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**CONSUMERS - Food products made from GMOs will soon be suitably labelled**  
**Further steps towards stricter European regulations.**

Is it risky to eat food containing ingredients produced from genetically modified organisms (GMOs)? While waiting for scientists to come up with a definite answer, many consumers want to know, at the very least, if the foodstuffs they buy contain GMOs. Help is at hand, thanks to two European Commission draft regulations, which were approved recently by the Standing Committee for Foods, a body which brings together representatives of European Union (EU) member states.

One of the two regulations stipulates that when additives and flavourings produced from GMOs are added to food products, the manufacturers must label the products in question accordingly. This is not the case at present, as the requirement to inform consumers of the presence of GMOs applies only to new foods, conceived around them. The fact is that the EU regulation which seeks to ensure the safety of additives and flavourings was adopted long before GMOs appeared on the market.

The second of the two draft regulations is designed to complete the present labelling rules. It requires labelling of the kind «contains GMOs » to be used in connection with all foodstuffs, at least one of whose ingredients contains genetically modified material in excess of 1%. For example, if a food product contains, among other ingredients, maize starch made from GMOs, the manufacturer will have to indicate their presence only if the starch contains more than 1% of genetically modified material.

But this 1% threshold will apply only if the presence of GMOs in an ingredient is purely accidental, and if the manufacturer can prove that he has tried to avoid the use of genetically modified material. The use of the words «contains GMOs» on the label will otherwise be obligatory, even at levels below 1%.

The European Commission should adopt the two regulations definitively at the end of the year.

### **FOOD - Keep sewage sludge out of meat !**

**An EU regulation needs clarification in order to ensure the effectiveness of controls.**

What if the pork chops on your plate were from a pig which had been fed sludge containing waste from septic tanks? An existing European regulation bans the use of sewage sludge in feed for animals meant for human consumption, but it can be interpreted in various ways. The recently published report of a European inspection mission to France makes this point ; it also identifies deficiencies in the checks carried out by the French authorities. The European Commission, which monitors the proper implementation of European Union (EU) laws, plans to clarify the regulation in question, even though it regards the practices in question as quite illegal.

Since this summer several articles have appeared in the press on the use of sewage sludge and excrement in animal feed in different member states. These questionable practices were first reported in France, where inspectors from the Fraud Department visited five plants for the treatment of animal waste at the end of 1998 and the beginning of this year. This resulted in the dispatch of European Commission inspectors to France in August. The newspapers reported the use of sewage sludge in other member states, in the north and centre of the EU. In the case of France, the Commission's inspectors recommended that the authorities draw up an action plan before mid-November, in order to ensure that substances banned from animal feed will no longer be used.

In general, waste water from slaughterhouses and meat and other processing plants undergoes three separate operations. It is first screened or filtered, in order to separate solid particles from the water. This is followed by physical and chemical treatment, to separate fats and greases, as well as precipitated particles, from the water. The third and final operation is a biological one. For the authorities of several EU countries, the results of the first two operations do not represent sewage sludge, which is banned under European rules, but rather animal waste that can be used in animal feed.

The inspectors who went to France want this aspect of the problem clarified. Hence the European Commission's decision to send a questionnaire to all the member states, asking them for their interpretation of the EU regulation. They must reply before October 31.

## **TRAINING - New technologies to help you learn**

**Netd@ys Europe 99 is coming from November 13 to 21.**

You can learn almost anything, thanks to the new information and communication technologies. All you need is a PC and access to the Internet. This is what Netd@ys Europe wants to show you. It is being organized throughout the European Union (EU) – and beyond – for the third year running, on the initiative of the European Commission. The 1999 version will take place from November 13 to 21. However, as in previous years its impact will not be limited to just a week.

Netd@ys Europe first saw the light of day in 1997. It was animated by the same spirit as an operation launched the previous year in California's Silicon Valley. The first two editions of Netd@ays Europe enabled schools, as well as organizations of all kinds, to devise original projects, communicate between them and make them known throughout the length and breadth of Europe – and beyond. Last year no fewer than 35,000 organizations took part. They included schools, vocational training centres, cultural organizations and children's hospitals.

