



Dual food quality: Commission releases study on sensory differences in food products

Brussels, 23 March 2021

Today, the Commission published the results of the second part of an EU-wide quality comparison of food products marketed under the same branding, a study conducted by the [Joint Research Centre](#) (JRC). The [first part of the study](#), published in 2019, focused on differences in composition of food products. It found differences - for about one-third of products tested - not immediately apparent from the front-of-pack information, but from the ingredients. The aim of the second part of the study, presented today, was to find out if these compositional differences can be perceived by human senses.

Today's findings did not alter what the first part of the study found: differences in food products did not follow a geographical pattern. At the same time, the results presented today demonstrate that sensory differences are clearly noticeable, where there are large differences in product composition. For example, significant differences in sugar content in breakfast cereals can be perceived influencing the overall sweetness of the product. By contrast, when compositional differences were small, experts could not perceive them, for example, smaller variations in fat content in potato crisps. Overall, sensory differences were found in 10 out of the 20 products tested.

The study was conducted as a pilot project, testing 20 products that had shown compositional differences in the first part of the study. Samples of each product were purchased in 5-10 different Member States. As the testers were specifically trained for such tests, it is likely that the average consumer may not necessarily sense the same differences. Whether or not differences could be detected by the experts, depended not only on whether the compositional differences were large or small but also on the kinds of ingredients used: a difference between various synthetic sweeteners in orangeade could be detected, whereas different natural sweeteners in carbonated soft drinks were not. At the same time, it should be noted that consumers do not base their decision to buy a product exclusively on the sensory experience but may also be influenced by other elements, such as costs.

Members of the College said:

Věra **Jourová**, Vice-President for Transparency and Values welcomed the report: *"As promised, we keep close attention on the issue of dual quality. There can be no unjustified differentiation of products in the EU. This is why we strengthened our consumer laws and empowered consumers in this regard. These laws must be vigorously enforced, also on this issue, and the Commission stands ready to support the authorities, if needed."*

Mariya **Gabriel**, Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture and Youth said: *"This second part of the study provides further evidence on the scale of the dual quality issue and supports consumer authorities and consumer organisations in tackling it effectively."*

Didier **Reynders**, Commissioner for Justice added: *"Consumers need to know what they are buying. They must not be misled by the same or a similar front-of-pack implying that goods are the same when they are not. This is unfair and contrary to EU consumer law. I call on the Member States to ensure a rapid transposition of the updated Unfair Commercial Practices Directive into national law. The Commission will continue to assist Member States and offer support to consumer authorities."*

Commission action to address the issue of dual product quality:

- In September 2017, the Commission [issued concrete guidance](#) for enforcement authorities on the application of current EU consumer protection and food legislation to suspected dual quality cases.
- In April 2018, as part of the [New Deal for Consumers](#) the Commission proposed to amend the [Unfair Commercial Practices Directive](#) to clarify when dual quality of products is a misleading practice. The amended Directive will apply across the EU as of 28 May 2022.
- In June 2019, the Joint Research Centre published the first part of today's [EU wide comparison of quality related characteristics of food products](#), which showed that some products are

identically or similarly branded while composed differently.

This study is part of a nearly EUR 5 million investment from the EU budget to increase knowledge on dual quality issues and to support capacity-building activities for consumer authorities and associations across the Union (see [here](#) for more information).

Next steps

Further studies are expected from the Joint Research Centre in 2021 and 2022, examining the evolution of products in the first comparative tests of 2019.

The Commission continues to assist Member States in their efforts to transpose and implement the updated Unfair Commercial Practices Directive into national law, notably in the form of transposition workshops.

Finally, in 2021, new grants for a total amount of EUR 1 million to support consumer authorities' capacities, including for product testing, will become available once the multi-annual financial framework is operational.

For more information

[Dual Food Quality - Results of the second part of the EU-wide testing campaign](#)

[Background – Dual Food Quality](#)

[Dual Food Quality SOTEU 2017 Factsheet](#)

[Factsheet - New Deal: What benefits will I get as a consumer?](#)

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Press contacts:

[Christian WIGAND](#) (+32 2 296 22 53)

[Katarzyna KOLANKO](#) (+ 32 2 296 34 44)

[Jördis FERROLI](#) (+32 2 299 27 29)

General public inquiries: [Europe Direct](#) by phone [00 800 67 89 10 11](#) or by [email](#)