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European Commission

Directorate General Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs

Unit E3 – Notification of Regulatory Barriers

Rue de la Loi 200

B-1040 Brussels

24.01.2024

RE: TRIS notification 2023/0675/IT — draft Italian “Provisions regarding production and release bans on the market of food and feed consisting, isolated or produced a starting from cell or tissue cultures derived from animals vertebrates as well as a ban on the denomination of meat for processed products containing vegetable proteins” (standstill period ends 4/3/2024)

Dear Sir/Madam,

The European Vegetarian Union has taken note of the Italian draft law mentioned in the subject line. The law purports to lay down “provisions designed to ensure the protection of human health and the interests of citizens and to preserve the agrifood heritage, as a set of products that express Italy’s socio-economic and cultural evolution, that is of strategic importance for the national interest.” (Article 1(1)). Central for the prohibition of the designation of processed products containing vegetable proteins as meat is Article 3.

This law is of concern to European citizens, including Italian citizens, with preferences for vegetarian, vegan and plant-based food products, but also to producers in the food sector who cater to their needs, thereby serving a growing market for such products.

The EVU concurs with the observations issued by the European Alliance for Plant-based Foods (EAPF) of 15 December 2023 and supports the points made therein. Further to this statement we wish to make the following points.

Formal observations

The Italian draft law seems to have used a similar French law and decree as a blueprint, namely the French law « Loi n° 2020-699 du 10 juin 2020 relative à la transparence de l’information sur les produits agricoles et alimentaires » from 11 June 2020. The accompanying decree to this law is currently subject to litigation with a preliminary ruling requested from the European Court of Justice

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(Case C-438/23). The CJEU is expected to deliver a judgement on the harmonisation of such labelling questions at EU-level.

Establishing such insular rules as in France or Italy in the midst of the internal market, creates an obstacle to intra-community trade by obliging traders to change their labels in order to meet the national requirements. This is why the EU establishes labelling rules through the means of Union-wide Regulations such as the Food Information Regulation (FIC) and the Common Market Organisation (CMO).

The EVU therefore calls for the suspension of this Italian law at least until the questions raised to the CJEU are clarified.

Observations in substance

The Italian Law will confuse consumers and producers alike. It is one-sided as it privileges conventional meat production to the disadvantage of all other stakeholders, and fails to take into account the trend towards plant-based and more sustainable food production.

Informative food labelling

Tradition is that plant-based meat alternatives can bear ‘meaty’ names as long as their non-animal origin is made plain. The use of product denominations such as ‘vegetarian burger’ or ‘vegan tofu sausage’ for food containing vegetable proteins is well established and has been used in the internal market for decades, and has not caused significant complaints from either consumers or traders. Because the vegetarian nature of meat alternatives is important in terms of generating sales, producers and retailers communicate it clearly on the packaging. Consumers are not misled by the use of ‘meaty names’ for vegetarian alternatives.

We wish to raise concern over the question whether Italy has produced any empirical evidence as to why the “national livestock heritage” needs protection through the means of such a ban. It would appear that there is a threat to the value of livestock products by the use of the aforementioned labelling, which we do not have any knowledge of.

Italy also claims to protect human health and consumer information with this law, indicating that the current labelling of plant-based meat alternatives poses a health threat to consumers and denies them their right to information. We currently do not have knowledge of such threats and would therefore also be interested in the information Italy is basing this on. On the issue of cell cultivated meat also being part of this draft law, before reaching the market and consumer plates, cell-based products must undergo the security check of a novel food authorisation which will guarantee relevant foods are safe to consume.

In our view, ‘meaty names’ for vegetarian alternatives to meat products convey important information about what consumers can expect from a product. These denominations guide consumers in their purchase decisions in a straightforward way. If meat alternatives needed to be given new, non-established names, customers would require information on appearance, taste, texture, preparation, etc. in the form of additional text and pictures on the packaging. This would – for no plausible reason – overcomplicate the purchase process for consumers and limit their ability to make their own purchase decisions.

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Renaming established names and brands with 'non-meaty' fantasy denominations such as 'disc' instead of burger would provide no further clarity for consumers of meat and would be unnecessarily confusing to consumers of non-meat products. Indeed, one can argue that it would instead undermine the EU's consumer protection agenda by needlessly introducing uncertainty around the naming of plant-based foods.

Better for the environment

Plant-based products can provide more sustainable alternatives to meat products. The European Commission has stated in its Farm to Fork Strategy that "Moving to a more plant-based diet with less red and processed meat and with more fruits and vegetables will reduce not only risks of life-threatening diseases, but also the environmental impact of the food system." The Commission has also expressed its wish to empower consumers "to choose sustainable food" and to make "it easier to choose healthy and sustainable diets". We are convinced that this can only be achieved if consumers are able to quickly and easily identify plant-based alternatives.

We hope that these considerations reach you in time to inform the debate in the TRIS process.

Yours faithfully,



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About EVU

The European Vegetarian Union (www.euroveg.eu) is the umbrella association of 46 civil society organisations in 29 countries. The EVU represents the voice of the growing number of European consumers shifting towards a more plant-based diet. As such, we advocate for a favourable food environment that makes it easier to choose more plant-based foods and dishes.

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