



# ENSURING FOOD IS SAFE

The veterinary and phytosanitary system  
of the European Union explained



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*Food production and gastronomy in Europe are based on the combination of knowledge, skills, practices and traditions relating to fisheries, livestock and crop farming and to methods of conserving, processing, cooking, sharing and eating food.*

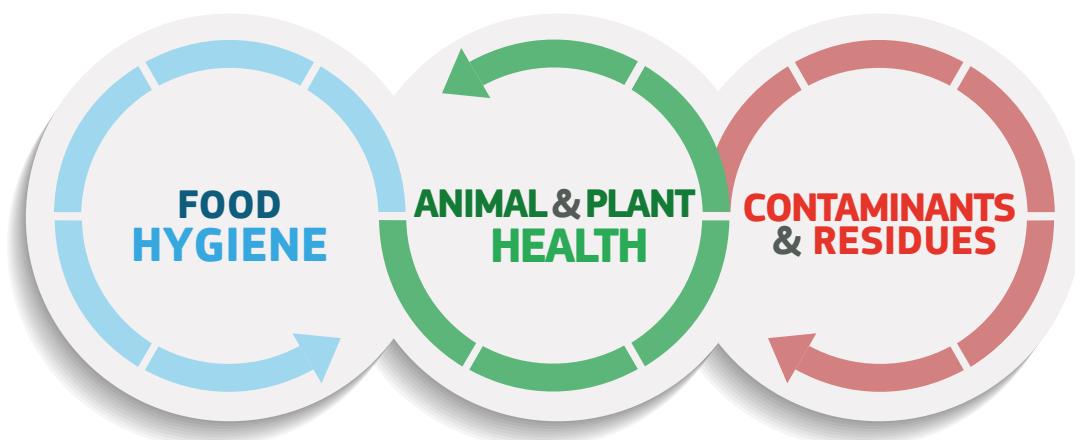
*In the European Union there is a recognition of the intangible cultural heritage which is integral to the rich array of food production, tightly bound up with the unique farming practices in different European regions and with their local products and acknowledges the value of the raw materials it uses, their quality and the need for excellence at all stages in the processing of foodstuffs, a concept which incorporates respect for animals and nature.*

*Gastronomy and food production are a source of both cultural and economic wealth for the regions which make up the EU. The development of global export markets is enabling also non-EU citizens to benefit and share the EU's rich cultural food heritage.*

*Enjoy! It's from Europe.*



**THE SAFETY** of our food on this enormous market is **GUARANTEED** through comprehensive controls systems related to:



This brochure explains how we do it.

# HARMONISED LEGISLATION ENFORCED THROUGH THREE LAYERS OF CONTROLS **CONSUMER PROTECTION COMES FIRST.**

A **high level of health protection** is the paramount objective of all EU laws in agriculture and the food producing sectors. Animal and Plant Health are similarly important.

The EU has harmonised its sanitary and phytosanitary legislation throughout the Union. An extensive body of EU-wide laws covers the entire food production and processing chain ‘from farm to fork’ within the EU, as well as imported and exported goods. In all its diversity, the EU is a single entity when it comes to food safety.

Each EU Member State is responsible for implementing these harmonised standards and to establish robust, official controls to enforce them. The European Commission verifies through regular audits that the controls of all Member States are equally effective. Regular EU-level training events for inspectors ensure that best practices are used across all Europe.

Read more about the EU Food Law: [http://ec.europa.eu/food/safety\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/food/safety_en)

