

DNA- Unexpected presence of pork in meat products

Key Technical Messages

1. This case is not related to a food safety issue and therefore causes no concern to consumers' health.

→ Objective: Avoid any assimilation with food safety that could cause negative reactions among consumers and other stakeholders. This could potentially result in strong measures such as massive product recalls.

2. We understand the ethical implications of the issue. We reaffirm our respect for consumers' choices and convictions.

→ Objective: Consumers' convictions and choices are at the centre of this issue, more than consumers' health. We therefore have to show our respect for this by recognising that the problem is purely technical (cross contamination). We strongly recommend avoiding all direct references to specific religions or convictions.

3. According to European regulations regarding food safety, the transfer of meat through the food chain has to be labelled from the slaughterhouse to the consumer. It is mandatory that this labelling indicates the origins of the animal species.

→ Objective: reassure on regulation and focus communication on the general question of consumers' information, and not on the question of pork meat.



4. All meat products from the European Union are submitted to competent traceability legislation. This enables all actors of the food chain to trace meat products from the farmer to the consumer. This traceability system has already proved to be efficient within the European Union during different food crises that have occurred at both European and national levels.

→ Objective: Target group education and reassurance: the meat sector is serious and has rigorous regulations in place. Every actor involved in food production containing meat can be identified rapidly. Therefore, all these actors have far more to lose than to gain by breaking the rules.

5. In a case where this does occur, it is necessary to distinguish the 2 potential sources of the problem:
 - a. Fraud: unfortunately, malicious actors within the food chain can always break the rules. This type of behaviour, driven by objectives other than respect for the consumer, can break the bonds of trust that exist within the entire chain.
 - b. Traces of a certain type of meat (e.g. pork) in food products that are not supposed to contain this type of meat (e.g. burger that is supposed to contain 100% beef meat).
Things happen in factories as they do at the butcher: when a factory uses several types of meat in food production, very small traces of those different meats may be detected.

→ Objective: In case of fraud, protect the image of the sector and avoid assimilation of all actors to the individual player, who is solely responsible for the cause of the problem. Before learning the outcomes of the investigations in the case at hand, it is important to leave the door open for the 2 potential causes: cross contamination (= accidental presence) or fraud.

6. Results of DNA control tests on meat products are highly sensitive (message to be used in case of cross contamination).
The general use of DNA control tests, organised at European level, can detect very small traces (less than 0.1 %) of a variance in the type of meats. This can lead to false positive analyses, which have no link with any kind of fraud. It is up to each individual to determine if he can tolerate these traces, according to his personal conviction. Whatever the efforts of the meat industry, traces are very difficult to avoid in elaborated products.
→ Objective: Explain the controversial aspects of DNA tests and try to demonstrate their limits, while reassuring on the good practices of the meat sector.

