

Food and Feed Safety in Romania in the European Union Context: Current Issues

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Abstract

Since 2007 when Romania became EU member, the regulations approved by European Commission have been compulsory for the Romanian government, including the consumer protection domain. The paper presents and analyzes the food and feed safety system (RASFF) in the European Union and Romania with reference to number, type and distribution of notifications, RASFF procedure and the gap between the notifications sent by Romania authorities and those registered by European Commission. Some recommendations were made in order to ensure reliable consumer protection in European Union and Romania and broadening of the scope of RASFF.

Key words: food, feed, RASFF, consumer protection

JEL Classification: D18; L66; Q18

Introduction

Since 1957, when the Treaty of Rome was signed in order to create the European Economic Community (EEC) or “Common Market” and finishing with the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon, the European Union (EU) has evolved both from institutions and new Member states point of view. Thus, today, the European Union has 27 Member states with 21 more countries from its beginning.

The EU population has risen from 188,892,415 in 1960 to 502,477,005 in present time¹, with 166.01%.

In Figure 1 is shown the evolution of EU population between 2000 and 2011. Thus, the number of population *increased continually* in average with 0.36% every year. In this period, the biggest rise was in 2008 beside 2007 with 0.48% and the smallest in 2002 beside 2001 with 0.17%.

In the context of raising the number of EU population, their protection as consumers (consumer protection) is an important aspect of EU policies since the European Commission has a commissioner who is in charge with “Health and Consumer Policy”.

EU Consumer policy aims to refocus European regulations towards citizens oriented outcomes by managing challenges arising from 2004 and 2007 enlargements, improving the functioning of the internal market and addressing market failures².

¹ EUROSTAT, *Demographic balance and crude rates 1960-2011*, (last update March 30, 2012)
<http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/setupModifyTableLayout.do>

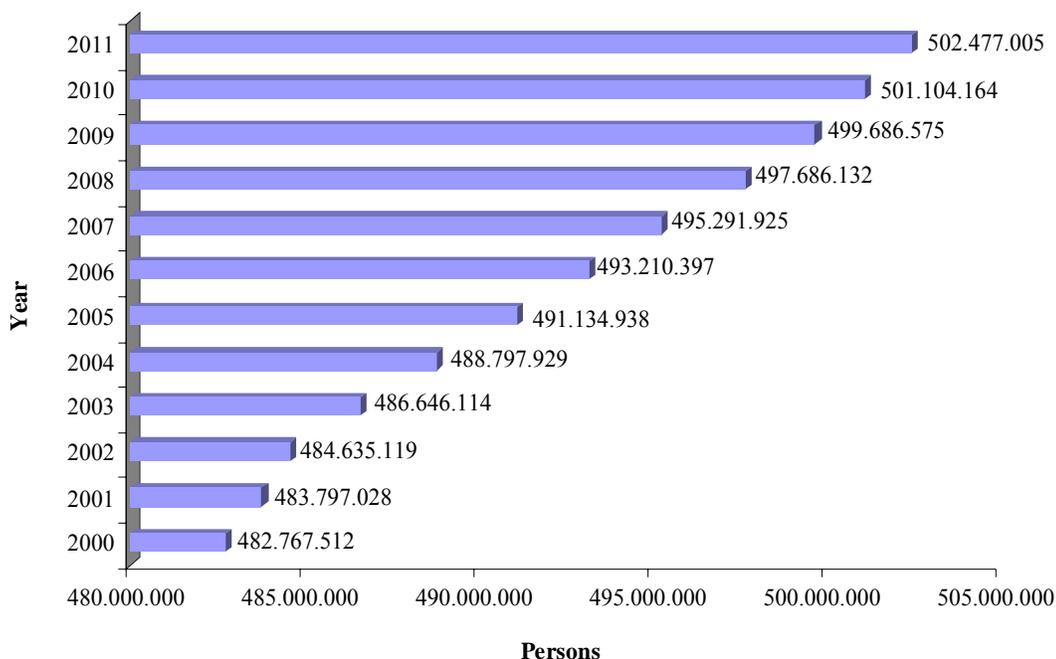


Fig. 1 Evolution of EU population between 2000 and 2011

Source: Adapted from EUROSTAT, *Population at 1 January* (last update of data: March 30, 2012) <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tps00001>

Food and Feed Safety in European Union

Food and feed safety is one of the many European Union policies along with: business, culture, education, sport, audiovisual, media, economy, finance, employment, custom, taxation, social affairs, environment, energy, justice, immigration, foreign affairs, security, humanitarian aid, regions and local development, institutional affairs, science, technology, research, innovation, transport, travel etc.³

The importance of food safety issue in the European Union is revealed by both the complex regulation and many institutions with responsibilities in this area, such as:

- European Commission (EC);
- Council of the European Union (CEU);
- European Parliament (EP);
- Food and Veterinary Office (FVO);
- EU Reference Laboratories (EU-RL's);
- European Food Safety Authority (EFSA).