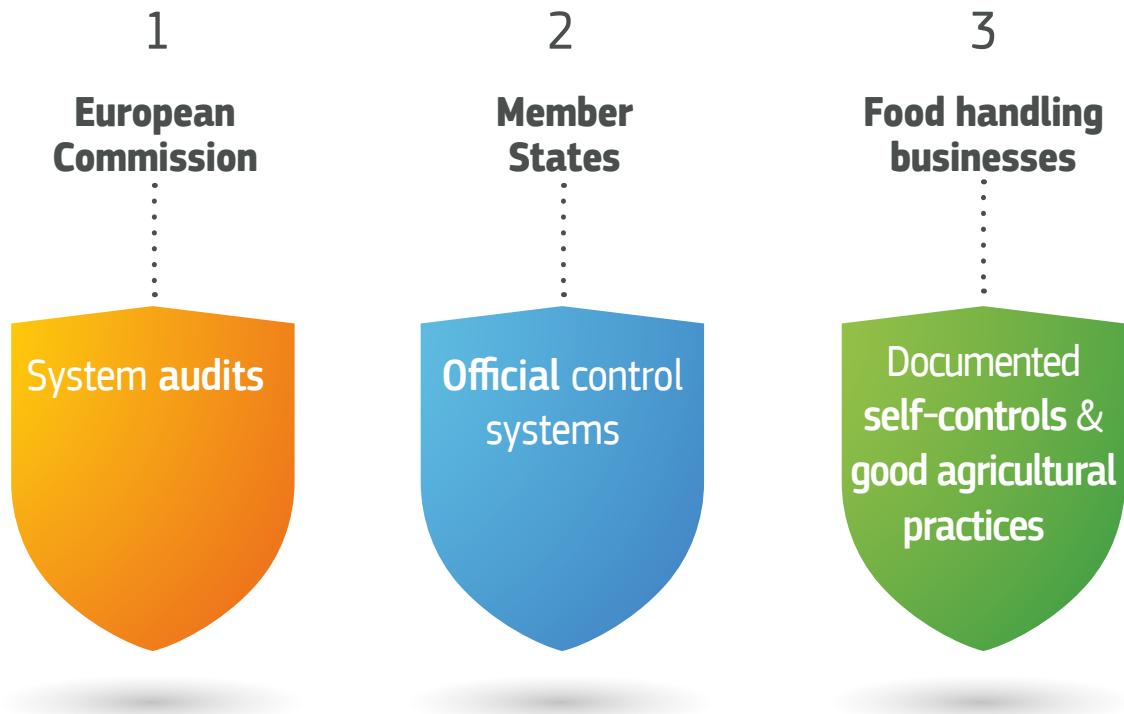


*“Whenever people buy food,  
they want to trust that it is **safe** and  
**good quality**. The EU Control System  
earns this trust every day”*

Commissioner for Health & Food Safety  
**Mr Andriukaitis**



# THREE LAYERS OF CONTROLS



Our **integrated policy approach** aims at building **safety** into the food and feed chain, from the farm, throughout processing, storage and retail to the consumer's table.

This is achieved through a system with **three layers** of control:

1. On top of the system, the European Commission has a unique obligation to audit the control systems of Member States and countries that export to the EU, and verify that they are effective.
2. The responsibility of Member States, or in case of imports, the administration of the country where the business operates, to put official control systems in place to verify the effectiveness of self-controls by operators.
3. A clear allocation of responsibility to food-handling businesses and farmers to comply with EU rules associated with an obligation of self-control.

EU law does not oblige businesses or Member States to organise their controls systems in the exact same way. But it obliges all businesses, as well as Member States, to strive for continuous improvement and a very high level of safety for all consumers, in all regions of the world.

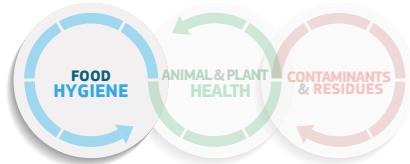


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# FOOD HYGIENE



**Food businesses must ensure compliance** with EU food law in their daily activities. All operators must have documented self-control systems in place to address the risks that may arise in their specific operations — whether it is a meat plant or a restaurant, a fruit importer or fish cannery. Farmers have also a key role in ensuring that their production complies with hygiene requirements. They are also at the start of the traceability chain.



Commissioner for Agriculture  
and Rural development

**Mr Hogan**

*"EU farmers are subject to the world's most stringent standards of health and safety in terms of food production. In rising to this challenge, they have succeeded in making Europe the best address for food on the planet! Our farmers create food and drink products of the very highest quality, which is enjoyed by consumers around the world. Our guarantee of safety and quality has made us the number one agri-food exporter globally."*

## THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF FOOD-HANDLING BUSINESSES ARE TO:

- have documented self-controls in place;
- identify and regularly review the critical points in their processes and ensure that controls are applied at these points;
- notify authorities of their activities and cooperate in official controls;
- be responsible for the safety of the food and feed that they produce, transport, store or sell;
- ensure traceability by rapidly identifying any supplier or consignee;
- immediately inform the competent authorities if they have a reason to believe that their food or feed is not safe;
- immediately withdraw food or feed from the market if they have a reason to believe that it is not safe.

**EU Member States are responsible for the enforcement** of the applicable EU law throughout the food and feed chain. Competent authorities must organise official controls (that reflect the risk of the respective product categories) in order to verify that the activities of food-handling businesses and goods placed on the EU market comply with all requirements. All Member States work on the basis of transparent, coordinated control plans.

Countries outside the EU wishing to export to any of the EU Member States must have similar control systems in place to guarantee compliance of imported food with all applicable EU standards.

