

2. Speaking points

- Thanks to UECVB, EUROCOOP and CELCAA for organising this conference on Food Authenticity and for inviting me to open it, together with the President of EUROCOOP, Mr Bowdler.

Sophisticated and globalized food chain

- The past half a century has seen a revolution in the way that food is produced, processed and marketed.
- Today, EU citizens are accustomed to choice, convenience, quality, and competitive prices when it comes to the food they buy.
- The complex nature of our globalized food supply chains and the economic motivation to provide cheaper food products have contributed to the growing problem of food fraud, with recent scandals such as horse meat in beef products drawing worldwide attention. Fraudsters are becoming increasingly inventive in the deceptive tactics they are deploying to take advantage of the sophisticated nature of food supply chain.

EU role, essential to ensure a fair market

- But overall, the EU food safety system is designed, and has proven to be effective, to respond to challenges such as those during crises affecting both animal and public health.

- It is widely used as a global benchmark. Non-EU countries solicit us to share our experience and we are keen to promote our model worldwide. The EU food chain can take pride in the fact that the Chinese authorities turned towards the EU when they revised their regulatory framework after the melamine scandal. The new Chinese General Food Law displays many similarities to the European General Food Law.
- The EU has a very ambitious target: to maintain and promote only the highest standards for food safety. This takes effort and we can be proud of the solid reputation we have built ourselves. Yet, this reputation can be easily damaged – or in the worst case lost – by a major case of food fraud.
- In this respect, the political agreement reached just last week on the review of the EU legislation on official controls is a positive step – not only will these new rules enable competent authorities to modernise and strengthen their controls against fraudulent practices (for example by requiring them to regularly perform unannounced official controls to identify possible violation of agri-food chain rules), but the Commission will also be able to establish a new EU Reference centre for food authenticity and integrity.
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- Because of its complexity and worldwide reach, reining in food fraud requires a collaborative effort between industry and

government agencies. Preventive systems identifying problems at an early stage, preparedness at all levels and coordination are essential.

- With this in mind, I would draw your attention to the action taken by the Commission in creating the EU Food Fraud Network. The Member States, supported by a dedicated IT system, can now rapidly exchange information on potential cross-border fraud. Since its inception the network has worked on over 200 cases.

Avoid that companies are losing money and customers are losing faith

- Let's take the example of the 'Gatto con gli stivali' case, one of the largest fraud cases in the EU until now. Approximately 703,000 tons of falsely-labelled conventional products were sold as organic, corresponding to an estimated financial damage of around 220 million EUR. Mainly from 2007 to 2009, a network of at least 20 fraudulent operators sold conventional products produced in Italy and Romania as organic to several EU Member States. Conformity certificates and invoices were falsified.
- Industry is first in line as potential victim when such a scandal breaks out, as consumers are unsettled and it is not easy to restore their trust.

- Many companies from UECVB, CELCAA and EUROCOOP have already implemented ways to counter global fraud threats, but more needs to be done. Pushing responsibility down the supply chain is no longer acceptable. Industry alarms should go off whenever a commodity suddenly floods the market at a too-good-to-be-true price.
- New analysis tools are already appearing to help alert industry and regulators in real time to potential problems. You will see a good example this afternoon on how Eurocoop (Italy) has recently invested in such an advanced technology to determine the "fingerprint" (origin) of different products.
- Some of the responsibility also falls upon consumers to remain vigilant and speak up when they witness what they believe to be fraudulent practices. Manufacturers can support this effort by helping consumers identify issues, giving them the resources to identify fraudulent products so that they know what to look for to avoid these products.
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and data-sharing between national governments, agencies and industry is key to detect and prevent fraudulent practices.

- Trust is an important factor, which is established through confidence-building activities, such as the ones you will get acquainted with today during this conference.
- Ensuring food authenticity will remain a major challenge in the years to come. To combat food fraud, we altogether need to increase pressure on unscrupulous individuals and you can count on my personal commitment to lead this combat at Commission level.
- I wish you all a fruitful and successful seminar!

