

Brussels, 15<sup>th</sup> January 2019

## Reaction to the European Court of Auditors Report: “*Chemical Hazards in Our Food: EU Food Safety Policy Protects Us But Faces Challenges*”

The European Court of Auditors (ECA) published today the report ‘*Chemical hazards in our food: EU food safety policy protects us but faces challenges*’. The main conclusion of the report was that although the EU legal framework for protecting consumers from chemical hazards in food is “**soundly based**”, major implementation and enforcement issues **jeopardize** its proper functioning at Member State level.

Euro Coop **welcomes** the report and **praises** the ECA's initiative to address loopholes in food safety, which is a matter of high concern for Euro Coop Members.

In order to tackle the pressing enforcement and implementation issues flagged in the report, Euro Coop calls first and foremost on the **development of a strategy which seeks to improve co-ordination and efficiency among the different competent bodies rather than compromising on the standards**. A telling example is that currently there are several layers of competences which result into **inefficiencies** and **double testing** of the same substance. Groups of chemicals such as enzymes, food flavourings or additives are instead systemically under-checked. In this respect, we particularly appreciate ECA's recommendation to recognise that **the private sector could play a key role in ensuring a better use of resources**, by establishing for example partnership with public bodies and co-operating to put in place reliable food safety checks. Other options to be explored to better streamline operations could also include **open access to safety checks data** and the **use of blockchain**.

Euro Coop members are staunch supporters of the EU food safety system as proven in particular by the policies regulating their **own-brand products**, which see the application of the **precautionary principle** at their very core. This is fully in line with our consumer-members' needs and expectations, who seek in the co-operative products a **guarantee of the highest standards of food safety**, which in many cases go well **beyond legislative** requirements. For example, in 2017 Coop Denmark, i.e. Denmark's largest retailer and market leader, implemented an ambitious strategy to phase out “**The Dirty Dozen**”, twelve groups of chemicals which, although legally permitted on the market, have been eliminated from their own-brands due to their **potential harmful effect on human health**. In some instances this measure has also **stimulated innovation** in the sector and **advanced research** into the substitution of ingredients/materials. Another example comes from Coop in Italy - also market leader - who since the early 90's has **limited the residues** in its own-brands looking not only at single substance but also at the so-called “cumulative effect”.

We believe that **the EU food safety system is a value to be preserved** and that especially thanks to **new technologies** a lot can be achieved in order to streamline operations and attain better implementation and enforcement results. **No compromise should be accepted on the standards**, with particular reference to the **precautionary principle** - a real stronghold of the EU food safety system – to the **benefit of consumers in the EU and worldwide**.

Euro Coop is ready to play an **active role in supporting** EU and Member States in this path by putting at disposal its longstanding experience in coupling **sound science** with **exceptionally high standards** of consumer protection.

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