## ROLE OF NATIONAL AUTHORITIES

- overall about 100 000 independent and well-trained staff monitor the 25 million food-handling businesses that are active throughout the EU supply chain — from a feed mill to a restaurant;
- the 'Better Training for Safer Food' –BTSF- programme ensures that best practices are disseminated among the competent authorities across the EU and selected partner countries outside the EU.

**Read more about Training:** <http://ec.europa.eu/chafea/food/>

## The European Commission verifies that the control systems are effective.

This is one of the tasks of the Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety. It is in charge of auditing of the controls and inspections systems in EU Member States from farm to consumers. This ensures that food produced in the EU is subject to serious controls. In practice, more than 200 systems audits are carried out annually by the European Commission in EU Member States and third countries.

Countries importing food from the EU can rely on the EU three layers control system that no other exporting country offers.



Commissioner for Trade  
**Mrs Malmström**

*“Consumers are benefitting from the elimination of trade barriers, enjoying a broader choice of safe products at lower prices. The import rules of the EU are based on international standards and offer fair market access to our trade partners while assuring that **consumers can have full confidence in the goods they buy.**”*

## Because of their high level of performance, EU rules are often at the basis for international trade standards.

The EU is actively involved in the development of international standards of the World Animal Health Organisation (OIE), the Codex Alimentarius Commission or the International Plant Protection Convention. This work contributes to improving food safety, animal health and plant health around the world and helps facilitating trade in food and agricultural products based on globally agreed rules.

The EU offers many programmes that help developing countries to comply with these rules.

## TRACEABILITY AND RAPID INFORMATION EXCHANGE – HOW DO WE DO IT?

Every day, vast quantities of livestock, food and products are traded into the EU.

**TRACES – TRAde Control and Expert System – is the online system that tracks all movements** of animals, plants, food and feed imported from outside the EU and traded throughout the Member States.

TRACES manages official controls and route planning for animal transports online.

National competent authorities post their certificates online through TRACES before a consignment is shipped. Authorities in the receiving country are pre-notified of the arrival and can plan their controls at the EU border, at the final destination or even during the transport of live animals.

TRACES simplifies trade and makes it safer by using a user-friendly interface available in 35 languages. More than 36 000 users from almost 80 countries worldwide are connected through TRACES and it issues over 50 000 veterinary and phytosanitary certificates every month.

**Read more about TRACES:** [http://ec.europa.eu/food/animals/traces\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/food/animals/traces_en)

The **Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed** (RASFF) allows immediate reaction throughout the EU Member States to any threat to public health that may be detected in the single market or at border controls.

More than 3 000 notifications are processed every year to allow competent authorities to react immediately and recall any suspect food or feed from the market quickly and effectively — from Portugal and Finland, to Ireland and Cyprus. Full transparency is guaranteed.

**Find weekly online reports:** [http://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/rasff/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/rasff/index_en.htm)





## ANIMAL DISEASE CONTROL – HOW WE TACKLE OUTBREAKS.

In the event of an outbreak of a serious animal disease (such as foot and mouth disease, highly pathogenic avian influenza, classical or African swine fever) on a farm, EU legislation provides that immediate movement restrictions are applied to the affected holding and all farms in a radius of at least 10 km, the so-called surveillance zone.

All movements from this surveillance zone are stopped immediately to isolate the disease, pending eradication. Investigations immediately identify, trace and isolate all contact animals that might be carriers of the disease, but also all products, such as meat, feathers, manure or feed.

The veterinary services of the affected Member State are responsible for taking these measures in accordance with approved contingency plans. Regular training and simulation exercises must be conducted to maintain a high level of preparedness and to disseminate best practices among the services throughout the Union.

These rapid and extremely stringent measures are necessary to contain animal diseases that may be highly contagious. There is no room for complacency when it comes to protecting our livestock capital.

The EU system of regionalisation has demonstrated its efficiency for many years and during many outbreaks, effectively preventing the spread of disease while keeping trade disruptions to an absolute minimum.

# ANIMAL AND PLANT HEALTH



## ANIMAL HEALTH

The EU has effective rules to guarantee the prevention, surveillance and control of animal diseases. Effective sanitary controls and quarantine measures apply to pets, farmed animals and wildlife. Farmers and food business operators play a key role in the prevention and surveillance. That's why their responsibility and obligations are clearly defined in the EU legislation.

Coordinated surveillance programmes keep wildlife diseases under control and prevent their spread to livestock. Contingency plans and regular simulation exercises in all Member States ensure constant preparedness and a high level of resilience.

All movements of farm animals within and between EU Member States are recorded in electronic databases. This is a costly obligation to the livestock sector but it allows the permanent tracing of animals and immediate action in the event of an outbreak of disease, preventing its further spread.

