

Food information to consumers

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In accordance with the requirements of Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the provision of food information to consumers ('the FIC Regulation'), the Commission presents a report regarding the mandatory indication of the country of origin or place of provenance for unprocessed foods, single ingredient products and ingredients that represent more than 50% of a food.

Consumer interest: the report finds that consumer interest in origin labelling ranks behind price, taste, use by / best before date, convenience and/or appearance aspects. Even if consumer interest in origin labelling for unprocessed foods, single ingredient products and ingredients representing more than 50% of a food is claimed by two thirds to three quarters of consumers, it is lower than for food categories such as meat, meat products or dairy products. For 42.8% of EU interviewed consumers, origin labelling would be used to favour national or local production over other food origins. For 12.9% of EU consumers, origin labelling is considered to provide reassurance on the quality of the food product. Environment-related reasons drive the interest of some 12.8% of EU consumers. Origin labelling would also reassure 10.8% of EU consumers on the safety of the food they buy. The Commission notes that some of these reasons are not pertinent.

Voluntary or mandatory labelling: unprocessed foods, single ingredient products and ingredients that represent more than 50% of a food are food categories that gather very different products, for which consumer interest in origin information and economic impact of imposing a mandatory origin labelling varies greatly.

The supply chains for the three categories of foods in the scope of the report show that the origin of ingredients varies frequently to maintain low purchasing prices and to maintain the quality of the final product. Therefore, mandatory origin labelling at the EU level and even more at the level of the country is highly complex to implement in many areas of food, leading to substantial increases of costs of production, which ultimately would be passed on to consumers.

Origin labelling on a voluntary basis would be the least market disruptive scenario and would maintain product cost at current levels. It would not provide a satisfactory solution to the consumer demand for systematic origin information, but consumers could, if they so wish, opt for foods where origin information is voluntarily provided for by food business operators. Mandatory origin labelling at EU level leads to lower production cost increases, less burden for both food business operators and Member States competent authorities, but consumer satisfaction would be not as high as with mandatory origin labelling at country level.

Unlike origin labelling at EU level, origin labelling at country level would have a substantial impact on the internal market, with a possible increase of consumption of local foods for certain markets.

International aspect: both mandatory origin labelling scenarios at EU and country levels could impact on international food supplies and interfere with existing trade agreements with third countries. Additional labelling rules may lower the competitiveness of EU food business operators on the international market, while food business operators from third countries are concerned about potential additional costs of production and loss of exports to the EU because consumers would prefer foods of EU origin.

Administrative burden: mandatory origin labelling would represent an additional burden on Member States competent authorities, in particular in the current economic environment, if they had to cope with the imposition of possible new control tasks for such additional requirements.

Conclusions: in view of the Commission policies in terms of better regulation, voluntary origin labelling combined with the already existing mandatory origin labelling regimes for specific foods or categories of food appears as the suitable option. It maintains selling prices at current levels and still allows consumers to choose products with specific origins if they want to, while it does not affect the competitiveness of food business operators and does not impact internal market and international trade.