Challenges in Food Safety in the EU

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Following the food safety crises of the late 1990s, the European Union has put in place a comprehensive body of legislation to ensure that food placed on the market in Europe is safe. The food chain policy of the Health and Consumers Directorate-General aims at maintaining consistently high levels of safety throughout the various stages of production and distribution within the internal market. Challenges to the current policy arise from a number of factors, including the possible occurrence of emergencies due to increasingly complex risks and globalisation of the food chain and the scarce resources available at EU and at national level, which frequently result in a need to prioritise according to clear criteria and objectives. As proved by the “horsemeat scandal” at the beginning of 2013 (when evidence became available that beef was widely replaced by horsemeat in different food preparations without proper labelling), fraudulent activities may also undermine the integrity of the EU system. A revision of the rules governing official controls activities in Europe is ongoing, in order to simplify and clarify the legal framework applicable to official controls, consolidate the integrated and modernised approach across the entire agri-food chain and ensure that Member States appropriately resource control authorities through fees charged on operators. Amongst other things, the legislation on official controls also provides the framework for the designation of EU Reference Laboratories, which are tasked to provide the Commission with scientifically and technical expertise in relation to laboratory analysis e.g. assist actively in the diagnosis of animal disease outbreaks.

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