This year the organizers of the Netd@ys have chosen seven themes: citizenship, solidarity with the lonely and disadvantaged, science, art, the environment, employment and unemployment and Europe's cultural identity and diversity. The 1999 Netd@ys are stressing the fact that the new technologies are changing the role of teachers and trainers.

The projects selected for the Netd@ys cover a wide range of subjects, from the frontier-free black stork, proposed by the Ideas Network in Brussels, to the wines proposed by the commercial academy of Neusiedl am See in Austria. Other projects include the cinema on the Internet, a scientific journal, an on-line museum as well as ways of linking isolated villages and discovering Mediterranean cooking.

The operation has the support of EU member states, national and regional educational authorities and local groups. It also has the backing of numerous firms. The European Commission, for its part, is providing both financial and technical help. And the Netd@ys have their own website of course (<http://www.netdays99.org>)

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There is a Helpdesk in each country, which also acts as the link between the European organizers of [Netd@ys](mailto:Netd@ys) and the country or region in question. The addresses for the UK and Ireland are:

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## **POPULATION - Europeans are growing taller all the time**

**Average height varies with age – but also from one country to another.**

If you have the feeling that there are more young people around you than before, and that they are taller, you are quite right – and official statistics will back you up. In the European Union (EU), young people aged between 15 and 24 are 5 cm taller on average than their elders – those 65 years of age and over. This is just one of the numerous nuggets of information crammed into the latest Eurostat Yearbook, «A statistical eye on Europe,» published by the European Statistical Office in mid-October.

Young men in the 15-24-year age group measured 1m 77.5cm on average, and young women in the same age group 1m 65.5cm in 1996 (the latest year for which this information is available). If those in the 25-34-year age group are almost as tall as those under 25 years of age, those in succeeding age groups appear noticeably shorter, with the gap widening after 55 years. Finally, those aged 65 and over are just 1m 71.8cm tall on average in the case of men and 1m 61.2cm in the case of women.

Average height varies not only with age but also from one EU country to another: those living in the northern member states are generally taller than those living in the southern ones. Among the oldest European men, the Swedes are the tallest, followed by the Danes and Dutch. In the case of women in the same age group, the Dutch are taller on average than the Danes and Swedes, who have the same average height. Among young men in the 15-24-year age group, the Dutch are in the lead in terms of height, followed by the Danes and Germans – excluding those from the Federal states of eastern Germany. The ranking is unchanged in the case of girls in the same age group.

At the other end of the height scale, the shortest men in the oldest age group are the Portuguese. Spanish males are somewhat taller, followed by their Belgian and French counterparts. All are below 1m 70cm on average. In the case of women from the same age group, the Portuguese are the shortest, marginally shorter than Spanish women – the only ones whose average height is under 1m 60cm.

In the 15-24-year age group, the shortest boys on average are the Spanish and Portuguese; they are marginally shorter than Belgian boys. Portuguese girls in the same age group are the shortest on average; their Italian counterparts are somewhat taller, while British girls are slightly taller than Italian girls on average. The gap between men and women is greatest in the UK, incidentally.

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In 1996 Europeans reached their maximum weight around the age of 55 on average: between 45 and 54 years of age in the case of men, but somewhat later in that of women – between 55 and 64 years. But as weight depends largely on height, inter-country comparisons are not particularly meaningful.

It is more useful to know if you are overweight -- or underweight! Eurostat uses the Body Mass Index (BMI), which is calculated by dividing one's weight in kilos by one's height in metres squared. For example, a man weighing 80 kilos, who is 1m 80cm tall, has a BMI of 24.7 (80 divided by 1.80 x 1.80). If the result is below 18, the person is severely underweight. If it is between 18 and 20 he or she is underweight. The person with a BMI of between 20 and 27 is normal, but overweight if the index is between 27 and 30 and severely overweight if his or her BMI is over 30.

