

Food fraud from the consumers perspective

SciCom Fraud in the food chain and consequences for food safety
2/12/2022

Testaankoop – Testachats
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Definition of food fraud

Food fraud is about “any suspected **intentional** action by businesses or individuals for the purpose of **deceiving** purchasers and **gaining undue advantage** therefrom, **in violation of the rules** referred to in Article 1(2) of Regulation (EU) 2017/625 (the agri-food chain legislation)”. These intentional infringements to the EU agri-food chain legislation may hinder the proper functioning of the internal market and may also constitute a risk to human, or plant health, to animal welfare or to the environment as regards GMOs and plant protection products. animal

https://food.ec.europa.eu/safety/agri-food-fraud/food-fraud-what-does-it-mean_en

Definition of food fraud

Four key criteria that help differentiating fraud from non-compliance guide Member States to exchange on suspicious non-compliances and potential intentional violations of the EU agri-food chain legislation:

1. **Violation of EU rules** codified in the EU agri-food chain legislation as referred to in Article 1(2) of Regulation (EU) No 2017/625.
2. **Customer deception** by hiding true quality of a product.
3. Direct or indirect **economic gain** for the perpetrator.
4. **Intention** : strong grounds to believe that the noncompliance is not coincidental.

These intentional fraudulent activities that breach EU agri-food chain legislation **may also constitute a risk to human, animal or plant health, to animal welfare or to the environment.**

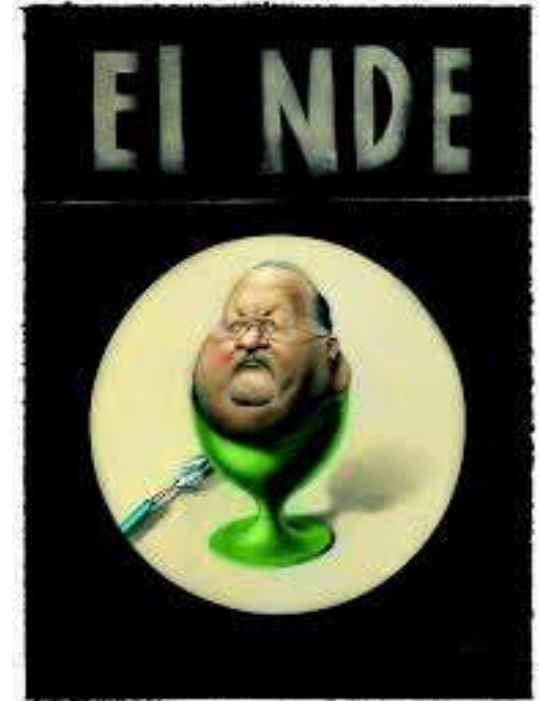
https://food.ec.europa.eu/safety/agri-food-fraud/food-fraud-what-does-it-mean_en

Some examples

- The sale of illegal spirits which caused around 59 casualties in the Czech Republic and Poland (2012-2014)
- **Horse meat in beef products** (2013)
- **Fipronil in eggs** (2017)
- The **slaughter of sick cows** (2019)
- The "**rapeseed oil**" fraud intended for industrial use (1981) affected about 20.000 people and led to between 370 and 835 fatalities in Spain,
- **Dioxin** in Belgium resulting in massive economic losses (1999),
- **Milk adulterated with melamine** in China resulting in more than 50.000 sick babies and around six fatalities (2008)

