

Conference on Food Safety – Educating the Consumer
organised by the
Association for Consumer Rights (ACR) in collaboration with the Irish Embassy to Malta
Europa House, Valletta
Saturday 18 May 2013

The Conference was opened by Grace Attard, General Secretary of ACR who highlighted the importance of education and empowerment of consumers in matters concerning food safety. Stefan Xuereb, President ACR welcomed the participants commented on the need for Government and the Malta Competition and Consumer Affairs Authority (MCCAA) to increase joint efforts in consumer education and protection. NGOs working in the field of consumer protection need to be strengthened to ensure a strong voice in putting forward their complaints and have guarantees of redress

Virtual message from EU Commissioner Tonio Borg, Health and Consumer Affairs

Minister for Consumer Affairs, Hon Helena Dalli addressed the conference spoke about government's strategy which will be made public in the next few weeks, highlighting policies to provide access to information and education for vulnerable groups, increase IT literacy and most particularly financial literacy, starting from programmes in schools even at primary level

Speaking from the EU perspective, Frans Verstraete, EU Commission DG Sanco responsible for stated that the EU has developed the most sophisticated food safety in the world., however emphasising the agrofood chain cannot be dealt with in isolation. The 'farm to fork' approach, both in the EU internal market and the global market is increasingly providing food safety, through hazard analysis, traceability and effective enforcement, including out official controls and action based on the precautionary principle

Referring to the National Action Plan on Health of the high level group on Nutrition and Physical activity at EU level, Mr Verstraete emphasised the importance of nutrition programmes in schools, to help children to actively address misleading advertising and lack of information. He also spoke about a new EU food labeling legislation to ensure mandatory efficient labeling on energy, fats, carbohydrates and proteins due in November 2014. The system is in a process of change dependent on scientific progress providing sophisticated methods of testing

The Irish Ambassador to Malta H.E. Jim Hennessy congratulated Malta for its 50% female representation in the EU Parliament. He then gave an overview of the Irish Presidency priorities, one of which is strong measures to address issues concerning food safety and the prevention of hazards. He also referred to Malta's plans for the EU Presidency 2017 working through the trio presidency, stating that Malta is ready to face these challenges. He congratulated Malta for its Valletta City of European Culture in 2018.

Mr Raymond Ellard, Director Consumer Protection Division, Food Safety Authority, Ireland, spoke about Food Safety Challenges in a Global Market. The Irish expert stated that consumers' interests and

consumer confidence were important for business and citizens alike. Today's global market advertising and global food brands which can make it confusing for individuals to realistically make informed choices. This is calling for global collaboration – interdependence in the processes of traceability with the support of business controls. A clear separation between advertising and information must always be ensured

During the second session Flavia Zammit, Senior Scientist, MCCA dealt with food and labeling and the need to ensure the authentic origin of food production. Doriette Agius and Charlene Vassallo, senior officers - nutrition- Health Promotion Dept. gave a very effective presentation on a national strategy on helping children and adolescents develop healthy eating habits for life. Following a study on eating habits among boys and girls between 11 and 15, they spoke about healthy eating habits at different parts of the day highlighting the importance of fruit and vegetable consumption

Mr Hadrian Bonello from the Environment Directorate spoke about the Food Safety Week campaign 'The four Cs to food safety' :

- Cleaning during food preparation;
- separating raw and cooked food to avoid cross contamination and keeping food covered;
- cooking food to a safe temperature to kill micro organisms and reheating;
- chilling (refrigerating) and thawing

A number of questions and comments from the floor addressed EU legislation and measures on food safety, handling of food by customers, especially bread in shops and supermarkets, the role of the MCCA, GMOs, the small print in food labeling, the need for more education, information and empowerment at all ages and levels of society

Grace Attard
Gen Sec ACR