

**FOOD SAFETY– A CONSUMER PROTECTION FACTOR**

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**Blazheva V. Food safety– a consumer protection factor.**

By 2030 the world population is expected to reach 8 billion people, which demands that the world food production should increase by at least 40%. 80% of this increase has to be ensured by a more intensive crop production. Food, wine and tobacco industry is the second largest economic sector in the European Union. It employs 48 million people and its share in the European economy is around 750 billion Euros per year.

The basic principles of the food safety policy were regulated in the EU legislation in 2002. They are intended to facilitate the free trade of food throughout the European Union, ensuring an equally high level of consumer protection in the Member States.

The European food law covers all stages of the food chain – from animal feed and food production to their processing, storage, transportation, import and export, as well as retailing. All food and feed products produced and sold in the EU can be traced 'from farm to fork' through this integrated approach so that consumers will be well informed about the content of the foods they consume. The foods cannot have health claims on their labels unless they are scientifically proven and explicitly approved by the European Commission.

**Блажева В. И. Безопасность продуктов питания – фактор защиты потребителей.**

Прогнозируется, что к 2030 г. население Земли будет составлять 8 млрд. человек, что создает необходимость увеличить, по крайней мере, на 40 % мировое производство продуктов питания. 80 % этого увеличения должно быть обеспечено более интенсивным производством сельскохозяйственных культур.

Пищевая промышленность является вторым по величине экономическим сектором в Европейском союзе. В нем занято 48 млн. человек, а его доля в европейской экономике оценивается в 750 млрд. евро в год.

Основные принципы политики безопасности продуктов питания регламентированы европейским законодательством в 2002 г. Они направлены на содействие свободной торговле пищевыми продуктами во всем Европейском союзе, гарантируя одинаково высокий уровень защиты потребителей в государствах-членах.

Европейское законодательство в сфере пищевых продуктов охватывает все этапы пищевой цепи – от кормов для животных и производства продуктов питания до переработки, сохранения, транспортной перевозки, импорта и экспорта, оптовых продаж. Посредством этого интегрированного подхода все пищевые продукты и корма, произведенные и продаваемые в Евросоюзе, могут быть прослежены „от фермы до стола“, и потребители хорошо информированы о содержании продуктов питания, которые употребляют. На продуктах питания не могут быть поставлены медицинские претензии, если они не являются научно доказанными и официально одобренными Европейской комиссией.

**Блажева В. І. Безпека продуктів харчування - фактор захисту споживачів.**

Прогнозується, що до 2030 року населення Землі становитиме 8 млрд. осіб, що створює необхідність збільшити, принаймні, на 40% світове виробництво продуктів харчування. 80% цього збільшення повинне бути забезпечене більш інтенсивним виробництвом сільськогосподарських культур.

Харчова промисловість є другим за величиною економічним сектором в Європейському союзі. У ньому зайнято 48 млн. осіб, а його частка в європейській економіці оцінюється в 750 млрд. евро на рік.

Основні принципи політики безпеки продуктів харчування регламентовані європейським законодавством у 2002 р. Вони спрямовані на сприяння вільній торгівлі харчовими продуктами у всьому Європейському союзі, гарантуючи однаково високий рівень захисту споживачів у державах-членах.

Європейське законодавство у сфері харчових продуктів охоплює всі етапи харчового ланцюга - від кормів для тварин і виробництва продуктів харчування до переробки, збереження, транспортного перевезення, імпорту та експорту, оптових продажів. За допомогою цього інтегрованого підходу всі харчові продукти і корми, вироблені і продавані в Євросоюзі, можуть бути простежені "від ферми до столу", і споживачі добре поінформовані про зміст продуктів харчування, які вживають. На продуктах харчування не можуть бути поставлені медичні претензії, якщо вони не є науково доведеними і офіційно схваленими Європейською комісією.

**Formulation of the problem.** Protecting the health of people, animals and plants at every stage of the food production process is a top priority in the European policy implemented in the area of food safety, whose aim is brought to the following two points:

- ensuring that European citizens consume safe and nutritious food produced from healthy plants and animals;
- creating optimal work conditions in the food, wine and tobacco industry.

Since the adoption of the first measures aimed at consumer protection in 1975 the European Union has aimed to ensure a high level of protection of the health and safety of all consumers in the Union throughout the agri-food chain.

