

## Greater Manchester Brussels Service

### Briefing: EU Public Health – Food

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Recent crises have undermined public confidence in the capacity of the food industry and of public authorities to ensure that food is safe. The European Commission has identified food safety as one of its top priorities. The central goal of the European Commission's food safety policy is to ensure a high level of protection of human health and consumers' interests in relation to food, taking into account diversity, including traditional products, whilst ensuring the effective functioning of the internal market. The implementation of this approach involves the development of legislative and other key actions across all Member States (source DG Health and Consumer).

Food security and sustainable food are also two major societal challenges for all EU Member States.

This Briefing Paper provides a summary on the latest legislations and other EU programmes affecting EU Food policy which may have an impact on our local authorities or businesses.

*If you would like the GM Brussels Office to follow any of the issues highlighted in this Policy Briefing please contact a [member of the team](#).*

#### Background

In all Member States and many third countries, the overarching principles concerning food safety and consumer protection are established in national legislation. It was not until 2002 that the European Parliament and the European Commission adopted the first General Food Regulation setting up the European framework to ensure a coherent approach in the development of food legislation across all Member States.

#### Key Developments Related to Food Safety

##### Food for infants, young children, and for specific medical purposes

In 2013, the Commission adopted a [Regulation on food for specific groups](#) aimed at streamlining existing rules and removing or updating existing unnecessary or contradictory rules under one Framework. The new Framework covers:

- Food for infants and young children.
- Food for people with specific medical needs.
- Food for weight control that replace the totality of the daily diet.

The new regulation will come into force in **2016** to give businesses time to adapt and to meet the new requirements. No products will be withdrawn from the market.

As part of the Regulation the Commission is expected to prepare two reports on:

- Milk-based drinks (so called, growing-up milks) and similar products intended for young children in order to analyse the necessity to establish special compositional and labelling rules for this kind of products.
- Food intended for sportspeople in order to analyse the necessity to establish special compositional and labelling rules for this products.

## **Food labelling**

From the 13 December 2014, new labelling rules for packaged food will be mandatory across the EU.

The new [EU Regulation 1169/2011](#) will change existing legislation on food labelling, making mandatory information origin labelling of unprocessed meat from pigs, sheep, goats, and poultry and highlighting allergies such as peanuts or milk in the list of ingredients. The regulation also indicates requirements on the minimum text size for the labels as well as how food sold in restaurants and cafes should be labelled.

The nutrition information on processed foods is also covered by the new regulation, however this new requirement will not come into force until 13 December 2016.

## **Better Training for Safer Food Initiative (BTSF)**

[BTSF](#) is an EC initiative which tries to coordinate an EU training strategy in the areas of food law, feed law, animal health and animal welfare rules, as well as plant health rules.

Training is designed for all staff of competent authorities involved in official control activities so as to keep them up-to-date with all aspects of EU law in the areas specified above and ensure that controls are carried out in a more uniform, objective and adequate manner in all Member States.

Training courses are organised all year round across all Member States and across all the various different areas mentioned above.

In UK the Food Standards Agency is the main contact point for this EU programme ([eutraining@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:eutraining@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk)).

## **Future Development**

### **Future of EU food safety and nutrition policy**

At the end of 2013 EC published the results of a study looking at the future of food safety and nutrition - '[Delivering on EU Food Safety and Nutrition in 2050 – Scenarios of future change and policy responses](#)'. The report provides guidance for future policy-making and research underpinning EU policy in this area by identifying the critical challenges to the EU food policy and legislative framework, their future evolution up to 2050, their impacts on the current EU regulation framework, and the potential critical changes in the current framework necessary to maintain the prevailing high standards of food safety and nutrition.

## **Sustainable Food**

About 90 million tonnes of food is wasted annually in Europe. Food is wasted throughout the entire food chain: by farmers, by the food industry, by retailers, by caterers and by consumers. The reasons are diverse and sector specific – lack of awareness, shopping planning, inadequate storage or packaging, etc, etc.

The EU Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe calls the Commission to give greater focus to limit waste in the food supply chain and to lower the environmental impact of food production and consumption.

