

Food Price Tags Must Now Display Country of Manufacturing

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Effective from 1 September, new regulations require retailers to clearly indicate the country of manufacturing on food price tags, either in writing or by displaying a flag. This initiative aims to provide consumers with more transparent information about the manufacturing location of their food. Notably, if a product is manufactured in Russia or Belarus, the label will explicitly state this in writing without a flag, reflecting their designation as aggressor nations.

Reasons for the Amendment

Except for certain categories of food (for instance, milk, meat, unprocessed food), under the EU Regulation 1169/2011, it was sufficient to provide the name and address of the responsible food business operator. Furthermore, the labelling had to indicate the country of origin where failure to indicate this might mislead the consumer as to the true country of origin. The Latvian legislators sought to strengthen and expand requirements for consumer information, emphasizing the need for clear, convenient, and unambiguous information about the product's country of manufacturing on the price tags. This change enables consumers to make more informed choices and express their views on broader social or political issues through their purchasing habits.

Defining "Country of Manufacturing"

The new rules establish clear criteria for determining a food product's country of manufacturing and the presentation and display requirements—either in writing or with a flag. Either the "country of origin" or the "country of location of the manufacturer" must be indicated as the "country of manufacturing" According to EU food law, "country of origin" should be determined in accordance with the EU Customs Code, which specifies that (i) goods wholly obtained in a single country shall be regarded as having their origin in that country; and (ii) goods produced in more than one country shall be deemed to originate in the country where they underwent their last substantial, economically justified processing or working in an establishment equipped for that

purpose, resulting in the manufacture of a new product or representing a significant stage of manufacture. However, Latvian regulations do not address situations where indicating the "country of origin" could be misleading, such as when the "country of origin" of the primary ingredient is not specified in cases outlined by the Regulation 1169/2011.

Exceptions to the New Requirements

The regulation also outlines specific exceptions where indicating the country of manufacturing is not mandatory. These include public catering establishments, food outlets offering drive-through services, and food vending machines. Additionally, in situations where the retailer does not have information on the country of manufacturing, the price tag will state "Country - no information." Only one country of manufacturing may be indicated for each finished product offered at the point of sale.

Non-Compliance and Enforcement

Where non-compliance with the requirement to indicate the country of manufacturing of food is detected, the supervisory authority will initially apply the "consult first" principle. This will remain in effect until 28 February 2025. During this period, retailers will be advised on compliance without immediate penalties. However, if a retail establishment repeatedly fails to meet the requirements, the "consult first" principle will no longer apply. In such cases, non-compliance may result in warnings or fines of up to 250 EUR for a natural person and up to 1 000 EUR for a legal entity.

In practice, there is a continued failure to comply with the established regulations. For instance, the country of the distributor is frequently indicated in place of the country of origin or the manufacturer, contrary to the stipulations set forth in the pertinent legislation. Similarly, on occasion the price tag indicates that the consumer must refer to the product label to ascertain the country of manufacture, which is not in accordance with the prevailing regulatory framework.

Conclusion

These new regulations reflect a growing emphasis on transparency in food labelling, allowing consumers to make choices based not only on product quality but also on the manufacturing location of their food. By providing information on the country of manufacturing, these changes aim to enhance consumer autonomy and accountability in their purchasing decisions. Retailers must now adapt to these new standards to comply with the law and meet the evolving expectations of their customers. The transitional “consult first” period provides businesses with an opportunity to align their practices before facing stricter enforcement, making compliance essential to avoid penalties while supporting informed consumer choices.