

Recommendation 1053 (1987)¹

Threat to agriculture by imitation food products

Parliamentary Assembly

The Assembly,

1. Concerned that - at a time when surpluses in the agricultural sector in Europe are reaching record levels and farmers engage in painful efforts to restrain production - imitation food products, often of non-agricultural origin, are invading the market, either as substitutes or as replacements for essential ingredients in natural food such as milk, butter, cream, cheese and meat ;
2. Considering that, although principles such as the free choice of the consumer and the freedom of production and trade are important, these have to be weighed against the grave consequences that would befall agriculture in the event of further encroachments of the food market by imitation products ;
3. Questioning, furthermore, whether the consumer in reality has freedom of choice between natural foods and imitations, given the latter's often incomplete or unclear labelling and the intensive and frequently misleading advertisement campaigns in their favour ;
4. Regretting the widely differing legislations as regards imitation food products in Council of Europe member states, and the tendency in international negotiations to adapt standards to the most lax rather than the most stringent national requirements ;
5. Recognising that agriculture itself bears part of the responsibility for the development mentioned, by its having excessively in recent years emphasised quantity over quality of production, thus facilitating competition by imitation products as concerns taste, texture and nutritional value ;
6. Aware of the case regarding the protection of milk against imitations now before the Court of Justice of the European Communities, and of the proposal presented in 1986 by the Commission of the European Communities to the Council of Ministers aiming at improved monitoring of the sale of such products,
7. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers urge the governments of member states :
 - a. to improve the protection of the image and trade name of natural foods, by making it impossible for imitations or substitutes to be even remotely identified or confused with them as regards nomenclature, advertising, labelling and display in stores ;
 - b. to strive, notwithstanding the principles of freedom of production and trade, to attain the highest possible standards of quality and authenticity in the food sector, not only in Europe but within the worldwide GATT framework - in recognition of the crucial importance of agriculture for the well-being of society as a whole ;
 - c. to orient, given the above, agricultural policies so as to encourage quality of production and competitive prices in order to allow natural products to compete more effectively with imitations ;
 - d. to ensure that imitation products do not benefit, either directly or indirectly, from financial or other support by governments, on the understanding that the latter should be strictly reserved for products of purely agricultural origin.

1. See [Doc. 5701](#), report of the Committee on Agriculture. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 27 March 1987.

