March 2017

Monthly Summary of Articles on Food Fraud and Adulteration

Retrieved mainly from the JRC tool Medisys (http://medisys.newsbrief.eu/)

Selected Food Fraud Cases

01/03/17 - 35 000 eggs seized near Parma
About 35 000 eggs were seized in the region of Parma by the anti-fraud unit of the local Carabinieri. The declaration of origin and other labelling information were either missing or incomplete.

Ansa

03/03/17 - 5000 bottles of fake Barolo and other quality wines seized near Asti
Fraud inspectors seized 5000 bottles of prestigious wines (Italian DOC and DOCG denominations), including Barolo, in a wine cellar near Govone. They also found false labels and thousands of fake marks, worth tens of thousands of euro. Tests are on-going to determine the origin of the sold wine.

La Stampa

05/03/17 - Results of the operation "Sardina Pilchardus"
The operation Sardina Pilchardus took place in February in Calabria to control the local fish market. Notably, 116 000 euro in fines were imposed and 1254 kg of fish seized for lack of or incomplete traceability labelling.

Quotidiano del Sud

13/03/17 - Millions of cage eggs sold as free range in New Zealand
Newsroom, an independent journal, investigated one of the most popular brands of free range eggs in New Zealand. The investigation revealed that the volume distributed did not correspond to the number of hens owned by the company. Several documents (video, audio) also supported the fact that the company was buying caged eggs from other producers. The Serious Fraud Office (SFO) was notified and is investigating the case.

Newsroom

13/03/17 - Operation Phoenix 5: mislabelled fish seized in Sicily
850 kg of fish were seized during a control operation carried out in Agrigento, Sicily. The main targets of the investigation were street vendors of untraceable fish and seafood products. In total, 23 000 EUR in fines were imposed.

Giornale di Sicilia

14/03/17 - Three companies investigated for milk adulteration in Brazil
Three businesses are accused of organized crime in the dairy industry by Brazilian authorities. The companies allegedly exchanged batches of milk intended for animal feeding and treated it with chemicals to "rejuvenate" the expired product. Reports and accounting of the companies were also forged to hide the fraudulent transactions.

Jornal do Comercio
17/03/17 – Massive meat scandal in Brazil: concerns about consumer health and exportations

The police operation called ‘Carne Fraca’ (Weak Flesh) revealed, after two years of investigation, a huge fraudulent scheme rooted in the Brazilian meat sector, involving the Ministry of Agriculture and 21 big companies exporting worldwide. The investigators uncovered fraudulent practices such as:

- bribing health control officials to avoid sanitary checks
- intentional distribution of meat contaminated with salmonella
- ‘rejuvenating’ tainted meat with chemicals (artificial enhancement)
- injecting water to increase weight (dilution). The protein content was raised to normal levels with soy forging documents and labels (mislabelling).

Official reactions within Brazil tried to minimize the problem but international actions were quickly carried out. The EU, China, and South Korea announced temporary restriction, joined by Chile, Uruguay, Egypt, Panama, and Mexico. However, on March 26th, China, Chile and Egypt reopened their markets. Commissioner Andriukaitis discussed the issue with the Brazilian authorities.

Brazils world’s largest exporter of beef and chicken, is facing exportation losses estimated to 3.5 billion EUR, corresponding to 0.2% of its GDP.

Selected articles:

- Globo
- Le Monde
- Yahoo News
- Article summarizing the restrictions taken by country:
- AG Web
- The impact is so important that the operation Carne Franca has already its own Wikipedia article:
- Wikipedia
- Opinion of the EU Health and Food Safety Commissioner Vytenis Andriukaitis:
- Euractiv

27/03/17 - 20 kg of Romanian truffles lacking correct labelling

20 kg of white and black truffles coming from Romania were seized in Italy due to the lack of labelling. They were transported to the province of Umbria and the value of the product is estimated to 80 000 EUR. This suspicious importation may raise concerns on the real end use of the truffles, such as being sold as an Italian product (origin masking).

- Rete News 24

29/03/17 - 300 kg of unlabelled products discovered in a Chinese shop

2000 packages of processed food were found unlabelled in a Chinese food shop in the province of Rovigo (Northern Italy). Expired products were also found on the premises of the shop.

- Libero Quotidiano

29/03/17 - Control operation in the fish sector of Andalusia

The fish control authority of Andalusia seized more than 3 tons of fish products, mainly due to the lack of traceability and proper labelling. The catch is divided into 2 tons of shellfishes and 1 ton of fish, mainly anchovy, hake, monkfish and sole.

- Diario Sur
01/03/17 - DNA study on chicken sandwiches from Canadian fast foods

An investigation conducted by the Canadian media group CBC studied the chicken content of several fast food sandwiches with DNA tests. The most surprising results concerned sandwiches from a particular brand for which a high amount of soy DNA was found and only 50% of the total DNA was actually from chicken (to be compared to 80-85% for the sandwiches of other restaurants).

CBC

(02/03/2017) The concerned company answered with its own study, involving two independent laboratories, to demonstrate the quality of their chicken meat. Results showed a low amount of soy DNA (<1%) and the fast food chain asks for an immediate retraction of the CBC report.

Washington Post

03/03/17 - Exports of New Zealand honey rise by 35% in revenue

While the average price of honey is decreasing, the New Zealand exports reached NZD 315 million which represents an increase of +35% compared to last year. This upward trend is explained by the high quality and rising price of New Zealand honeys, especially from Manuka type, that are very demanded in Australia and China.

Vox

Xinhuanet

03/03/17 - Blockchain technology to help food authenticity

A start up from Northern Ireland (Arc-Net) implemented the use of blockchain technology for food traceability. This new promising technology, famously used by the Bitcoin cryptocurrency, is able to store chains of events and thus makes it a relevant tool to store the different events happening in the food chain.

Silicon Republic

Alibaba, the online selling platform, is also interested in this technology to fight counterfeit food.

ZDNet

12/03/17 - Canadian beekeepers blame adulterated honey for prices drop

Last year, the value of Canadian honey dropped by 53 million CAD while the country imported 6.6 million kilograms of honey. The chair of the Canadian Honey Council claimed it could be 'transhipped adulterated manufactured honey' asking for actions from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, suggesting investment in nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) testing, which can detect the sweetener's composition and place of origin of honeys.

CTV News

14/03/17 - Tougher food inspections adopted by the European Parliament

Plans to tighten up official food inspections, from farm to fork, were adopted by the EU Parliament. The new rules aim to improve food traceability, combat fraud and restore consumer trust in the integrity of the food chain. The legislation will provide a comprehensive, integrated and more effective control system in the areas of food and feed safety rules, veterinary and plant health requirements, organic production and protected geographical indication rules.

Europarl

Disclaimer: The selection of articles reflects their media coverage. In any case, it does not reflect the frequency of food fraud in a particular country and/or concerning a particular food product.