



Recommendation 1417 (1999)¹

Final version

Dioxin crisis and food safety

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Referring to its Recommendation [1389 \(1998\)](#) on consumer safety and food quality, the Assembly once again expresses its profound concern at the repeated threats to food safety in Europe. The contamination of food products by dioxin is a further example of the serious shortcomings which remain in European laws and regulations with regard to the prevention and, where necessary, effective management of food crises.
2. By removing national barriers, our economic (trade liberalisation) and institutional (European integration) context can also give a European or even international dimension to any problem in the food chain that cannot be brought under control. Above and beyond the major economic implications of any breakdown in the food production and distribution circuit, the protection of public health must remain the public authorities' primary and priority concern.
3. The dioxin crisis has once again revealed a succession of errors which led to contaminated food being put on the market and distributed without our legislative system's preventive and early response mechanisms having functioned in time. Whether in terms of prior checks or subsequent verification, risk assessment, risk management, information, responsibilities or co-ordination, the handling of this crisis should be judged in very severe terms.
4. The Assembly fears that similar situations might occur again in future, and the possibility of having to face up to even more serious food crises cannot be ruled out. The current agro-industrial system has many advantages, even as regards food safety, but it still entails risks which must be kept under control and reduced to a minimum. Beyond any self-regulation practised by the companies and economic sectors concerned, the public authorities bear the ultimate responsibility for guaranteeing food safety and are accountable to citizens in this respect.
5. The development of this agro-industrial system has led, in particular, to food production on a mass scale which often combines the advantage of making a whole range of food products available at affordable prices with the disadvantage of a decline in the nutritional and organoleptic properties of foodstuffs.
6. The globalisation of the economy must be accompanied by international harmonisation of the rules on the management of food, health and safety problems not only for obvious health reasons but also to avoid distortion of the competitive situation likely to give rise to huge transfers of risks from one country to another.
7. The Assembly believes that it is now a matter of urgency to consider the functioning of the agri-foodstuffs sector in European countries and take the necessary measures. Following the recent food crises (BSE and dioxin) which have called into question our stockfarming methods, further delays are no longer acceptable and the steps to be taken include a very thorough review of the production of compound animal feeds and a ban on the use of all animal meal which is produced from animals which are sick or have not been thoroughly examined or which is produced in facilities with insufficient security standards.

1. Assembly debate on 24 June 1999 (23rd Sitting) (see [Doc. 8453](#), report of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, rapporteur: Mr Etherington; and [Doc. 8457](#), opinion of the Committee on Science and Technology, rapporteur: Mr Asciak). Text adopted by the Assembly on 24 June 1999 (23rd Sitting).



8. The Assembly wishes to draw attention to its recent activities in this field, in which certain proposals, which it now renews, were already put forward; in particular, in its Recommendations 1142 (1991) on the labelling of quality food products, 1244 (1994) on food and health, and 1389 (1998) on consumer safety and food quality.
9. Consequently, the Assembly calls on the governments of member states:
 - 9.1. to consider the proposals made in its Recommendation 1389 (1998);
 - 9.2. to apply the precautionary principle systematically where food is concerned, in order to protect public health as fully as possible, and to request all necessary scientific advice before passing legislation in this field;
 - 9.3. to strengthen scientific capacities for the identification of toxic contamination of food;
 - 9.4. to develop or improve methods for the rapid detection of contamination and for the establishment of its concentration;
 - 9.5. to seek pan-European or international standardisation for successful methods to allow their wide use;
 - 9.6. to review and strengthen their food legislation, especially with regard to the traceability of foodstuffs and the ingredients used for making them, to provide for strict controls and frequent spot checks at all stages of the food chain, as well as severe penalties in cases of fraud (which could extend to withdrawal from the market or loss of a trademark);
 - 9.7. in particular, to review the systems for monitoring the animal feed industry and the raw materials used in the manufacture of compound feeds;
 - 9.8. to set up national food safety agencies on the lines of those established in some member states, with an independent status, which would include representatives of the public authorities, scientific bodies, the economic and professional sectors, representatives of farm organisations and consumers' associations, and would be responsible for food quality and safety;
 - 9.9. to work for the inclusion of these agencies, as well as those responsible for the quality control of drugs, in a pan-European structure similar to the US Food and Drug Administration;
 - 9.10. to improve co-ordination and clarify the division of responsibilities between the ministries and departments responsible for food questions and, in particular, to assign control of food safety to the Ministry of Health;
 - 9.11. to distinguish clearly the responsibilities of the various players, for example between those who are involved in risk analysis and those whose task is risk management;
 - 9.12. to set up a national early warning network, co-ordinated at European level, enabling the other member states (and, where appropriate, the European Commission) to be informed immediately of any risk to food safety, however small;
 - 9.13. to develop a new food information policy characterised by complete openness and a sense of responsibility towards the consumer;
 - 9.14. to choose from among existing government departments one to be responsible for centralising national and international information concerning food safety.
10. The Assembly calls on the governments of European Union member states:
 - 10.1. to allow intervention by the inspection services of the European Commission in national food sectors, without any restrictions or prior notice, at any time and at all stages in the manufacture of food products;
 - 10.2. to bring their legislation into line with, and apply as soon as possible, Community regulations relating to food questions.
11. The Assembly urges the European Union:
 - 11.1. to strengthen its regulations relating to food (particularly with regard to traceability, controls and sanctions) and to set up, in co-operation with the Council of Europe, a European food safety agency (with sole responsibility at European level for food quality and safety), as proposed in its Recommendation 1389 (1998);

