Paper on agricultural product quality. Members support the criterion of promoting the quality of European agricultural products while not generating additional costs or burdens for producers.

They consider it vital that there should also be **conditions of fair competition for imported products,** which tend not to meet standards comparable to those governing Community products. The EU's quality standards applicable to third-country products having access to the internal market need to be laid down on the basis of agreement in the World Trade Organisation. The Commission must seek to secure an agreement on the 'non-trade concerns' which ensures that as many imported products as possible meet the same requirements as those imposed on European farmers, so that the quality of agricultural products which meet EU requirements offers agricultural producers a strong competitive advantage.

Parliament expressed concerned at the influence of the big retail chains on the general quality of European food products. It suggests that the Commission take note of the need to regulate the **reverse tendering practices** imposed by a small number of bulk buyers, in view of their disastrous consequences for quality products.

Production and marketing standards: Members are concerned at the complexity of the EU system of basic standards and at the multiplicity of rules which farmers have to comply with, and favour a simplified system. They also call for the development of EU guidelines on the use of general reserved terms, such as "low in sugar", and "low carbon ", in order to avoid misleading practices.

Parliament is concerned at the fact that the majority of EU consumers are not sufficiently informed concerning the food chain, especially as regards products' origins. It advocates **mandatory indication of place of production of primary products** based on a country of origin label. Such a system should also apply to processed food products. MEPs support the Australian model of labelling of the country of origin. They take the view that the use of the general European quality label, bearing the words 'produced in the EU', must ultimately ensure that European products stand out on the market, on the basis of the high quality standards governing their production. In addition, the **optional reserved terms** should be promoted as an alternative to compulsory marketing standards.

Specific quality systems: Parliament considers that market monitoring for the enforcement of all PDO (protected designations of origin) and PGI (protected geographical indications), provisions will increase administrative costs for Member States but will contribute to more effective protection. It favours Community technical assistance for monitoring by Member States so as to ensure that PDO and PGI protection arrangements are implemented as uniformly as possible. It advocates further action to disseminate information on these systems, with Community financial support. The Commission is asked to step up its efforts, particularly at the political level, to bring about an improvement in PGI protection in the course of the WTO talks.

Members suggest setting up a **European Agency** for Product Quality, which would work closely with the European Food Safety Authority and the Commission. That Agency would also adjudicate on the increasing number of requests from third countries in relation to PDO, PGI and traditional speciality guaranteed products.

On the matter of organic food, Parliament supports, in principle, the proposal for an **EU organic label**. It advocates the **compulsory indication of country of origin** in the case of fresh and processed organic products imported from third countries independently of whether they bear Community organic production certification. Members also suggests enhancing the credibility of **European logo** by means of a programme to promote organic products, and examining the question of dual certification required in many cases by major distributors, since this is resulting in a shortage of organic products on the EU market.

Members call on the Commission to provide criteria for quality initiatives such as **voluntary GMO-free labelling schemes.**

Certification systems: they take the view that EU rules on the harmonisation of standards are unnecessary, and that there is no need to introduce new certification schemes for foodstuffs at EU level, as this would undermine existing schemes and mislead consumers. The development of **quality marks** must not result in more red tape for producers. Producers should be able to take the initiative regarding the use of such marks, and the intervention of the Community bodies should be confined to ensuring the protection of those marks with a view to guaranteeing producers a fair price and protecting the consumer from fraud.

With regard to the international dimension, Parliament is concerned at pressure from products from emerging countries which do not meet the same quality standards and often benefit from lax controls. It reiterates the need to implement the concept of **'qualified market access'**, as affirmed in numerous resolutions of Parliament.

It supports action to communicate the benefits of the EU's policies for food quality and safety, and emphasises the potential role of EU funding in this area.

Lastly, it calls for the creation of sales promotion programmes for **local markets**, to promote local processing and marketing initiatives. This could be done by producer cooperatives, which boost added value in rural areas and which by avoiding long transport routes set a good example for combating climate change.