
Request for advice

On 18 August 1999, the Minister of Health, Welfare and Sport wrote as follows to the President of the Health Council of the Netherlands (under reference GZB/VVB 993428):

Since May 1997, Regulation (EC) 258/97 concerning novel foods and novel food ingredients has been in force in the European Union. Under the Regulation, the safety of novel foods has to be assessed as part of a community procedure.

Following discussions regarding the possibility of the Health Council making such assessments, the State Secretary for Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries and I wish the Council to take responsibility for safety assessment for a period of several years during the first phase of implementation of European Regulation (EC) 258/97. It is considered appropriate that the Health Council should initially take on this role because the assessment activities will be of an experimental nature, involving both a new form of assessment (i.e. pre-marketing assessment) and, in many cases, new categories of foodstuff (primarily foodstuffs with a genetically modified basis and functional foods or nutraceuticals). We also feel that if assessments are made by a body with the Council's independent scientific status, this will support the validity of the Netherlands' opinion in the eyes of the European Committee and other member states.

My wish is to make the procedure and the assessment as open and transparent as possible, so as to enhance consumer trust in the safety of novel foods. I would like the Health Council to support this objective by, for example, allowing perusal of the application dossier (insofar as consistent with the need to protect the confidentiality of commercially sensitive information) and publishing the criteria upon which safety assessments are made.

The Minister of Health, Welfare and Sport,
(signed) dr E. Borst-Eilers