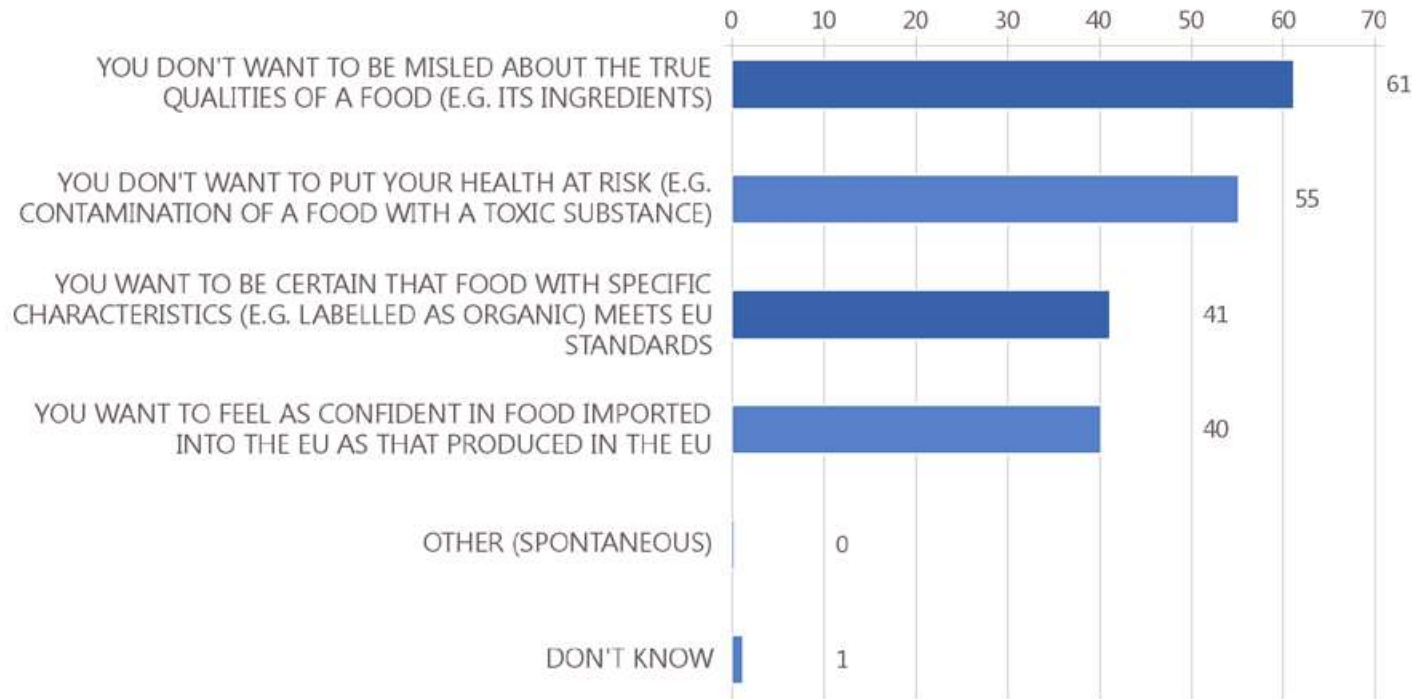
Consumer concern about food fraud

- Food fraud makes politicians loosing elections (Dioxine) and in a democracy, elections are the ultimate translation of what people care about.
- When there is a foodfraudscandal, the impact on public opinion always is massive (Fipronil, Veviba, ...)



Consumer concern about food fraud

QB9T Food fraud can lead to serious disruption of the food supply chain, undermining consumer confidence and putting both food safety and food security at risk. When it comes to food fraud, what is your main concern? Firstly? And secondly? (MAX. 2 ANSWERS)
(% - EU)



Special Eurobarometer -
Making our food fit for the future –
Citizens' expectations
(August-September 2020)

A request for clearer information about food and its potential impact on health is evident in citizens' responses to concerns about food fraud:

they mostly fear being misled about the true qualities of food and the risks it could pose for their health, while they also have concerns about food measuring up to EU standards.

The EIT Food Trust Report 2021

- **Only 47% of Europeans** say they have confidence in the integrity of our food products.
- In general, **consumer trust in the European food system is rather low**, but this does not have an important impact on day-to-day purchase decisions.
- Since 2019 **consumer confidence in food integrity has increased slowly**, but consistently from 45% in 2019.
- When asked to judge confidence in food's taste, safety, health, authenticity and sustainability, **participants had most confidence in the taste of food**. This is something that consumers can easily ascertain for themselves.
- However, they cannot easily check the sustainability or the authenticity of food. Therefore, **confidence in the sustainability of food is the lowest**.



