

Brussels, 24 September 2002

David Byrne welcomes new rules on animal-by-products

Commissioner David Byrne, responsible for Health and Consumer Protection today welcomed the adoption by the European Parliament of a Regulation laying down clear rules on what must and may be done with animal materials that are excluded from the food chain. This includes rules on new disposal options such as transformation of the materials into biogas. Only material derived from animals declared fit for human consumption following veterinary inspection may be used for the production of animal feed. The regulation also prohibits any form of "cannibalism" within species.

"The requirements for feed are now as stringent as those for food, and this is a great step towards preventing any feed-borne food crises like BSE or dioxin contamination. The Regulation sets out a transparent, comprehensive and directly applicable legal framework, replacing and simplifying a number of laws that have developed over more than a decade. It is a far-reaching and ambitious piece of legislation based on science and a concrete example how we are making food and feed safety a top priority. It is based on the over-riding principle to ensure food safety from the farm to the fork by introducing stringent conditions throughout the food and feed chains requiring safe collection, transport, storage, handling, processing, uses and disposal of animal by-products", said David Byrne.

The key objective of the Regulation is to revamp veterinary legislation on animal by-products (i.e. parts of a slaughtered animal that are not consumed by humans), so that it lives up to its fundamental objectives to ensure a high level of protection of public health throughout Europe. Feed-borne food crisis such as BSE or dioxin all point to control deficiencies in the feed sector.

Safe disposal of animal by-products

The Regulation builds on previous EU measures requiring the exclusion of dead animals, specified risk materials (SRMs) and other condemned materials from feed, and the pressure treatment of mammalian materials intended for use in feed. It classifies animal by-products into three categories based on their potential risk to animals, the public or the environment, and sets out how each category must or may be disposed of.

Category 1 materials (i.e. animal by-products presenting highest risk such as TSEs or scrapie, residues of prohibited substance e.g. hormone used for growth promotion or environmental contaminants e.g. dioxins, PCBs) must be completely disposed of as waste by incineration or landfill after appropriate heat treatment.

Category 2 materials include animal by-products presenting a risk of contamination with other animal diseases (e.g. animals which die on farm or are killed in the context of disease control measures on farm or at risk of residues of veterinary drugs), and may be recycled for uses other than feeds after appropriate treatment (e.g. biogas, composting, oleo-chemical products, etc).

Only category 3 materials (i.e. by-products derived from healthy animals slaughtered for human consumption) may be used in the production of feeds following appropriate treatment in approved processing plants.

It also requires reliable traceability and identification systems of marking for certain materials intended for specific disposal options (e.g. incineration of meat and bone meal) to avoid possible frauds or risk of diversion of unauthorised products into food and feed.

Intra-species recycling (cannibalism) ban

The Regulation extends the current ruminant intra-species recycling (cannibalism) ban to other species. It does not affect the current EU total ban on the feeding of meat and bone meal to farmed animals, which is a separate issue and remains in force without any date set to terminate it. However, the Regulation establishes clear safety rules for the production of meat and bone meal in case it is ever re-authorised for inclusion in feed for certain non-ruminant species, e.g. poultry and pigs.

Catering waste

While the uses of catering waste in feed for pigs and poultry is not the focus of the Regulation, it is of major concern to nearly all Member States who agreed last year on a total ban on such feeding practices in the revised Council Directive on Swine Fever. Such uses have been at the origin of a number of major animal disease epidemics including the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in the UK last year, which have led to enormous losses to the farming and non-farming community. The adopted Regulation is flexible, permitting a temporary relaxation of the ban on the use of category 3 catering waste in feed for a period of not more than 4 years for certain Member States under certain highly controlled conditions to be established shortly by the Commission's Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health.

Next steps

The Commission will now focus on preparing implementing measures (e.g. approval of alternative disposal methods, derogation on intra-species recycling for fish and fur animals, feeding of vultures, etc) as well as a number of transitional measures before the application of the Regulation in six months following entry into force on the 20th day of its publication in the Official Journal of the European Communities.