**Analysis of the latest research and publications.** Consumers must make sure that the food they buy in Europe is safe. The first European Union rules regarding food hygiene were introduced in 1964, becoming at present an active, consistent and comprehensive instrument for protecting the health of people, animals and plants, as well as the environment.

**The purpose of this paper** focuses on food safety in two aspects: ensuring a high level of protection of human health and protection of consumers' interests in making their informed choice.

**Presentation of the basic material.** Each of the 500 million people living in the European Union (Table 1), when making their informed choice, requires a wide range of choices, qualities and affordable prices, accurate information about what they buy and protection of their consumer rights.

Table 1

The European Union then and now: Member States and consumers

Indicators	1992	2014	Relative share (%)
Member States	12	28	43%
European consumers	345 million	508 million	68%

Source: [3, p. 11]

There is mistrust among consumers. Many European citizens are still cautious: 25% of them consider that a significant number of the non-food products sold in the European Union are dangerous; 30% believe that they lack the necessary information; and about 50% think their rights are not protected. For this reason the European policy focuses on four priorities [3, p. 12]:

1. Greater safety for consumers;
2. Promoting awareness;
3. Measures for implementation, law enforcement and compensation;
4. Adequate response to social and economic changes.

The European consumer policy has four key objectives [3, p. 3]:

- protection from serious risks and threats that we cannot tackle as individuals;
- the opportunity to make choices on the basis of clear, accurate and consistent information;
- safeguarding consumer rights and giving access to fast and efficient ways of resolving disputes with traders;
- keeping consumer rights up-to-date.

#### *Protection of human health*

Human health is a key priority of the European Union, where five out of the seven most important risk factors for premature death are associated with the intake of food and fluids: high blood pressure, cholesterol and body mass index, insufficient consumption of fruits and vegetables and alcohol abuse. Obesity and diabetes are also significant risk factors. In this respect, good nutrition is encouraged to avoid health risks.

The EU health policy complements the national policies in terms of:

- achieving a higher life expectancy – the average life expectancy in the European Union increased from 65 in the 1950s to 80 in 2010. There is inequality in the levels of life expectancy in the different countries of the European Community – the difference can be up to about 9 years [1, 4];

- combating obesity – over 200 million adults (more than half of the adult population) in the European Union are overweight or obese. One in four children also suffers from overweight or obesity. Obesity leads to serious physical and mental health problems, including cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancer and psychiatric disorders [1, p. 11];

- providing an opportunity to reduce life-threatening diseases such as diabetes, heart attack, stroke and cancer. The registered cases of diabetes are on the increase. In 2011 in Europe, 35 million adults lived with diabetes (type 1 and type 2). Their number is expected to rise by 23% by 2030 – up to 43 million people. The death rate in the European Union has also increased as a result of cancer: by 12% in men and 9% in women since 1985 to the present moment [1, p. 11].

The data presented is the reason to focus our attention on the need for consumers to obtain comprehensive information.

*Protecting consumer interests in food safety*

The European rules on **food labelling** ensure that consumers are informed about the content and composition of the foods when they make their choice.

Foods must have clear labels with important information about allergens, nutritional value, including energy, fat, saturated fat, carbohydrate, sugars, protein and salt content. Food labels contain information about the manufacturer, seller, importer, storage conditions and preparation of certain foods. The labels must be placed in a way that prevents their removal. Labels must be easily visible, read and understood [2, p. 8].

In order to provide consumers with appropriate information on the nutrient composition, some **foods** intended **for certain groups of the population** (e.g. infants and young children) are subject to detailed regulations.

When food manufacturers want to present a food as beneficial to health with statements like ‘it contributes to the proper functioning of your heart’ or ‘it reduces cholesterol’, this requires scientific substantiation of the **nutrition and health claims** (assessed by the European Food Safety Authority).

To encourage the production of **high-quality foods** and **traditional foods** the labelling rules facilitate consumers in identifying organic foods, quality products or foods produced using a particular technology.

The following signs are used in labelling and packaging products to indicate a safety risk or certain environmental advantages – Table 2:

The European Union logo for organic farming can be used on all pre-packaged organic food products produced in the Member States, ensuring that they meet the European organic production standards.