2021 Quantitative Results - Belgium

- Sample size: n=1,130, total n=20,326
- Nationally representative in terms of age, gender and region
- Countries involved: Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Italy, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, UK
- The graphs show the total of the 18-country sample compared to the Belgian results.

Consumer motivation and behaviour

● Disagreement ● Neutral ● Agreement

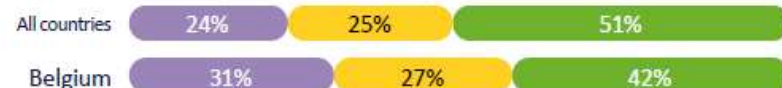
Motivation to live sustainably



Currently eating healthily



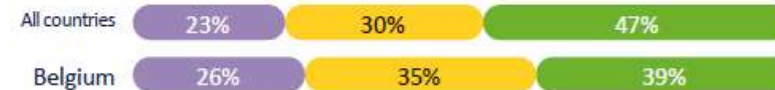
Currently eating sustainably



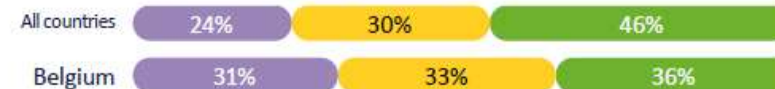
Confidence in food products and food technology

● % expressing distrust ● % neutral ● % expressing trust

Confidence in the integrity of food



Confidence in food technology



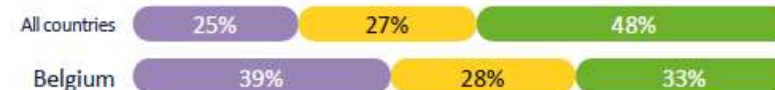
Trust in actors

● % expressing distrust ● % neutral ● % expressing trust

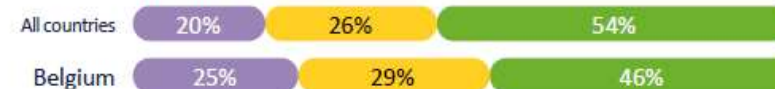
Trust in Farmers



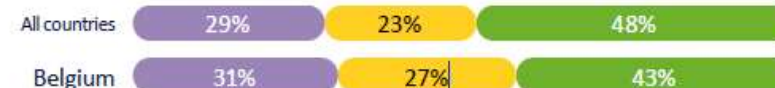
Trust in Manufacturers



Trust in Retailers



Trust in Authorities



Distrust In Belgium is higher:

- 39% distrust manufactures
- 31% distrust food technology
- 31% distrust authorities
- 26% have no confidence in the integrity of food

Testachats / Testaankoop at work



Extra virgin olive oil tests

- Fats & oils, where majority of cases concern olive oil, is the most notified product category in the system in 2020, similarly to 2019.
- An extra virgin olive oil must not contain additives, chemicals or other types of oil (e.g. cheaper sunflower oil). We did not catch anyone cheating.
- For extra virgin olive oil, flaws in taste or smell are out of the question.

All products are tasted at no less than three recognized labs.

Number of products that did not meet the flavour that an extra virgin should offer and should therefore simply have


"vierge" on their label :

2013 : 8 out of 25 products

2018 : 2 out of 25 products

2021 : 3 out of 27 products





Honey test : A call for authentic, unadulterated honey

2020: 24 liquid multifloral honeys:

- two independently certified laboratories.
- Aim: to examine their authenticity using the most sensitive tests currently available.

Even after repeating the analyses in several specialized labs, we were unable to find out about the authenticity of some of the purchased products : nothing could be established with certainty.

Poor lab results:

Quality criteria analysed:

- presence of a substance called HMF
- and its enzymatic activity

It is far from OK: 19 out of 24 honeys contain too much HMF, and only 1 out of 24 honeys meets the enzymatic activity requirements.