EC prepares proposals for legislative acts through Directorate-General for Health and Consumers and ensures that EU law is well implemented and applied in the 27 Member states. During its meetings in the field of food safety, CEU has decision-making rights along with EP. EP is in charge in establishing draft regulation in the food and safety domain through Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee. FVO assesses if the European Union regulation is obeyed in the EU countries and non-EU Member states that export to EU by inspection procedure. EU-RL's provide standards for testing, procedures and methods,

² E n e , C., Consumer Protection in Bulgaria: EU Challenges, *Economics of Agriculture*, Volume 59, Number 2, April-June 2012, pp. 253

³ European Union, *Policy areas of European Union*, 2012, http://europa.eu/pol/index_en.htm

comparative analyses, training of personnel from national laboratories etc. for EU. EFSA provides independent scientific information and data about the present and possible risk in food safety area, which are the bases of EU policies and regulation.⁴

In Romania, the authorities that are in charge with food and feed safety are shown in figure 2.

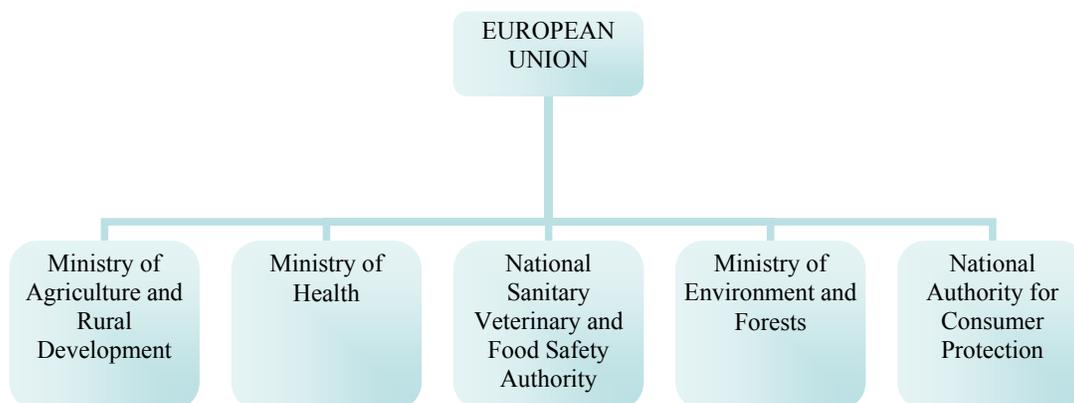


Fig. 2. The relationship between UE and Romanian food and feed safety institutions

Source: Made by author

These institutions are represented by both ministries and agencies which are subordinated to Romanian Government.

At European level, the food and feed safety policy is based on *Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF)*. The Regulation (EC) 178/2002 represents the legal basis of RASFF which is made from a notifications system on risk that concerns the food and feed which are traded in the Member states (notifying countries).

RASFF is managed by the *Health and Consumers Directorate-General of the European Commission* and as its name suggests it is under de coordination of European Commission with the others 32 departments.

There are four types of notifications:⁵

- *Alert notifications* come up when foods or feeds that are traded have significant health risk and rapid action is required. The country that encountered this problem must take the appropriate measures in order to reduce the risk and triggers the alert;
- *Information notifications* occur when the risk about food and feed have been clearly spotted but the other Member states don't have to take rapid action, because the product didn't cross the border;
- *Border rejections* refer to food and feed that have been checked and rejected at the borders between EU and non-EU countries when encountered a health risk. This information is disseminated to all borders to avoid re-entering in the EU market.
- *News* represents the information about food and feed safety which are not in the alert or information notification category and is communicated to the control institutions.

