

Opinion: food fraud

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The Food safety and consumer protection have always been at the heart of the work of commissions and organizations of the environment, public health and food security as a whole in whatever in the EU or in the USA. Now comes the question that has to be added, related but distinct, Food Fraud, which has become increasingly important in recent years.

What is food fraud?

There are many definitions of food fraud. For me the best technical definition of Food Fraud is that given by Spink and Moyer: «Food fraud is a collective term which describes a substitution, addition, alteration or a misrepresentation, deliberate and intentional, of food ingredients or of food packaging's, or false or misleading statements formulated concerning a product for economic gain». As recent examples, there may be mentioned: the addition undeclared horse meat in beef products, the addition of melamine in milk and infant formula, and the alteration of the chilli powder with Red Sudan. These revealed cases suggest the possible existence of a durable or structural problem. These cases of food frauds already have a negative impact on consumer confidence in the food chain, creating a major paradox, food has never been as safe, but consumers have lost confidence. A European citizen is 260times more likely to die from flu than die from eating unsafe food, but one on three consumers do not trust on the information on the labels of foodstuffs.

The various types of fraud includes

- a. Adulteration
- b. Substitution
- c. Alteration
- d. Counterfeiting

Products represent the most risk include

- i. Fish
- ii. Olive oil
- iii. Organic food

Top 10 Products that are most likely to be the subject of food fraud

- a. Olive oil
- b. Fish
- c. Organic Foods
- d. Milk
- e. Cereals
- f. Honey and maple syrup
- g. Coffee and tea

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- h. Spices(like saffron and chilli powder)
- i. Wine
- j. Some fruit juices

Increasingly globalized food supply chains and the economic motivation to provide cheaper food products have contributed to the food fraud issue

The risk of fraud is greatest when the risk of getting caught is small and the potential economic gain is high. The complexity and cross-border nature of the food chain, coupled with the emphasis primarily on food security and the national character of the controls and enforcement, are often cited as contributing to the low food fraud detection probability currently. The economic gain of fraud is further increased by the frequent ineffectiveness of the repressive regime, characterized by relatively low sanctions.

Possible solutions

- A. It is necessary to define what constitutes food frauds: A definition clear and harmonized is crucial to underpin a universal approach.
- B. Become more proactive in addressing economic adulteration: Many companies have already implemented ways to counter global fraud threats, but more needs to be done.
- C. Private initiatives to establish the fight against fraud programs should be encouraged, and a legal obligation on food business operators to report a fraudulent behavior to competent authorities in their sector could contribute to burst more cases of fraud precociously and limit the hazards on the public health.
- D. Find new ways to share information and promote collaboration: Identify a formal way to collaborate with industry, official authorities, academia and nongovernmental organizations and increase global engagement.
- E. Finally, sanctions should be increased to reach at least double earnings economic sought after by food fraud, and the approval of a food business operator should be withdrawn in case of recurrence.¹⁻³

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Conflict of interest

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