Honey test : A call for authentic, unadulterated honey

Detecting fraud is mission impossible :

An authentic honey is first and foremost a honey that complies with legislation:

- The conversion of nectar into honey must be carried out entirely by bees and only within the hive. In short, human intervention is not tolerated.
- The law excludes the presence of foreign sugars derived from syrups.

Even after repeated analyses in various specialized laboratories, we could not get assurance about the authenticity of some of the products bought. This is due partly to outdated analytical methods that are easy for fraudsters to circumvent, and partly to the lack of a standardized test, which leads to differences in interpretation.



Honey test : A call for authentic, unadulterated honey



2017 : Out of the **28 monofloral and regional honeys** examined

- 11 fail in terms of freshness, or accuracy of botanical and geographical indication of origin
- **in 5 products small amounts of cheap sugar syrup from maize or sugar beet were detected.**

However, 12 honey samples got a good report which proves that it is perfectly possible to market a fresh and pure product.

We have filed a complaint with the FPS Economy about the 16 non-compliant products.

We call for stricter standards from the government and reiterate our call for all European honey directives to be ratified.

2013

- 6 out of 40 products were not fresh or were for some unclear reason.
- **2 samples, both bought from a beekeeper, were not pure honey.**
- On 1 sample, the geographical specification on the label does not match the analysis.

Good news: for the first time in ten years, we found no antibiotics anymore.

Food supplements for slimming

66 products sold online and delivered in Belgium. Including:

- supplements available in international online shops such as Amazon, eBay, AliExpress and Wish
- products manufactured outside the EU
- weight loss supplements offered on social media (Facebook and Instagram).

Our **selection criteria**:

- promised weight effects and positive feedback/recommendations from 'customers'.
- Some promises that caught our attention: products that reduce appetite, prevent our body from storing fat, burn fat, reduce calories, reduce our fat reserves, induce a feeling of satiety or suppress hunger.

The most worrying result was the presence of amphetaminil in the product Phenemine, which was sold on Wish and also available from us via Etsy.

This amphetamine-derived stimulant was developed in the 1970s and was used to treat obesity, ADHD (hyperactivity disorder) and narcolepsy. It has long since fallen into oblivion due to **its highly addictive nature**. When ingested, it releases amphetaminil, which has psychoactive effects.



Food supplements for slimming

The worst example : in Exogene Krtonen's KETO capsules, we found salicylic ointment.

- has nothing to do with a slimming medicine.
- This is a medicine to treat skin conditions such as psoriasis or acne.

The product, combined with slimming claims of "advanced weight loss", "helps suppress appetite", "promotes fat burning" and "ketosis booster" suggests that this is a slimming supplement. But to our surprise, small print on the back of the bottle reads "topical use" and "massage".... Massage? With capsules? In our opinion, a bizarre finding.



The regulatory requirements on labelling are, for most of the analyzed products, not respected:

- **a lot of mandatory information is missing** (expiry date, name and address of the producer, quantities of substances, warnings, etc.)
- **claims are often made that fall outside European authorizations.**
- We also discovered ingredients that were very different from those advertised on the label or website.

These fraudulent products often disappear from the market as quickly as they reappear. They are very quickly replaced by other, equally unreliable products, whose packaging is sometimes simply a copy of another product.

Declassification of organic goji berries

In 2018 we subjected 15 (including 8 organic) products to laboratory analysis for pesticides.

Results:

- 10 packets contained at least trace amounts of 1 pesticide.
- 1 product had up to 14 different pesticide residues.
- Only 5 products out of 15 contained no pesticide residues.
- 4 packages, three of them organic exceed Maximum Residue Limit (MRL) allowed by Europe for conventional products.

Steps have been taken to declassify organic products in which pesticide residues have been found as non-bio foods.

