



Protecting EU consumers from unsafe food: EU's Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed

Brussels, 12 December 2019

What is the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF)?

The EU has one of the highest food safety standards in the world – largely thanks to the solid set of EU legislation in place, which ensures that food is safe for consumers. A key tool to ensure the flow of information to enabling swift reaction when risks to public health are detected in the food chain is RASFF – the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed.

Created in 1979 and celebrating its 40th anniversary this year, RASFF enables information to be shared efficiently between its members (EU Member State national food safety authorities, Commission, EFSA, ESA, Norway, Liechtenstein, Iceland and Switzerland) and provides a round-the-clock service to ensure that urgent notifications are sent, received and responded to collectively and efficiently. Thanks to RASFF, many food safety risks have been averted before they could have been harmful to European consumers.

Vital information exchanged through RASFF can lead to products being recalled from the market. A robust system, which has matured over the years, RASFF continues to show its value to ensure food safety in the EU and beyond.

How does the system work in practice?

The process starts with the notification by a member of the RASFF network of the existence of a serious, direct or indirect, risk to public health linked to food or feed. This information reaches the European Commission (as manager of the system), which in turn verifies the notification and immediately transmits it to the network's other members.

A common template is used to provide all relevant and useful information including identification of the product, the hazard(s) found, the measure(s) taken as well as information on tracing the product.

Upon receiving this information, other member countries check if they are concerned. If the product is on their market they are able to trace it using the information in the notification. These members report back on what they have found and what measures they have taken. This allows a transparent and mutual flow of information between RASFF members. In case of products from the EU, the Member State from which the product originates also reports on the outcome of its investigations with regard to the origin, distribution and cause of the problem identified. This allows other member countries to take rapid action if and when needed.

Measures include: **withholding, recalling, seizing or rejecting products.**

In addition, following a notification by a member of RASFF, the system allows member countries to request clarification as regards the timing, scope or nature of notification. For instance when there is evidence that an incident could have been reported earlier, it is possible to ask the notifying country for an explanation.

Who are the members of RASFF?

All EU Member States.

EEA countries (Norway, Liechtenstein and Iceland) and the EFTA Secretariat coordinating the input from the EEA countries.

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and the European Commission as manager of the system.

Switzerland became a member of the system following an agreement that came into force on 1 January 2009.

What is predominantly notified by RASFF?

Around **half of notifications concern controls at EEA borders**, at points of entry or border inspection posts when a consignment was not accepted for import (marked as "border control – consignment detained") or when a sample was taken for analysis at the border (marked as "screening") and the consignment was released (marked as "border control - consignment released")

.Official controls on the internal market then follow.

Finally, other notifications can arise from a company notifying the outcome of a check it carried out on its own account, a consumer complaint or a food poisoning incident.

What are the main products concerned by RASFF and types of notifications?

The most notified issues by RASFF in [2018](#) were aflatoxins in nuts, pesticides in fruits and vegetables and Salmonella in poultry.

Also often reported are allergens in food and issues regarding the composition of food supplements.

Who has what powers to take action when a problem is detected?

When a problem is detected, it is the **task of the national food and feed authorities to take action**. This includes any action necessary to immediately address the risk but also to prevent a similar risk reoccurring.

A whole range of actions are carried out and reported back through RASFF: withdrawal or recall of the products and their possible destruction, information to the public, re-dispatch to origin etc.

If there is a need for emergency (safeguard) measures at EU level, the Commission and EU Member States can decide on these measures using a rapid procedure. Such measures are binding with immediate effect.

What happens if a food safety issue reported through RASFF is a result of fraud?

The **EU Food Fraud Network (FFN)** can be mobilised to allow for swift and efficient cooperation in cases of cross-border fraud in the food chain. Created in July 2013 following the horse meat scandal, the FFN is comprised of the EU Member States' national food fraud contact points, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, and the European Commission's Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety.

It handles potential food fraud cases whether arising from a RASFF notification or following official controls in a FFN member where there is an indication that a possible violation of food law requirements may be taking place, which are motivated by the prospect of economic or financial gain. The national contact points of the EU FFN and the European Commission are in permanent contact.

What is the difference between RASFF and the EU Food Fraud Network?

RASFF is a key tool to ensure the cross-border flow of information to swiftly react when risks to public health are detected in the food chain, whereas the EU Food Fraud Network (FFN), facilitated by the Administrative Assistance and Cooperation (AAC) IT tool, allows member countries to liaise bilaterally (or multilaterally) to rapidly confirm a suspicion of fraud.

Under RASFF, the Commission has the role to verify each RASFF notification prior to transmission and inform third countries, whereas the Food Fraud Network is primarily a means for member countries to exchange information to help them build a case for action leading potentially to administrative sanctions or judicial proceedings.

As regards the FFN, the Commission normally only intervenes in the bilateral information exchanges if needed. However, it monitors all cases reported and inform member countries or third countries if required.

The Commission's role is also, for both networks, to facilitate the use of the IT tools through helpdesk, training, ensuring diligent responses from member countries and proper closing when a case is brought to an end, notably with regard to personal data protection aspects.

What is iRASFF?

iRASFF is the new online application through which all 32 RASFF member countries can transmit new notifications about products presenting a risk or provide follow-up to previously transmitted notifications by other members. It functions like an online interactive platform and has a specific workflow to allow members of the network to collaborate on the notifications in a transparent way. It is designed to function both at national and EU level. Another benefit is that it links RASFF notifications to other systems such as the Trade and Control System (TRACES) and the food fraud IT system more efficiently.

What is the RASFF consumers' portal and what does it do?

Launched in 2014, the [RASFF consumers' portal](#) provides practical and timely information drawn from the RASFF on consumer recall notices and public warnings issued by food safety authorities and business operators. It provides a link between RASFF notifications and public warnings or consumer recalls – which concern only a small portion of the notifications transmitted in the network.

For more information:

https://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/rasff_en

[Q&A on Official Controls](#)

[Q&A on Plant Health](#)

QANDA/19/6711

Press contacts:

[Vivian LOONELA](#) (+32 2 296 67 12)

[Darragh CASSIDY](#) (+32 2 298 39 78)

General public inquiries: [Europe Direct](#) by phone [00 800 67 89 10 11](#) or by [email](#)