

European food brand manufacturers welcome European Commission report finding no evidence of East-West divide in food quality

(Brussels, 24 June 2019) AIM and FoodDrinkEurope, representing European branded food manufacturers, welcome today's publication of a comprehensive analysis by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) of 128 branded and private label food and drink products across 19 EU Member States, which confirms that there is no evidence of an 'East-West' divide in the quality of food. At the same time, FoodDrinkEurope and AIM underscore the paramount importance of the European industry's high quality standards and reinforce that while food and drink recipes can be adapted to best serve consumers across the EU, this should in no way be confused with offering lesser-quality products.

For FoodDrinkEurope, AIM and their members, the safety and quality of food and drinks remains the most important priority that industry would never compromise anywhere and for any consumer. FoodDrinkEurope and AIM therefore maintain their strong support for JRC's initiative to further investigate and clarify the issue related to alleged "dual quality" of food.¹ This process has provided a sound basis in the absence of clear, comparable and robust data and evidence, and helps define parameters for industry in the future. While some level of subjectivity and a certain margin of error will always exist considering the very nature of this exercise², we believe that it is critically important to follow an EU-endorsed methodology.

Today's results, which are part of the first phase of the JRC study³, come as no surprise to Europe's food and drink industry, which has always argued that there is no common division of markets for food into 'East' vs. 'West' in the EU. The JRC report indicates that differences can exist in nutrient composition and/or ingredients, but that these are not structurally linked to specific geographies and, for the most part, can be logically explained. It is commonplace for food and drink companies to adapt recipes for a number of reasons, including compliance with national legislation and standards, availability of raw materials and supporting local supply chains, meeting consumer preferences and local consumer expectations and investing in product reformulation efforts to improve the nutritional profile of products.⁴ The JRC report clarifies that a difference in composition does not imply a difference in quality per se.

Mella Frewen, Director General of FoodDrinkEurope, commented: *"Europe's food and drink companies, small and large alike, take pride in being able to serve the richness of diversity in consumer preferences, whilst standing behind high quality, sustainability and brand consistency across Europe. We hope that the publication of the JRC report will provide reassurance to consumers, authorities and other stakeholders."*

Michelle Gibbons, Director General of AIM: *"As can be seen by the detail in the report, brands manufacturers in Europe have partnered with the European Commission and the JRC to ensure all facts have been made available to clarify this key issue. We look forward to continuing this*

¹ The allegation that companies sell 'inferior-quality' food under the same brand name in East-European countries compared to the West.

² For instance, in some cases, different stock-keeping units (SKUs), e.g. different sub-brands, different packs of weight/volume, 'low fat' vs. 'full fat' variants, etc., have been used as a basis for the comparison.

³ The second phase of the JRC study will entail a sensory testing of selected products. Furthermore, as part of the JRC process, further discussion will take place in the JRC Network on Assessing Food Quality to objectively establish what is considered as "significant" difference.

⁴ All 3 major EU Institutions (i.e. the Commission, Council and EP) acknowledge in their [provisional agreement on the Directive on the better enforcement and modernisation of EU consumer protection rules](#) that such reasons can justify product compositional differences.

constructive dialogue in the future, as we all seek to deliver the absolute best for consumers and communities around Europe.”

Since the JRC report has shown minor differences in labelling declarations (e.g. different application of rounding rules in the EU Member States), companies will take action to further align declarations across all EU countries, where possible. Furthermore, the members of AIM and FoodDrinkEurope look forward to continuing working with consumers, the authorities and stakeholders in all Member States to further optimise their recipes to local preferences and dietary needs.

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Note to the editors:

FoodDrinkEurope is the organisation of Europe’s food and drink industry, the largest manufacturing sector and leading employer in the EU and a key contributor to its economy (294,000 companies, 99% SMEs, 4.6 million employees).

AIM is the European Brands Association representing brand manufacturers in Europe, united in their purpose to build strong, evocative brands and as such place the consumer at the heart of what they do. AIM’s members invest approximately €14 billion in R&D in Europe alone, placing them fifth in the EU rankings for R&D investment.