There are special logos for products linked to a geographical area of the European Union: a protected designation of origin and protected geographical indication, as well as for products prepared or produced in a traditional way: traditional specialities guaranteed – Table 3.

Table 2

Ecolabels on manufactured products

		
<p>The product meets the criteria of the EU ecolabel</p>	<p>The packaging of the product can be recycled</p>	<p>The product meets the EU regulation on organic farming</p>




Source: [3, p. 10]

A rigorous system of authorization and sale of **genetically modified organisms** – their launching on the European market is allegedly strictly controlled. If a product contains, consists of or is produced from an authorized genetically modified organism, this must be indicated on the label with the exception of unavoidable and accidental presence below 0.9%. The labelling rule does not apply to products derived

from animals fed with genetically modified organisms (which is contrary to the claim for an informed choice throughout the agri-food chain – author’s note).

Table 3

Standards of food quality and safety, preservation of traditional and regional foods

Name	Logo
<p><b>Protected Designation of Origin</b> – a sign used on agricultural products and foodstuffs which are reproduced, processed and prepared in a given geographical area using recognised know-how.</p>	
<p><b>Protected Geographical Indication</b> – a sign used on agricultural products and foodstuffs closely linked to the geographical area where at least one of the stages of production, processing or preparation takes place.</p>	
<p><b>Traditional Speciality Guaranteed</b> – a sign used on the traditional character of the product, either in the composition or means of production.</p>	

Source: [4, p. 3]

*European policy on food safety*

The European Union policy aims to protect health throughout the agri-food chain – at each stage of food production to its consumption, preventing food contamination. This policy has three main objectives:

- to ensure that foods and animal feeds are safe and nutritious;
- to ensure a high level of animal health and welfare, and plant protection;
- to ensure the availability of sufficient and transparent information on the origin, composition, labelling and use of foods.

The European Union is a single market in which goods (including foods) are traded freely. Mandatory inspections are carried out throughout the agri-food chain to ensure that the plants and animals are healthy and that the foods and animal feeds are safe, high-quality, appropriately labelled and meet the rigorous European standards. Owing to these rules European citizens enjoy some of the highest food safety standards worldwide.

In terms of global market, the maintaining of these standards is facing many challenges [2, p. 4]:

- preventing the introduction and spread of plant and animal diseases in the EU;
- preventing the transmission of diseases from animals to humans;
- ensuring that common rules are maintained across the European Union to protect consumers and prevent unfair competition;
- protecting animal welfare;
- ensuring that consumers have clear, unambiguous information on the food content and origin;
- contributing to global food security and providing people with access to sufficient amounts of safe and quality food.

The EU food law is based on the following general principles that have to be applied by all Member States [2, p. 5]:

- Protection of public health, plant health, animal health and welfare;
- Risk analysis and independent scientific advice;
- Safety measures;
- Tracing the origin of all products;
- Transparency and clear, unambiguous information on foods and feeds;
- Clearly defined responsibilities of all participants in the agri-food chain. The main responsibility of all participants in it is to supply safe foods on the market;
- Rigorous control and regular checks;
- Training and education.

The European policy on food is based on **scientific data** and a thorough **risk assessment** [2, p. 6].

According to the rules of the EU **strict checks** are carried out to ensure that all products entering the food chain meet the relevant standards.

**Food additives and flavourings** (chemical substances intentionally added to food to improve its flavour, texture and appearance or to prolong its freshness) are regulated to ensure that they do not pose any risk to human health.

The rules of the European Union establish basic requirements to ensure the safety of **‘the food contact materials’** (packaging, processing machines, cutlery and dishes).

Bacteria, viruses and parasites can pose a serious risk to public health if strict **food hygiene** procedures are not followed along the food chain in the EU Member States.

**Contaminant** levels in the European Union should be kept as low as can reasonably be achieved by following good working practices.

**'Novel' foods** are foods, or ingredients, which, in the past, were not significantly used for human consumption. In the EU, the legal definition is that these are foods that were not used before 1997[2, p. 7].

*Outcomes of the European policy on food safety*

Economic operators bear the primary responsibility to ensure that the food they sell on the market is safe.