The EU Animal Disease Notification System provides around the clock and immediate information exchange between veterinary services to identify and isolate potential carriers of dangerous pathogens. Immediate notifications go also to the OIE and to EU trading partners via the World Animal Health Information System. Full transparency is essential to the maintenance of our global trade relations. That's why the EU is committed to it.

## PLANT HEALTH

Plant health is a key factor for sustainable and competitive agriculture, horticulture and forestry. Healthy seeds and propagating material are required for the preservation of the Union's forests, for profitable crops in agriculture and for food security. As for animal health and food safety, Member States plant health systems are subject to regular audits for the European Commission. Because of the existence of an EU internal market, National Plant Protection Organisations of Member States have developed over time a significant experience in pest surveillance on their territory. This is required under the EU legislation. This is useful expertise when it comes to certify that EU products such as fruit are free from quarantine pests of importing countries.

The EU accommodates global trade and the import of exotic fruit or ornamental plants from all over the world to give consumers access to the widest variety of choices — but this must not come at the price of importing pests, plant diseases or invasive species.

To meet the challenges of global trade, the EU plant health regime has been rigorously modernised. The new regulation strengthens our capacity to detect and eradicate pests at an early stage and it aims at preventing the introduction of potentially risky plant materials from non-EU countries until their safety has been demonstrated.

## **EUROPHYT – THE EUROPEAN UNION NOTIFICATION SYSTEM FOR PLANT HEALTH INTERCEPTIONS**

Europhyt is the EU's information system for plant health. It connects plant health authorities of the EU Member States and Switzerland to exchange information on pests or plant diseases that have been detected in consignments imported or traded within the EU.

Europhyt allows authorities to take preventative measures at early stages because they have access to accurate, up-to-date information about pests and plant diseases.

**Read more about plant health:** [http://ec.europa.eu/food/plant/docs/phb\\_ho\\_annual\\_report\\_2014\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/food/plant/docs/phb_ho_annual_report_2014_en.pdf)



# CONTAMINANTS AND RESIDUES



The EU has the world's most rigorous monitoring system to keep contaminants away from our food and animal feed.

Maximum acceptable limits apply to food and feed products whether produced in the EU or imported into the EU. Materials that come in contact with food are also strictly regulated to exclude any contamination. Member State authorities maintain extensive programmes of sampling and analysis from farm to fork to ensure that potential sources of contamination are identified and safe levels maintained in all stages of food production and processing.

## **Do you know that each year thousands samples are tested for residue and contaminants in the EU?**

EFSA collects the monitoring data from Member States and publishes regular overview reports. The latest analysis (2013) includes the results for almost 81 000 samples from 27 EU Member States, Iceland and Norway of a wide variety of processed and unprocessed food products which were tested for the presence of residues and contaminants.

### **Read more about contaminants and residues:**

[http://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/chemical\\_safety/contaminants\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/chemical_safety/contaminants_en)

# INDEPENDENT SCIENTIFIC ADVICE

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) provides independent risk assessments that underpin regulatory decisions taken by the EU. The assessments provide the scientific basis for the sanitary and phytosanitary standards of the Union that are applicable to domestic production and imports.

EFSA brings together the best available scientists in its advisory panels. EFSA issues annual reports about trends in food-borne illnesses, food contaminants and other topics of interest to the Commission and policymakers and helps to shape the rational, science-based food safety policy in the EU that consumers expect.

Since its creation in 2004, EFSA has become a globally recognised institution that stands for the core values of the EU — state of the art science, transparency and a high level of protection.

## **EFSA IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE EU'S FOOD SAFETY SYSTEM. THE AUTHORITY'S MISSION IS TO:**

- provide EU risk managers with independent, high quality scientific advice related to food and feed safety, animal health and welfare, plant health, nutrition and the environment;
- inform the public of its work;
- work with Member States and other partners to promote coherent advice and increase trust in the EU's food safety system;
- identify and monitor emerging risks that have an impact on food and feed safety

### **EFSA has two core responsibilities:**

- 1.** the delivery and communication of scientific advice;
- 2.** the evaluation of food and feed products that require a safety assessment before they can be authorised for use on the EU market.

To ensure the best available scientific expertise, EFSA collaborates with partners throughout the world and can invite them to their panels. EFSA also works with national food safety authorities worldwide and other scientific organisations responsible for aspects of risk assessment through its advisory forum, focal points and scientific networks.

**Read more about EFSA: [www.efsa.europa.eu/en/aboutefsa](http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/aboutefsa)**



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