EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

WRITTEN QUESTIONS WITH ANSWER

(2003/C 92 E/001)  

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2688/01  
by Mario Mauro (PPE-DE) to the Commission  
(3 October 2001)

Subject: Funding from ECHO Humanitarian Aid Office

Will the Commission provide a list of the projects which, in 2000 and 2001, were submitted by the Italian Regions of Liguria, Lombardy, Piedmont and Valle d’Aosta for financing from the funds administered by the ECHO Humanitarian Aid Office, and the names of those which were subsequently approved?

Answer given by Mr Nielson on behalf of the Commission  
(31 January 2002)

The Commission informs the Honourable Member that its Office for Humanitarian Aid (ECHO) manages assistance, relief and protection operations to help people in third countries and as a priority those in developing countries. ECHO does not fund regions such as those mentioned by the Honourable Member but partners (NGOs, UN agencies, and the Red Cross family) to carry out its operations in third countries.

The nature and amounts of funding are determined on field needs assessments and are based on partners’ specific proposals for relief activities in a given region. The funding plans (global plans and funding Decisions) show the partners chosen for each aid programme and are subject to approval/consultation with the Humanitarian Aid Committee.

(2003/C 92 E/002)  

WRITTEN QUESTION E-3071/01  
by Michl Ebner (PPE-DE) to the Commission  
(8 November 2001)

Subject: Microfiltration of raw milk on milk-producing farms

The proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down specific hygiene rules for food of animal origin (1) lays down the following definition for raw milk (Annex I, point 5):

raw milk: milk which has not been heated beyond 40 °C; treatments such as homogenisation and standardisation which have an effect on the quality of the milk may be carried out.
This definition will make it legal for farmers to treat raw milk by various means (e.g. microfiltration) and so make it possible to manipulate the composition of raw milk before it reaches the customer. Microfiltration alters the quality of the milk, and a higher price may then be charged for what is actually an inferior product.

It is already possible to use microfiltration to reduce the total bacterial count and filter out certain fractions (e.g. casein).

The Commission confirms that there are no direct methods to reveal the use of microfiltration (see the answer given by Mr Byrne on behalf of the Commission to written questions E-0823/01 and E-0824/01 (1)).

1. Can the Commission explain how in practice checks are to be made on raw milk deliveries to ascertain whether it has undergone microfiltration?

2. What sort of checks does the Commission envisage for verifying that milk which has undergone microfiltration is correctly labelled?

3. Why is the definition of raw milk laid down in Directive 92/46/EEC (3) not being retained, and why are changes made on the premises of raw milk producers to parameters which determine quality or value not going to be explicitly prohibited?

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Answer given by Mr Byrne on behalf of the Commission

(11 January 2002)

Microfiltration is a sophisticated technology, also known as membrane separation, which requires expensive equipment and special expertise. It is used only in industry, and a clear distinction must be drawn between it and the use on the farm of new types of filters for removing solid particles which may be suspended in milk (bits of straw, for instance). This type of filtration by membrane, a modern version of the traditional sieve, does not have the effects at microscopic level mentioned by the Honourable Member.

It is true that there are no direct methods for revealing the use of microfiltration by industry. However, this procedure changes the flora of the milk, removing micro-organisms that are needed for the development of the flavours and other characteristics of certain raw-milk-based cheeses, at the same time as removing those micro-organisms considered undesirable. The end products will therefore have different characteristics from similar products made with raw milk.

With regard to labelling checks, these depend not only on analytical resources but are based, in particular, on the company's records, the use of self-monitoring and traceability. They remain the responsibility of the competent authorities in the Member States, with inspectors from the Food and Veterinary Office being able to check the application of these provisions during specific missions to the milk industry. Checks such as these are already implemented for other claims, such as those pertaining to species (e.g. 'goat's cheese') or certain protected commercial descriptions (e.g. 'butter').

Concerning the definition of raw milk, the proposal to simplify the veterinary legislation (2) to which the Honourable Member refers, which has been submitted to the Council and Parliament under the co-decision procedure, is currently being examined in depth by the Council's group of veterinary experts.

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