The concrete steps for the consistency of the European policy on food safety include[1, p. 11]:

- the EU Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF), created in 1979. It allows quick and effective exchange of information on food and feed between all interested authorities at national and European level. The system helps governments to act quickly and in coordination to avoid food safety risks before consumers are harmed, i.e. by withdrawing risky products from the market;

- the EU Platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health, created in 2005, which aims at banning the advertising of sugary drinks to children, providing better nutritional information in restaurants, reformulating recipes in order to reduce salt, sugar and fat content, and promoting physical activity in schools;

- the EU High Level Group on Nutrition and Physical Activity, created in 2007;

- fighting cancer—Each year about 2.5 million people in the Community are diagnosed with cancer. For this purpose the European Partnership for Action Against Cancer (EPAAC) initiative was launched in 2009 whose aim is to reduce cancer incidence by 15% by 2020[1, p. 12];

- promoting active and healthy aging—Europeans live longer, but the number of years they live in good health remains unchanged. On average, EU citizens spend 20% of their lives in poor health, which affects their quality of life. In this aspect in 2011, the European Union launched the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Aging initiative to increase the average healthy lifespan of Europeans by 2 years by 2020[1, p. 13].

- introducing general (common) rules on food labelling in the EU in terms of providing accurate information to consumers on healthy and nutritional value of foods, i.e. if a food is claimed to be 'useful for the heart', this must be scientifically proven. Food labels must clearly indicate the energy value and the content of fat, saturated fat, carbohydrates, salt and sugar.

- the European Union Notification System for Plant Health Interceptions (EUROPHYT) of plant products imported and marketed in the European market. It helps to prevent the entry and spread of diseases and plant pests, namely [2, p. 13]: preventing the transmission of diseases from animals to humans— The EU regulations ensure that animal diseases are controlled and that only healthy animals and their products enter the food chain[2, p. 9]; stopping the spread of pests— the crop production in the European Union amounts to 205 billion per year[2, p. 11].

The EU regulations set strict requirements and terms for the import and movement within the Union. Regular inspections are carried out during the vegetative phase and immediately after harvest. The EU regulations also ensure that plant protection products against specific pests do not pose a risk to human health or the environment.

- protection of the plant reproductive material (seeds and young plants) is essential for agriculture, horticulture and forestry.

In the European Union the use of pesticides (plant protection products) is strictly regulated to ensure that the chemicals they contain have no adverse effects on humans or the environment.

- strict control is necessary for the safety of food purchased from countries outside the European Union.

- the European Union has a significant contribution to food security by participating in building effective systems for managing food safety for the poorest and most vulnerable people worldwide.

About 90 million tonnes of food are wasted annually in Europe, which can be reduced by 60% through more effective resource management. This requires a reduction in food waste without this affecting food safety negatively. For this purpose, consumers should be encouraged to make sustainable and responsible choices [2, p. 15].

**Conclusions:** European legislation on food safety guarantees consumers a high level of protection at all stages of production and distribution of all foods and food products marketed within the European Union. It controls food hygiene, animal health and welfare, plant health and risks of food contamination.

The European regulations for protection of people, animals and the environment are based on scientific assessments. All novel food ingredients authorized for sale on the European market are subject to scientific safety assessment. When authorities give permission for novel foods, this includes specific provisions regarding the way they can be used and labelled.

From 13th December 2014 the new European food labelling rules adopted by the European Commission in 2011 will guarantee consumers a clearer, more detailed and accurate information about the contents of foods and help them to make informed choices about the foods consumed. The main changes are brought to the following:

- more legible information (a minimum font size is introduced for the mandatory information);
- a clearer and uniform presentation of allergens (e.g. soya beans, nuts, gluten, lactose) in prepackaged foods (visibly standing out from the other information by means of font, style or background colour) in the list of ingredients;
- mandatory information regarding allergens in foods that are not prepackaged, including in restaurants and cafes;
- a requirement to submit certain information about the nutritional value of the majority of pre-packaged processed foods;
- mandatory information about the origin of fresh pork, mutton, goat and poultry meat;
- uniform labelling requirements when shopping over the Internet, from home and from the store;
- list of engineered nanomaterials in the respective ingredients;
- specific information about the plant origin of refined oils and fats;
- stricter rules to prevent deceptive practices;
- designation of the substitute ingredient in the 'imitation' of foods;
- a clear indication of 'formed meat' or 'formed fish';
- clear indication of defrosted products.

The rules for mandatory labelling of the nutritional value of processed foods will be in force from 13th December 2016.

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