According to the time, the notifications are:⁶

⁴ Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR), *EU Food Safety Almanac*, 2011, Berlin, Germany, pp. 8-11

⁵ European Commission, Directorate-General for Health & Consumers, *Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed, RASFF notifications*, 2012, http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/rapidalert/rasff_notifications_en.htm

⁶ European Commission, Directorate-General for Health & Consumers, *The Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF), Annual Report, 2010*, pp. 12

- *original notification* – it is the notification that concerns food, feed etc. that were not previously notified to the RASFF;
- *follow-up notification* – it is the notification which follow-up the original notification.

These notifications represent the bases of RASFF procedure (figure 3).

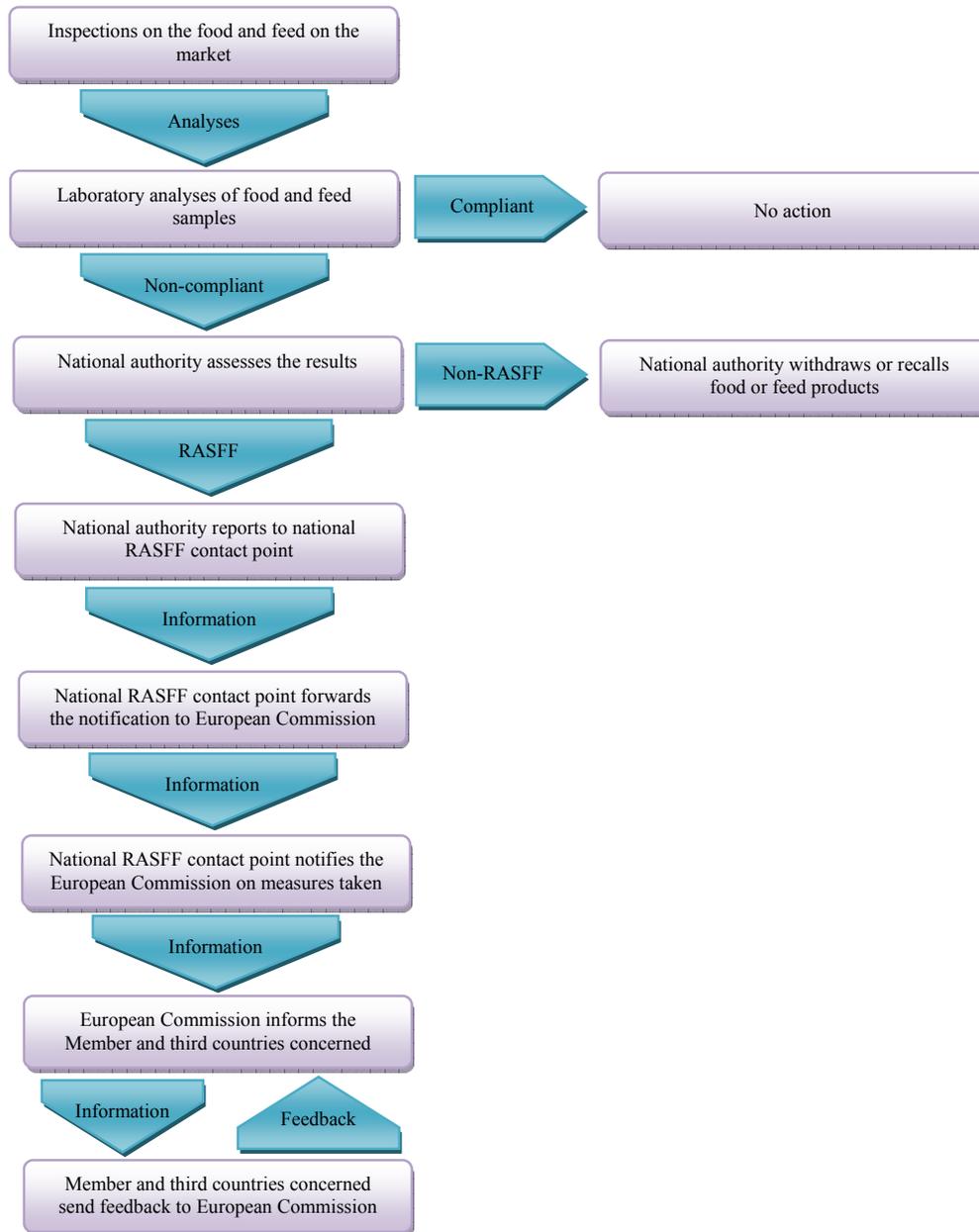


Fig. 3. RASFF procedure

Source: Adapted from European Commission, Directorate-General for Health & Consumers, *Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) – How are RASFF notifications made? and RASFF information flow*, 2012, http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/rapidalert/about_rasff_en.htm#

The RASFF procedure starts with the inspection on food and feed quality in order to identify the lack of safety. The samples of the product are sent to laboratory for analyses. The results are judged against the regulations and if the product is compliant, no action will be taken. Otherwise, the product is assessed in order to identify the level of health risk for consumers. If the health risk is high then the national authority informs the national RASFF contact point which forwards the notification to European Commission. At this stage, the European Commission notifies and receives feedback from the Members states and other countries concerned about the unsafe food and feed product.

