

USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agricultural Information Network

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Czech Republic

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Food Safety and Czech Consumers

Report Categories:

Sanitary/Phytosanitary/Food Safety

Retail Foods

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Report Highlights:

Czech consumers are quality oriented and perceive local products as safest. Many would rather reduce quantity purchased rather than settle for lower quality foods.

General Information:

On May 29, 2013, the Food Safety Department of the Ministry of Agriculture organized a conference “[Communication and Risk Perception in Food Safety](#).” The event, sponsored by the European Food Safety Agency (EFSA), took place in the Czech Parliament. Petr Bendl, The Czech Minister of Agriculture, opened the conference with a statement that “When informing the public about food safety, timeliness and openness are keys to allaying consumer fears.”

Ten speakers from various fields and EU member states discussed the effectiveness of risk communication employed during recent European food safety scandals. They also discussed other food and feed contaminants (e.g. dioxins) and measures taken to mitigate their impact. A separate session was dedicated to possible risks connected to alcohol.

Speakers forming the first block were Laura Smillie from EFSA, Prof. Andreas Hensel from The German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment, Denisa Kasl Kollmannova from the Charles University's Faculty of Social Sciences in Prague and Vladimir Valenta, Chief Hygienist of the Czech Republic. When addressing risk communication conducted in Europe during recent food safety scandals, they all agreed one point: there is a room for improvement. Consumers are not always clear on where to seek relevant information. One trustworthy and credible authority, an independent organization, should be clearly identified. It should use an efficient two-way communication through appropriate channels, including modern media and social networking.

Those issues reflect to certain extent in Czech consumers' attitudes, based on a recent survey on food safety and quality perception by general public in the Czech Republic that was presented during the conference. The survey, conducted by the Public Opinion Research Centre of the Academy of Sciences, revealed Czech consumers' views on issues relating to food safety, origin, quality, pricing, labeling, and other factors, which influence their decision making when shopping. Those findings follow:

Origin

When assessing food safety with regards to origin, consumers prefer domestic products. 73 percent of the survey respondents think that Czech food's safeness is very good or rather good. In contrast, 43 percent of respondents think imported products safeness is very good or rather good, 40 percent think it's rather bad or very bad, and the remaining 17 percent are undecided.

Quality

Almost three quarters of respondents (71 percent) have a positive opinion about domestically produced food. Only one third of respondents have the same view on imported foods. The survey revealed that opinions were based on heavily publicized small scale food safety issues related to neighboring member states products. The excessive publicity was spurred on, in part, for competitive reasons by domestic producers.

When asked about their view on food quality before the Czech Republic joined the EU and after, most

of the respondents (42 percent) think the food quality remained the same, but more than one third (35 percent) think it is worse.

Pricing

Czech Republic has increased value added tax rates again, as of 2013. When asked how Czech consumers react to food price increases in general the majority of respondents, almost two fifths, replied by decreasing the amount of food purchased. They did not lower their quality requirements, only quantity. Less than 25 percent selected the opposite approach – maintaining the same quantity purchased but settling for lower quality.

Labeling

Approximately two fifths of consumers always or almost always pay attention to food labels when shopping. When asked about sufficiency of information on labels, two thirds of respondents find it mostly sufficient. What consumers miss the most on labels? They would like to see a larger font for the writing, country of origin, specification of concrete EU member state, and nutritional composition and value. Some of those issues, namely the font size, were resolved with the recently amended EU legislation on labeling. You can read more in FAS Brussels report *New EU Food Labeling Rules Published*, which can be found [here](#).