

## Olive Oil Tops E.U. List of Foods at Most Risk of Fraud

By Julie Butler

*Olive Oil Times Contributor* | Reporting from Barcelona



Olive oil, fish and organic foods are the products most prone to food fraud, according to a draft report of a European Parliament committee which also calls for tougher penalties.

### Related Articles

- [EU Offers €5m to Fight Olive Oil Fraud](#)
- [An 'Interactive' Lesson in Olive Oil Fraud](#)
- [Taiwan Rejects Olive Pomace Oil Imports](#)
- [Madrid Workshop Defines International Study on Olive Oil Fraud Detection](#)

Committing food fraud in the E.U. is lucrative, the chances of getting caught are relatively low, and the number of cases appears to be rising.

And the evidence that criminal organizations are becoming more involved in food fraud “is all the more worrisome,” the report also says.

Prepared by the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, the report — on “the food crisis, fraud in the food chain and the control thereof” — follows a four-month inquiry and is open to amendment until October 28. The committee referral was announced in Parliament on June 10 and came in the wake of Europe’s horse meat scandal.

### **Fraud risk list based on academic research, police records and industry consultations**

The Committee’s spokeswoman on the report, Holland’s Esther de Lange, said on Friday that it followed consultation with all relevant parties, including producers, traders, retailers, consumers, scientists, national authorities, the European Commission, and Europol.

She said she was surprised meat was not among the top ten foods most subject to fraud. After olive oil, fish and organic foods come milk, grains, honey and maple syrup, coffee and tea, spices (such as saffron and chili powder), wine, and certain fruit juices.

The list was based on academic studies (1), police records and industry consultations. The draft report does not say why olive oil came first.

### **Findings include cross-border fraud hard to penalize**

Among other findings in the report are that:

- the key characteristics of food fraud are: 1) non-compliance with food law and/or misleading the consumer, 2) which is done intentionally and 3) for reasons of financial gain. Different types of food fraud include adulteration, substitution, tampering and counterfeiting;
- current E.U. laws largely focus on food safety thus food fraud goes largely undetected, especially when there are no public health or food safety issues;
- recent fraud cases include the marketing of ordinary flour as organic flour, of battery cage eggs as organic eggs, of road salt as food salt, and of horsemeat as beef, and the use of methanol-contaminated alcohol in spirits;
- jurisdiction issues often prevent successful prosecution of fraudulent food business operators operating across E.U. borders;
- whistle-blowers are key in uncovering food fraud and need support.

### **Calls for bigger fines, strategic policing**

Among the recommendations are:

- more systematic collection of data on fraud cases;
- that official controls focus not only on food safety issues, but also on preventing fraud;
- a move from an “administrative and veterinary” approach to a policing one, based on risk-profiling and the experience of the Danish Food Administration’s ‘flying squad’ and of the Arma dei Carabinieri and the Guardia di Finanza in Italy;
- a legal onus on food business operators to report food fraud cases;
- sanctions of at least double the amount of the economic advances sought through the food fraud.

### **Focus on food safety only allows fraud to thrive**

De Lange said that while public health came first, a one-sided focus on it by the European Commission and the E.U. Member States had allowed other cases of food fraud to pass under the radar.

She said a new definition of, and approach, to food fraud was needed.

“Only if the countries and the E.U., the government and industry, work together can we make a stand against food fraud,” she said.

#### Reference

(1) particularly “Defining the Public Health Threat of Food Fraud”, Spink, J, and Moyer, DC in: Journal of Food Science, 2011, Volume 75 (Number 9), p. 57-63.)

---

#### Sources:

[Draft report on the food crisis, fraud in the food chain and the control thereof, Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety](#)

[Press release, Esther de Lange \(CDA\), “Aanpak voedsel fraude over andere boeg gooien”, 18-10-2013](#)

[“Olive Oil, Fish Top EU Food Fraud List”, ABC News, October 18, 2013](#)