The notifications have a standard form. For example, the market notification includes information grouped in three categories:⁷

- *general information* includes: notification type, notifying country, contact point reference, basis for the notification, related RASFF notification, date of notification and countries flagged for action;
- *hazards*: hazard category, hazards found, results of the tests, counter analysis, data about sampling and analysis, persons affected and type of illness or symptoms;
- *product*: category, name (on label) and description of product.

The standard form of notifications ensures a faster exchange of information among all national RASFF contact points and European Commission and the same interpretation of the information regardless of the country location.

Overall, in 2010, the RASFF recorded 3,358 notifications from the EU Member states in which the “border rejection notification” has the highest share and the “alert notification” the lowest (figure 4).



Fig. 4. The share of each type of RASFF notification in 2010

Source: Adapted from European Commission, Directorate-General for Health & Consumers, *The Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF), Annual Report, 2010*, pp. 16

According to RASFF Annual Report, in 2010, from the total of 3,358 notifications, Romania made only 25 notifications,⁸ which represent 0.74% share in the whole European Union. The 25 notifications are spread differently by the hazard category (figure 5).

The figure 5 shows that the food and feed radiation had the biggest number of notifications (8 notifications), followed by pathogenic micro-organisms (5 notifications) and three hazard

⁷ European Commission, Directorate-General for Health & Consumers, *The Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed of European Union, 30 years of keeping consumers safe*, 2009, pp. 18

⁸ European Commission, Directorate-General for Health & Consumers, *The Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF), Annual Report, 2010*, pp. 49

categories with 2 notifications: adulteration/fraud, labelling absent/incomplete/incorrect and poor or insufficient controls. As well, six categories had only one notification and 15 categories had no notifications.

