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INDEPENDENT

Commission thinking doing more harm than good say food producers

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Commission will damage small businesses.

Failure by the European Commission to properly think through a common policy on food labelling will damage small businesses, say industry representatives.

By only taking into account the “so-called” view of consumers, the Commission is instead only confusing European citizens, who will be subject to an abundance of information printed on food packaging.

“Because the consumer is regarded as the main pillar of EU society, it is this so-called view that is considered the most important one”, says Ludger Fischer, of the SME representative body UEAPME. “But the information is not always easy to understand, and the labelling requirements wanted by the Commission will not be able to inform better, just confuse”.

The wider viewpoint, such as that expressed by industry, is not being properly taken into account by the Commission, who want a food labelling proposal issued as soon as possible. The arguments are just not seen by the Commission, continues Fischer, who says the Commission “only want to take into account what the member states tell us”.

“It is as if just one person expresses a need to be informed, it then becomes part of legislation. That ‘people need to know’ is not a real argument. It just seems as if one consumer says it, it becomes a ‘demand’”.

The Commission’s plans, which are to extend to packaged food, will require food packages to carry labels carrying details such as health information and country of origin.

But, says Fischer, there already exists a mutual agreement throughout Europe that all European food is safe. There is also no differentiation made between consumers living in different geographical areas. “Those living in very cold climates need far higher levels of fats than in warmer places. Those living or working hard in very hot places need far more salt.”

“This sort of thinking does not appear to enter the heads of those who design complex regulations”.

The proposal is due to be discussed in Parliament before the summer recess.