- 11.2. to seek to structure this work, and that regarding the quality control of drugs, into a single pan-European Food and Drug Administration Agency;
 - 11.3. to improve its system for issuing early warnings and applying the protective clause in the food sector, in co-operation with the member states, and to lay down penalties for offending states;
 - 11.4. to expand its inspection services for the food sector, in order to be able to monitor this sector properly throughout the European Union, both preventively and in emergencies, and to ensure that the possibility of checks being carried out is a sufficient deterrent for potential offenders against food regulations;
 - 11.5. to monitor more closely the application or transposition into domestic law of Community regulations by member states, particularly in the food sector;
 - 11.6. to carry out an in-depth study of the animal feed sector, to introduce better and stricter standards for the manufacture of compound feeds;
 - 11.7. to assess the need for a prohibition on the use of carcasses and parts from sick animals in animal foodstuffs, and for the prohibition of the use of meal made from animal meat and fats as foodstuffs for ruminants and their offspring;
 - 11.8. to prohibit the use of any ingredient potentially toxic to animals or human beings, of which the nutritional properties for animal feed have not been proven and which have not obtained prior authorisation and to make provision for severe sanctions against any person or party contravening the prohibition;
 - 11.9. to promote the development of oil seed crops whether in the member states or, with the agreement of the countries concerned, as alternative crops in the countries of central and eastern Europe.
12. The Assembly calls on national parliaments:
 - 12.1. to pass legislation and carry out continuous monitoring of legislation in the area of food safety and quality;
 - 12.2. where the parliaments of European Union non-member states are concerned, and in particular the applicant states, to be guided by Community food regulations, or even incorporate them into their national legislation, in order to ensure strong and compatible legislation in this field throughout Europe and to reinforce the right to make stronger national legislation in order to protect consumers' health and food safety all over Europe;
 - 12.3. to pass such legislation and undertake the continuous monitoring of legislation in the area of consumers' rights and protection.
13. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers step up its work on food issues and, in particular, that it:
 - 13.1. take action on the request which it made in its Recommendation 1389 (1998) for the drawing up of a European framework convention on food safety;
 - 13.2. extend the role of the European Health Committee by setting up within it a specialised unit to advise member states in the various fields connected with this subject;
 - 13.3. instruct the Standing Committee of the European Convention for the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes (T-AP) to draw up a new legal instrument on stockfarming practices in Europe, notably on the question of animal feed, in close co-operation with the other committees concerned and the relevant international organisations;
 - 13.4. instruct the Public Health Committee (CD-P-SP) of the Partial Agreement in the Social and Public Health Field to intensify its work on nutrition, food safety and consumer health, and to finalise and publish without delay its report on contamination of food by dioxins.