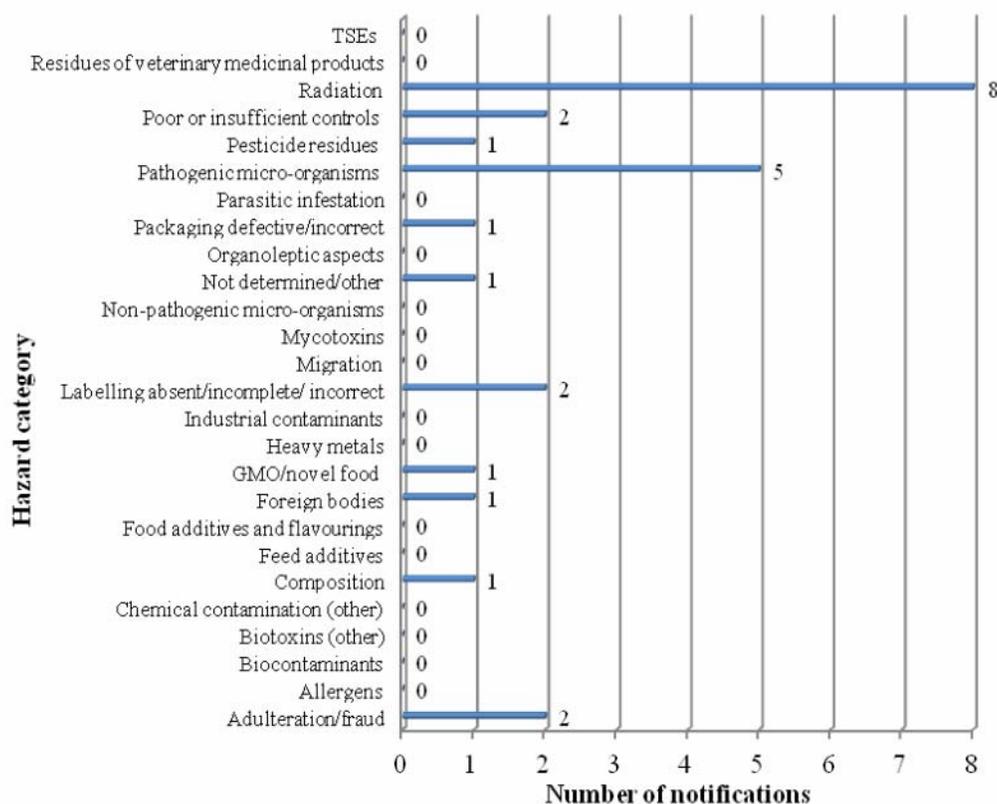


Fig. 5. The number of notifications by hazard category in Romania, 2010

Source: Adapted from European Commission, Directorate-General for Health & Consumers, *The Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF), Annual Report, 2010*, pp. 57

RASFF has members in all 27 EU countries which are represented by one or more authorities that manage the feed and food safety in the state of origin.

In Romania, only one institution is in charge with food and feed safety, i.e. *National Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Authority (NSVFSA)* which is subordinated to the Government and under the coordination of Prime Minister. Within the NSVFSA operates the national RASFF contact point which it is in continuous exchange of information with the European Commission.

The Authority has as subsidiaries the country sanitary veterinary and food safety directorates on region level, and area sanitary veterinary districts and sanitary veterinary and food safety districts, on local level.⁹

In 2010, in its activity report, the National Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Authority stated that were 28 cases of food borne illnesses of which 18 had the domestic consumption and 10 the public consumption as pest holes (table 1).

In the food borne diseases with domestic consumption as pest hole, 168 people were ill of which 139 were hospitalized and in the case of public consumption 160 people were sick of which 75

⁹ H.G. nr. 1.415/2009 privind organizarea și funcționarea Autorității Naționale Sanitare Veterinare și pentru Siguranța Alimentelor și a unităților din subordinea acesteia (Art. 1, Alin.3), pp. 1

were hospitalized. The number of ill persons from the two pest holes is slightly different although the number of cases for pest hole of domestic consumption is 80% bigger than the other one.

Table 1. Food borne Illnesses in Romania, 2010

No.	County (Region)	Town	Hazard	Food	Pest hole	Diseased persons	Hospitalized persons
1.	Alba	Albac	<i>Shigella flexner</i>	*	P	9	9
		Rădești	<i>Trichinella</i> spp	Pork meat	D	3	3
2.	Bihor	Vadu Crișului	<i>Salmonella</i> spp	*	D	62	62
		Oradea	<i>Salmonella</i> spp	Cakes	D	9	9
			<i>Escherichia coli</i>	Cheese	D	6	6
			<i>Escherichia coli</i> ; <i>Bacillus proteus</i>	Cheese	D	8	6
			*	*	P	18	8
		Suplacu de Barcău	<i>Salmonella</i> spp	Cakes	P	5	3
		Cordău	*	*	P	17	14
3.	Bistrița-Năsăud	Sintereag	<i>Salmonella cholerae suis</i>	Pork meat	D	15	15
4.	-	Bucharest	<i>Enterobacter</i>	Ice-cream	D	5	5
5.	Constanța	Negru Vodă	<i>Staphylococcus c.p.</i>	Cheese	P	28	-
		Ivrinezu	<i>Staphylococcus c.p.</i>	Cheese	P	23	20
		Eforie Sud	<i>Staphylococcus c.p.</i>	Vanilla cake	P	5	5
6.	Dâmbovița	Târgoviște	<i>Salmonella</i> spp.; <i>Staphylococcus aureus</i>	Cheese	P	39	9
7.	Galați	Galți	<i>Staphylococcus aureus</i>	Cheese	D	16	3
8.	Sibiu	Jina	<i>Staphylococcus c.p.</i>	Cheese	D	4	4
		Șelimbăr	<i>Staphylococcus c.p.</i> ; <i>Escherichia coli</i>	Cheese	D	14	0
9.	Timiș	Timișoara	<i>Botulinum toxin</i>	Pork ham	D	4	4
			<i>Salmonella</i> spp	Chinese pancakes with cabbage	P	3	3
			<i>Escherichia coli</i>	Pork meatballs	D	5	5
			<i>Salmonella</i> spp	Raw milk	D	6	6
		Deta	<i>Botulinum toxin</i>	Liver pate	D	1	1
			<i>Botulinum toxin B</i>	Pork sausage	D	1	1
10.	Vaslui	Vaslui	<i>Citrobacter</i> spp	Cheese	D	3	3
		Zorleni	<i>Escherichia coli</i>	Pasta with milk	D	3	3
		Puiești	<i>Proteus mirabilis</i> ; <i>Escherichia coli</i>	Cheese	D	3	3
11.	Vrancea	Focșani	*	*	P	13	4
TOTAL			-	-	-	328	214

