

Summaries

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Definitions and aspects of food safety

J.G.A.J. Hautvast and J.A.G. van de Wiel

Food safety is about not falling ill from eating and drinking today and in twenty years time from now. Food should be safe but what exactly does this mean in practice? National governments and Europe shape the legal framework. Companies need a license to operate and consumers can get a safe and healthy diet nowadays. Nevertheless controversies are also a daily reality. Some recent cases are used to illustrate the intrinsic and ultimately the judicial discussions whether food safety is at stake. And how to minimize an unknown risk by taking proportionate measures. However, a correct solution in only scientific, medical or judicial terms leaves opportunities unused. Education, communication and integration in daily modern life are necessary to make full use of all prospects to realize and maintain the desired level of food safety and healthy food habits.

Animal sickness, food safety and public health

W.J. van der Weijden and K.J. Hin

Recent outbreaks of swine fever, foot-and-mouth disease and avian influenza in the Netherlands were shocking but turned out to be almost irrelevant for human health and for food safety. Even BSE had no detectible impact on human health. Still these diseases, combined with salmonella and campylobacter, pushed food safety high on the public agenda. Whereas unsafe food kills roughly hundred people per year, unhealthy food patterns kill no less than 23.000 people. It is therefore urgent to readjust priorities and responsibilities. Regarding animal health, serious doubts are justified on the present policy, which discourages vaccination and makes animal health care more

and more dependent on hygiene regimes which may be strict, but will never become watertight and in addition introduce new risks. Instead we need to strengthen the innate immunity of livestock.

Consumers' perspective on food safety in the Netherlands

J.C. Dagevos

The problem of food safety is dominantly tackled by taking instrumental and institutional measures. The past decade large amounts of time and money have been invested in efforts to improve control systems or to set up food safety agencies at national and European levels. While this is typified in this article as a 'reductionistic-rational' approach, it is suggested that food safety is in need of a pluralistic approach. Particularly if one wants food safety to be adjusted to the much-devoted idea that the world of food is consumer oriented. A consumer-centric perspective on food safety shows various and variable impressions and images of what food safety is in the eyes of consumers. Food consumers give ample reason to believe that a food safety approach focusing on institutional arrangements and scientific-based regulations and inspections, is too narrow an approach to improve consumer trust in food safety. To reach the hearts and minds of consumers requires a more comprehensive approach which includes, among other things, the normative and symbolic food-related rationalities that are important to consumers. Having a consumer perspective as its focus, a variety of topics, deliberations and questions is presented in order to explain and explore the versatility of food safety.

Food safety and crime

S. Vreeburg

Food safety is under threat of several forms of crime. This article examines the role of criminal law enforcement in tackling crime in the field of food production and distribution. The author describes several examples. In the field of food safety many inspection and checking procedures, like forms and seals, seem to offer opportunities for criminals to go around them or even abuse them and sell contaminated or inferior food products for animals and humans. Tracing and prosecuting offenders is difficult because food nowadays is produced in a long chain of manufacturing processes often

stretching out over several countries. It's often not clear which part of the chain can be held responsible for damage caused. Judicial authorities are still in the process of defining the main threats to food safety. The author analyses and places his hope in recent institutional changes within the Public Prosecutors Office aimed at concentrating specialised knowledge in this field and coordinating forces against ever more professionalising criminals.

Food inspection throughout the ages

H. van Buuren, W. de Wit and B. ter Kuile

Throughout the centuries the authorities, first local then national, have been concerned with food safety and the protection of the health of their citizens. The enforcement of food safety laws has shifted from preventing gross abuse to compliance with an ever-increasing system of food safety standards. In the Netherlands this trend has led to increasing centralisation and merging of the different law enforcement organisations resulting in the formation of the Dutch Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority in July 2003. The tasks of this new organisation include law enforcement, risk assessment and risk communication. Parallel to this the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) was launched by the EU. The duties of the EFSA are primarily risk assessment, risk communication and advising the Commission in the latter's role of risk manager. Both organisations are in their starting phase, but the developments give ground to optimism in regard to their future effectiveness.

Modern European food safety law

B.M.J. van der Meulen and M.J. Lugt

After some food scares that shook consumer confidence European Food Law is rapidly developing into a coherent system of food safety law. The European Commission laid out a blueprint in the White Paper on Food Safety and formulated general principles and definitions in the so-called General Food Law. EU Food Law interrelates with both national and global (Codex Alimentarius) food law. This article presents an image of European food law dividing the subject matter in rules related to the content of food, rules related to the production of food and rules related to the communication on food. A fourth category of general rules on food (procedures and

enforcement) is addressed elsewhere in this issue. The authors hope that the Dutch legislator will participate loyally in the modernisation of food law in Europe.