A [public consultation](#) on how the EU can move towards a more resource efficient and sustainable food system was held at the end of 2013. The results of this should be published in a Communication on Sustainability of the Food System this year. This was expected to come out as part of a package of documents on building a Circular Economy in Europe in July 2014, but has been delayed until further notice.

## **Related funding and legislation**

### **Horizon 2020**

[Horizon 2020](#) is the successor research framework programme to FP7. It is split into three Pillars: Excellent Science, Industrial Leadership, and Societal Challenges. Two of the societal challenges are focused on “Food Security” and on “Waste and Resource Efficiency” which could frame calls related to the issues listed by this policy briefing.

### **Third Health Programme**

The Third Health Programme is the EU’s funding instrument to tackle health issues as part of the EU Health Strategy. The programme is structured around four key objectives relating to prevention, cross-border health threats, innovation, and access to healthcare. Under the first objective, there is one specific objective that could support food-related initiatives:

*Cost-effective promotion and prevention measures for addressing tobacco, alcohol, unhealthy dietary habits, physical activity;*

Funding is available through grants and tenders based on annual work programmes. The total budget available to the Programme for 2014-2020 is EUR 449.4m.

## **Other Food Related Matters**

### **[Generic descriptors](#)**

On 20 September 2013, the European Commission adopted new rules for applications concerning the use of generic descriptors (denominations) . Generic descriptors that imply nutritional and health claims on food were banned s use under the EU claims Regulation as unapproved health claims, however the new legislation allows food businesses to use them as long as their submit an application to a EU Member State for authorisation.

### **[Food enzymes](#)**

EFSA has completed the first safety assessment of a food enzyme as part of an initiative by EU decision-makers to set up an authorised list of these substances.

## [Aspartame](#)

Following some bad press related to the use of aspartame (the artificial sweetener used as a sugar substitute in some foods and beverages) the Commission commissioned a number of studies to assess its risk to humans. As a result, in December 2013 the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) published the results of its first full risk assessment of aspartame. The results concluded that aspartame and its breakdown products are safe for the general population (including infants, children, and pregnant women).

## [Public consultation: DRVs for zinc](#)

EFSA invited comments on its draft scientific opinion on dietary reference values (DRVs) for zinc. The document proposes DRVs for zinc for adults, infants and children, and pregnant and lactating women. The deadline for submitting comments was 8 July 2014.

## [Pesticides: new guidance to measure soil degradation rates](#)

New guidance from EFSA enables scientists to carry out a specialised aspect of environmental exposure assessment for pesticides. The guidance provides a clear methodology for evaluating studies that measure the time required for the degradation of 50% of a chemical pesticide in soil.

## [Dietary reference values: EFSA proposes adequate intakes of iodine](#)

EFSA has proposed adequate intakes of iodine for children, adults, and pregnant and lactating women. Iodine is an essential nutrient for humans, as it is an integral component of thyroid hormones.

## [Essential composition of infant and follow-on formulae](#)

The EFSA recently held a public consultation on the draft scientific opinion on the essential composition of infant and follow-on formulae, which considered which nutrients/substances could be considered as essential constituents of infant and/or follow-on formula and proposed minimum and maximum contents for these nutrients/substances.

## [Study maps EU school food policies for the first time](#)

As part of the European Commission's efforts to help reduce childhood obesity, the Commission's in-house science service, the Joint Research Centre (JRC), published in July 2014 the first comprehensive report on school food policies in Europe. The report shows that European countries acknowledge the important contribution of school food to children's health, development and performance at school. All the countries studied - 28 European Member States + Norway and Switzerland (inc. UK) - have guidelines for school food, although these vary considerably. National measures aimed at promoting healthy diets in schools range from voluntary guidelines, for example for menus and portion sizes, to complete bans, including on marketing, of vending machines and sugar-sweetened drinks.

## **Main EU-level contacts**

### **European Commission**

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### **European Parliament**

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### **Other**

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European Food Information Council (EUFIC), <http://www.eufic.org>

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4 September 2014