

# Dual quality of food: European Commission releases common testing methodology

The Joint Research Centre (JRC), the European Commission's Science and Knowledge service, has developed a common methodology to allow national consumer authorities to carry out tests comparing the composition and characteristics of food products sold with similar packaging across the Union. This step complements the actions already taken by the Commission following the [State of the Union speech](#) of President **Juncker**.

The Joint Research Centre is presenting the methodology today at a meeting of the High-Level Forum for a better functioning food supply chain.

Elżbieta **Bieńkowska**, Commissioner for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, said: *"All European consumers are entitled to a fair deal on the Single Market. The common methodology we developed together with Member States, consumer organisations and stakeholders from the food supply chain will help shed an evidence-based light on the different compositions of identically branded food products across Europe. I am glad that the dedicated forum on the food supply chain made the relevant parties heard in a rich and sound debate."*

Věra **Jourová**, Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, said: *"The Single Market cannot be a double standard market. All EU citizens must feel that they are treated in the same way and are offered fair and clear information on the products they buy. They cannot be misled by similar packaging. I encourage all national authorities to use it in the coming months, so that we can put an end to this practice."*

Tibor **Navracsics**, Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sports, responsible for the Joint Research Centre, said: *"European consumers have the right to be protected from misleading marketing about the food they eat and the products they use – and they must have confidence in information provided by producers. The Joint Research Centre of the European Commission has developed a harmonised procedure to evaluate perceived differences in the quality of products in an objective way. This is an excellent example of how first-class scientific work directly benefits citizens."*

The High-Level Forum for a better functioning of the food supply chain, chosen by the Commission to address the dual quality of food issue, gave to the Joint Research Centre the mandate to develop the methodology in June 2017.

The methodology complements the actions announced in the [Commission's New Deal for Consumers initiative](#) which aims to:

- clarify and strengthen consumer rights, including prohibiting dual

- quality practices which are misleading consumers;
- empower qualified entities to launch representative actions on behalf of consumers;
- introduce stronger sanctioning powers for Member States' consumer authorities.

### **A common testing protocol**

All food products sold in the EU have to comply with strict safety regulations; consumers must be informed about key characteristics set notably in EU food labelling law and should not be misled for example by packaging. National food safety and consumer protection authorities are responsible for ensuring that the food placed on the Single Market complies with the relevant EU legislation.

The testing methodology will help authorities identify if food products are marketed in compliance with EU law.

The methodology is based on key principles such as transparency, comparability, similar selection sampling, and testing of products.

### **Next steps**

Under the coordination of the Joint Research Centre, laboratories across a number of EU Member States will now apply this methodology in a pan European testing campaign to collect data on the scope of the dual quality issue. First results should be available by the end of 2018. This exercise should provide practical guidance for authorities investigating misleading practices.

### **Background**

In response to the issue of dual quality of food reported by some EU Member States, the European Commission has taken several actions to ensure that consumers can trust the products they buy, regardless of where they live.

In addition to the methodology, other adopted measures include:

- a set of [guidelines](#) on the application of EU food and consumer laws to dual quality products (see [press release](#))
- a proposal to amend the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive (UCPD) under the [New Deal for Consumers](#) adopted by the Commission on 11 April 2018, to provide legal clarity when assessing potential dual quality cases.

### **For more information**

Methodology: [Knowledge Centre for Food Fraud and Quality](#)