

Ms Sandra Gallina
Director General DG Sante
European Commission
Rue de la Loi 200
1049 Brussels
Sandra.Gallina@ec.europa.eu

Brussels, 25th June 2024

Re : Illegal horsemeat trafficking - lack of transparency and strict controls in EU supply chain

Dear Ms Gallina,

foodwatch is an independent, campaigning consumer organisation for safe, healthy, and affordable food for all people. We are writing to you to bring your attention to an issue in the traceability of horse meat.

More than ten years after the so-called “horsemeat scandal¹”, an in-depth investigation by the Irish public television channel RTÉ has revealed that racehorses in Ireland have had their passports or electronic chips tampered with so that they can be sent to slaughter. The two-part documentary² exposes a massive fraud that involves blurring the traceability of meat and allowing meat that is unfit for consumption to enter the European food chain.

Since the horsemeat scandal in 2013, the consumption of horsemeat has decreased. In France, for example, consumption has decreased from 17% in 2013 to 5% today. Nevertheless, France imported approximately 2,500 tonnes of horsemeat in 2023, including 400 tonnes from Ireland³. The traceability and safety of this meat is now seriously called into question.

In the last five years, the European Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) has shown almost 200 alerts about problems with the labelling or passports of horses entering the European market. However, despite the scale of the problem and the potential health risk to consumers, they are not informed.

This fraud in Ireland appears to date back to at least January 2023⁴ and involves many EU countries. The RTÉ documentary shows that weaknesses of the current system are allowing criminal networks to operate in Ireland, Belgium, Spain, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and France. Where have the tonnes of unfit horsemeat been sold and by whom?

¹ <https://www.foodwatch.org/en/horse-meat-trial-judgements-made-after-six-years-but-another-scandal-is-possible>

² Replay - Part 1 <https://www.rte.ie/player/movie/player/525555751982> and part 2 <https://www.rte.ie/player/series/prime-time/SI000000825?epguid=IH10002396-24-0047>

³ https://www.franceagrimer.fr/content/download/73587/document/Conjoncture%20Viande%20Equine_bilan%202024.pdf

⁴ <https://www.rte.ie/news/2024/0619/1455621-shannonside-horse-court/>

foodwatch is known in the EU for its work on food fraud. Ingrid Kragl, Director of Communications in foodwatch France is the author of the book *Manger du Faux pour de Vrai: Les Scandales de la Fraude Alimentaire*⁵ and was interviewed in the RTÉ documentary. It is therefore unsurprising that the media are turning to us⁶.

However, we too have a number of questions that we would be grateful if you can respond to:

- Were you, as the European Commission DG Sante, aware of this particular fraud in horse meat that has been revealed in the documentary? When did you become aware of it and what measures have you taken to trace this meat and to ensure that it does not enter the food chain?
- Are you aware of which countries this meat has been exported to and what measures have been taken in these countries to ensure that consumers do not eat the meat? What public facing communication has been issued in the member states or from the European Commission? Do you think consumers are sufficiently informed?
- The Implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/963⁷ provides an obligation to ensure access to the information on the status of equine animals in the databases to all relevant operators and competent authorities. The database provides information on whether the horse is fit or unfit for human consumption and must be checked before a decision is taken in the slaughterhouse to send the meat into the food chain. Member states must ensure that all relevant operator and competent authorities have access to the database. However, the exchange of information between member states lies only in the recital as something that is 'encouraged'. Do you think this is sufficient to ensure the safety of meat exports across the EU? Do you think that an interoperable database to provide access to standardised information across all EU countries and facilitate the traceability of horsemeat across borders is now needed?
- What measures and additional controls will be put in place to ensure the safety of horsemeat which is being exported across the EU and what are the consequences to those who are breaking the law?
- How do you plan to restore consumer confidence in the meat which is circulating on the European market?

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Suzy Sumner
Head of Brussels Office, foodwatch international

⁵ <https://www.foodwatch.org/fr/sinformer/nos-campagnes/transparence-et-scandales/scandales-alimentaires/petition-fraude-alimentaire/livre>

⁶ [Food Safety News](#), in France ([here](#), [here](#), [here](#), etc.), [Belgium](#), [Norway](#), [Greece](#), etc.