In 1996, in the EU as a whole, a higher proportion of women was underweight than men – 15% and 5% respectively. This was the situation in all EU member states. France had the highest proportion – roughly one in four - of underweight women. Luxembourg was next, with more than one in five women underweight, followed by Italy, with one in five women. Belgium and the Netherlands had the highest proportion of underweight men.

Of course there are more overweight men – one in four - than women – slightly over one in five – in the EU as a whole. The record in this respect is held by Greek men, who are ahead of their counterparts in Spain and Luxembourg. Greek women are not far behind, however.

### **HEALTH - In the EU, the French consume more alcohol, the Greeks smoke more...**

**...and the Swedes and Finns have the fewest vices.**

France leads in the per capita consumption of alcoholic beverages and Greece in the consumption of tobacco in the European Union. Not the most sought-after records perhaps, but they are to be found in the yearbook «A statistical eye on Europe», published by Eurostat, the European Statistical Office, in mid-October.

Every French citizen over 15 years of age consumes on average\* the equivalent of 14.1 litres of pure alcohol per year ; this is more than the average for each of the other European Union (EU) countries, with the exception of Luxembourg (14.5 litres). But Luxembourg is a somewhat special case, given that much of the alcohol bought within its borders is consumed in the neighbouring countries. If the Grand Duchy is therefore excluded, the biggest consumers of alcohol, after the French, are the Portuguese, followed by the Danes. The Swedes (6.4 litres) and Finns (8.4 litres) are the most sober, but they must give way to the inhabitants of two non-EU, but also Nordic, countries, Norway and Iceland, where per capita consumption is below 5 litres.

In most EU countries consumption of pure alcohol is tending to fall ; but it is rising in Denmark, Ireland and Portugal. It is virtually stable, or tends to rise and fall, in the Netherlands, Austria, Finland and the UK. However, the total consumption of alcoholic beverages has risen in most EU countries since 1990, although it has fallen in Portugal, Finland, Sweden and the UK.

As for smoking, the Greeks are well in the lead, puffing their way through more than 3,000 cigarettes on average per person during 1997. They are well ahead of the Spaniards (1,929 cigarettes) and the Germans (1,841 cigarettes). While consumption in Denmark, Ireland, Austria and Portugal is lower, the fact remains that people in these countries smoke more cigarettes per year than the EU average, which was 1,646 cigarettes in 1997.

Countries where cigarette consumption is below the EU average include Belgium, Italy, the UK, France and the Netherlands (in that order). The most reasonable in this respect are the Swedes (893 cigarettes) and the Finns (817 cigarettes). Luxembourg once again is a special case: consumption was as much as 2,140 cigarettes (in 1994), but the inhabitants of neighbouring countries had something to do with it.

Cigarette consumption seems to be falling since 1995, if one looks at the average for the EU as a whole. But the situation is largely unchanged in most member states. The only countries which have recorded a considerable fall in consumption since the beginning of the 1990s are Sweden, Finland and, if to a smaller extent, France. Consumption of tobacco in general has fallen in nearly all EU countries since 1990, but it has risen sharply in Greece and, although by not as much, Ireland.

\* in 1997, the latest year for which detailed figures are available.



## **INFLATION - EU prices rose by 1.2% on an annualized basis in September**

**This was the same rate as in August.**

Prices rose by 1.2% on an annualized basis in the 15-nation European Union (EU) in September, as in August, according to Eurostat, the European Statistical Office. This was also the inflation rate for the 11 countries\* that make up the euro area, having adopted the single currency on January 1.

Inflation was lowest in France and Austria in September at 0.6%. They were followed by Germany (0.8%), Sweden (1.1%) and the UK (1.2%). Countries above the average for the EU were Belgium (1.3%), Finland (1.4%), Greece (1.5%), Luxembourg (1.6%), Italy and Portugal (1.9%), the Netherlands (2%), Denmark (2.4%), Spain (2.5%) and, lastly, Ireland (2.6%).

*\* Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain.*

*Please contact us by fax or e-mail if you would like copies of the documents used to prepare Eurofocus articles.*

Mailed from Brussels X

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