- 2 organic samples recalled by food agency

⇒ intensification of inspection of food agency in superfoods in general (2 recalls in April + 2 recalls in July + 3 recalls in October 2018)

⇒ **Since July 2018, berries are included in the European regulation which establishes the product categories requiring more in-depth controls.**



Mislabelling

Questionable industrial recipes on the shop shelf (April 2020)

- Some industrial companies do not hesitate to replace traditional, more expensive ingredients with cheaper products. The result is products that barely have anything to do with the original recipe.
- Check on 78 products within 5 traditional product categories: pesto, chocolate mousse, vanilla ice cream, tiramisu and gingerbread.
- Pesto without olive oil or pine nuts, chocolate mousse without eggs, tiramisu with only 2.9% mascarpone ...
- We also found some surprising ingredients in the composition of these products: gelatin of animal origin, vegetable fiber, tapioca starch, glucose syrup, vegetable fat, etc.
- The packaging of certain products also contains illustrations or designations that could be misleading for consumers.

Amenam - Pesto basilicum bio >



Product type: Pesto
Huismerk of A-merk: Huismerk Bloplanet
Biologisch: Ja

Misleidend

Peijnenburg - Ontbijtkoek >



Product type: Peperkoek
Huismerk of A-merk: Huismerk Albert Heijn
Biologisch: Nee

Misleidend

Vondelmolen - Peperkoek met honing ambachtelijke traditie >



Product type: Peperkoek
Huismerk of A-merk: A-merk
Biologisch: Nee

Misleidend

Ijsboerke - Vanille met verse room >



Product type: Vanille ijs
Huismerk of A-merk: A-merk
Biologisch: Nee

Misleidend

Mislabelling

- For each product we send a letter to the producer
- To visualize our lobby work
- Closer to and interaction with consumers

Pinokkio-producten







Van volkorenproducten tot neusstrips. Ontdek de leugens die fabrikanten verkopen in onze nieuwe rubriek.

[LEES MEER >](#)



Alle thema's (73)

- Voeding (53)
- Misleidende beweringen (26)
- Allergie (2)
- Anti-luizenmiddel (3)
- Beter slapen (6)
- Volkorengranen (6)
- Misleidende benamingen (3)
- Geneesmiddelen (1)
- Misleidende afbeeldingen (10)
- Marketing gericht op kinderen (2)
- Medisch hulpmiddel (13)
- Ongediertebestrijding (5)
- Misleidende porties (6)
- Artisanale producten (2)
- Zonder toegevoegde suikers (6)

 <p>Deze bouillon bevat wel degelijk een smaakversterker</p>	 <p>Gemalen granen ontbreken bij Ella's Kitchen</p>	 <p>Deze bouillon bevat wel degelijk glutamaten</p>
<p>Overwinning</p>  <p>Delhaize zal zijn verpakking aanpassen</p>	<p>Overwinning</p>  <p>De fabrikant heeft de vermelding "natuurlijk" weggehaald</p>	<p>Vooruitgang</p>  <p>Choc'Land van BN: is een portie echt... maar 2,4g?</p>

Recommendations

- **Innovation, trend analyses and collaboration** are crucial for the agri-food industry to create solutions for food fraud mitigation and prevention. **Technologies and digital traceability systems** can help to track the supply chain and pinpoint the origins of food fraud.
- With the current staffing and operational resources, the realization of the proposed mission and strategy to combat fraud (= fraud prevention, detection and investigation) does not seem feasible.
- Because of the increase in signals of criminality in, complexity and globalization of the food chain on the one hand, and the increase in maturity of food safety control among operators on the other, a shift of focus towards fraud control seems desirable. **This requires an increase in resources to be spent on fighting fraud**, either by an increase in the total resources of the FASFC, or by a modified allocation of existing resources or by seeking possible synergies with other FPSs working in this field.



WE DEMAND

Recommendations



The government must stop saving on inspection services. Or do they not see the connection between PFOS and a stripped-down environmental inspection or the lack of inspectors and the scandals in the nurseries. For when the next big food fraud scandal?

In the case of honey : a uniform and performing test, approved by the government and carried out by an independent institution; an international database of original honey, with information exchange between different laboratories; a compulsory indication of the country of origin on the packaging of all honey sold in our country so that its origin can be traced and proven.

