
The meat industry must act as one if it is to thrive in the future. That is the view of the president of the European meat processors association.

Speaking with one voice

Industry associations have an important role to play in both good and bad times.

So says Eddy van der Pluym, the president of CLITRAVI – The Liaison Centre for the Meat Processing Industry in the European Union.

Of course in his position he will defend the role of industry associations, but he does back his statement up with reasons.

“It is important where there are common issues for processors for there to be a common voice.”

He adds that there is no shortage of common issues facing the European meat processors, many of which also face processors elsewhere in the world.

Fighting bacteria

Although the headlines have been dominated by BSE and foot-and-mouth disease, it is the old enemy bacteria that poses the greatest long term threat to meat

processors. Further development in bacteria control needs joint action by processors and their representatives, says Mr van der Pluym.

To this end, CLITRAVI (which is made up of the meat processing associations of all 15 EU member countries) is urging the development of international food safety and is taking part in the Global Food Safety Initiative. It is a retailer led initiative that seeks to improve the safety of food that is sold in stores around the world.

Mr van der Pluym believes that as many rules in Europe are not made at a local level, it is important that businesses are members of organisations that have a voice in Europe.

“It is important that where you have a voice it is a common voice. Many regulations regarding labelling, ingredients and food safety are decided by the European Union. A single loud



clear voice will be listened to more than several quieter ones.”

Promotion

Associations also have the job of promoting meat products to consumers. Mr van der Pluym complains that many of the marketing boards in Europe concentrate on promoting the sales of meat, but not processed meat products. While this may sell meat, pleasing producer levy payers, it does little to highlight the added value and quality of meat products.

Although he acknowledges that individual companies should take the lead in promoting their own products, general consumer education about the benefits of

Eddy van der Pluym: Many issues are common to all European processors

processed meat should be carried out by associations and marketing bodies.

"There are a lot of good things to say about processed meat. For example, cooked ham is very low in fat and many processed products provide people with vital vitamins and nutrients."

Communication

He also believes there should be a united effort by the meat processing industry to point out other facts to consumers. These include the responsibility they have in ensuring food safety when they store and prepare meat products, and that even though media attention is focused on meat and meat product safety, other food stuffs often cause more problems.

Related to this are the efforts that the industry has made to beat problems such as bacterial contamination.

Mr van der Pluym's interest in the processed meat industry is not just theoretical. He is also the director of the Belgian company Pluma that his Grandfather founded in 1945. It produces 18,500 tonnes of cooked meat and dried and cured meat a year, turnover is €100 million a year and the company employs 450 staff at two sites.

The company exports 68% of its products, and 90% of them are sold under retailer's private labels. For this reason it was hit hard when customers stopped buying Belgian meat products during the

1999 dioxin food safety scare. In the short term Pluma had to destroy 1200 tonnes of product. But the longer term damage of lost markets was more significant. The UK market was the first to recover, although at first UK retailers insisted that products were made with imported UK pork. Since then the Belgium and Dutch markets have fully recovered, but volumes sold to France and Germany remain slightly down on pre-1999 levels.

The good news about eating processed meat

Far from harming the body, processed meat provides it with many of the nutrients it needs.

- The body needs fats. Half of the fat intake should be saturated, a quarter poly-unsaturated and a quarter mono-unsaturated. Most processed meats provide 49% saturated fats, 39% mono-unsaturated and 12% poly-unsaturated.
- High cholesterol levels can damage human health, but French studies suggest that cholesterolaemia stays the same whatever quantity of processed meat is consumed.
- Processed products are also a source of vital nutrients such as iron, salt and vitamins. The traditional iron booster spinach provides just 4.7 milligrams of iron per 100 grams. But black pudding provides 19 mg/100g, while farmhouse pate, rillets and chipolatas are other good iron sources. The average man needs 10mg of iron a day, while women require between 15mg and 18mg a day. Iron has a major role in the transport of oxygen around the body, the fight against disease and energy production.
- Vitamins are vital to good human health. Cooked pig meat provides 15% of the recommended daily intake (RDI) for vitamins in group B. Certain processed



"Food safety remains a massive consumer concern."

meats can provide 100% RDI for vitamins B1 and B12. Farmhouse pates provide nearly 100% of the RDI of B12. Dry ham provides 86% RDI of vitamin B1. Vitamin B1 enables the use of glucose for energy, vitamins B2, B3 and B12 help metabolise fatty acids and B6 helps synthesise aminoacids.**MI**

CLITRAVI represents national meat processing associations in the European Union. The annual turnover of the 12,792 meat processors involved is €56.3 billion. The sector employs more than 350,000 people and has a total annual production of over 10.15 million tonnes.

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