* unidentified; D – Domestic consumptions; P – Public consumption

Source: Autoritatea Națională Sanitară Veterinară și pentru Siguranța Alimentelor, *Raport de activitate, 2010*, pp.57-64

It can be noticed that in the case of public consumption as pest hole for 4 out of 10 food borne illnesses it was not possible to identify the food that caused the diseases and in 30% of the cases the hazard cannot be spotted. Secondly, for domestic consumption as pest hole only one food borne illness wasn't recognized and there wasn't any food in which the hazard cannot be known.

For public consumption as pest hole, the food that was responsible for the illnesses was the cheese in 50% of the cases and the cakes in 33.33% of them. In the situation of domestic consumption as pest hole, the cheese had the biggest proportion as well (41.18%), followed by meat and meat products (35.3%), milk, pasta with milk, cakes and ice-cream with 5.88% each.

In the case of public consumption as pest hole, *Staphylococcus c.p.* is the source of food borne diseases in proportion of 42.85%, the *Salmonella* spp with 28.57%, both of them and *Shigella Flexner* with 14.29% each. For domestic consumption as pest hole, the type of microorganisms is different from the public consumption. Thus, *Salmonella* spp has 22.22% of cases, *Escherichia coli* and *Bacillus Botulinum* with 16.67% each, *Staphylococcus* with 11.11% and *Trichinella* spp, *Enterobacter* and *Citrobacter* spp with 5.55% each. *Escherichia coli* interferes along with *Bacillus proteus*, *Staphylococcus c.p.* and *Proteus mirabilis* in other three cases with 5.56% each.

Studying the number of food borne diseases with public consumption as pest holes from table 1 (7 notifications – because for 3 out of 10 food borne illnesses the hazard is not known), on the first hand and the number of notifications of pathogenic micro-organisms from figure 5 (5 notifications) on the other hand, it can be notice the inconsistency. These means that seven hazards were encountered and only five of them were reported to RASFF.

Starting with 2006, when Regulation (EC) No 183/2005 on laying down requirements for feed hygiene was adopted, the notification area of RASFF was extended to risks concerning animal health or the environment from feed used for animals which are not for food production.¹⁰ This means that any national RASPP contact point can send notification regarding pet food which presents important risk to human or animal health or to the environment.

Conclusions

Along with military, juridical, political etc. safety, the food and feed and non-food safety is a key element for any social system which ensures the durable economic growing through consumers' health.

In European Union, for food and feed safety was developed RASFF which acts on both livestock (indirectly by feed control) and natural and processed food.

It is not less important the small number of notification sent by national RASPP contact point to European Commission. This suggests that National Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Authority has to increase its inspection activity in order to identify the possible unsafe food and feed which will ensure a better consumer protection in both Romania and European Union.

In Romania, the inconsistency existing between the number of food borne diseases identified by National Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Authority from the public consumption as pest hole and the number of notifications reported to European Commission indicates that firstly the difficulties of any kind that interfere must be spotted and removed and secondly the communication between the two institutions must be improved.

¹⁰ Regulation (EC) No. 183/2005 of The European Parliament and of the Council laying down requirements for feed hygiene, pp. 3; 11

In 2006, a step forward was made by including on the RASFF scope the feed for animals that are not used in food industry. This broaden category can be joined by animal diseases which have the particularity of being contagious to other species that are used in food production.

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Siguranța alimentelor și hranei animalelor în România în contextul Uniunii Europene: Aspecte actuale

Rezumat

Din anul 2007 când România a devenit membră a Uniunii Europene, reglementările aprobate de Comisia Europeană au devenit obligatorii pentru guvernul României, incluzând domeniul protecției consumatorilor. Lucrarea prezintă și analizează sistemul de siguranță al alimentelor și hranei animalelor (RASFF) în Uniunea Europeană și în România, cu referire la numărul, tipul și distribuția notificărilor, procedura RASFF, precum și discrepanțele dintre notificările trimise de autoritățile române și cele înregistrate de Comisia Europeană. S-au propus câteva recomandări în vederea asigurării unei protecții reale a consumatorilor în Uniunea Europeană și România și de extindere sferei de cuprindere a RASFF.