



"The voice of crafts and SMEs in Europe"

Food labelling: final compromise leaves SMEs overall pleased

UEAPME satisfied with exclusion of non pre-packed food from compulsory labelling; worried about new country of origin rules

Brussels, 6 July 2011 – UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers' organisation, was left overall satisfied by today's vote at the European Parliament on a new set of food labelling rules. As requested by UEAPME, the compromise between the EU institutions approved by MEPs excludes non pre-packed food from the new compulsory labelling requirements, which would have proved impossible for many small food producing and processing enterprises. MEPs also rightly steered clear of approving "traffic light labels", which would have brought about extra burdens for producers and more confusion for consumers. On the negative side, however, the Parliament rubber-stamped a last-minute agreement that extends compulsory country of origin labelling to meat. This will generate problems for small food operators that change ingredients very frequently, warned UEAPME, calling for an impact assessment to be carried out before introducing the new rules.

Secretary General **Andrea Benassi** offered the following comments:

"Today's vote at the European Parliament on food information to consumers is certainly a step forward compared to what might have been. Thanks to the work of the Parliament's rapporteur, the final compromise excludes non pre-packed food from the new compulsory labelling requirements. Doing otherwise would have spelled the end for many small food producers that vary their offer very frequently, according to season and availability. Labelling and applying a fully fledged nutritional notice on each of their products is often either impossible or too expensive. Many small businesses would have been pushed out of the market, leaving consumers with less choice. Thankfully, MEPs avoided this negative scenario."

"MEPs also rightly rejected the idea of 'traffic light labelling', which would have created not only more burdens for small companies in the food sector, but also more confusion for consumers. Healthy dark bread, for instance, would have gotten a red light due to its content of salt. Nutritional information cannot and should not be reduced to such useless factoids."

"The only disappointment in today's vote comes from the new compulsory country of origin indications. The existing rules state that the country of origin must be indicated only when its absence is likely to mislead consumers, leaving the choice to the food producer in all other cases. This is a fair compromise between consumer protection and the needs of businesses in the sector. Today's extension of mandatory country of origin labelling to a very wide set of foodstuffs is tantamount to protectionism in disguise and will make the life of small food operators very difficult. This decision is against the single market and cannot be taken without a prior impact assessment. We hope that the rules will be revised very soon."

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EDITORS' NOTES: UEAPME is the employers' organisation representing exclusively crafts, trades and SMEs from the EU and accession countries at European level. UEAPME has 80 member organisations covering over 12 million enterprises with 55 million employees. UEAPME is a European Social Partner. For further information: <http://www.ueapme.com/>

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