

## **ENVI : ADOPTION OF THE NITRITE / NITRATE OBJECTION**

### **Michele Rivasi: "Suppressing nitrite in cured meats is a way to take concrete action to prevent colorectal cancer"**



The Nitrite objection tabled by Green MEP Michele Rivasi was adopted today by the European Parliament's ENVI Committee (+42 / -36 / o9). The aim was to block the Commission's inadequate proposal to set new limits on the use of the food additives nitrite and nitrate, which are known to cause carcinogenic compounds in processed meat and charcuterie. These new, lower limits were still insufficient to provide real protection for consumer health. For this reason, Michele Rivasi preferred to exercise the European Parliament's right of veto against the proposed decision. Michele Rivasi is calling on the Commission to adopt a common position banning these food additives, which have been identified as proven carcinogens, rather than setting permissive limits that would lead to a double standard of products "with" or "without" nitrite:

*"First and foremost, it is a good news for public health and cancer prevention. As we all know, and as I explain in my objection, there is no longer any public health reason to justify adding nitrate and nitrite to meat and cooked meats. Firstly, because these food additives are proven carcinogens. Secondly - and producers in the sector have been demonstrating this for several years now, particularly in France and Italy - it is possible to make ham and charcuterie without nitrite or nitrate. So the argument of technological necessity is no longer valid.*

*The adoption of this objection in ENVI is a clear signal to the Commission and to those Member States still reluctant to take the plunge: we have voted in favour of withdrawing these substances from the market, with accompanying measures to manage the transition. The Commission must listen to this and make a new proposal without delay. We need a Europe that really protects, rather than drawing up technical compromises that maintain the status quo without being really effective against cancer.*

*We can no longer be satisfied with inaction. That's why I would also like to warmly welcome the majority of ENVI colleagues and political advisors who have followed me on this objection. The next step will be to adopt this objection in plenary."*

## Context and additional details



### What is this objection ?

Michele Rivasi (Greens/EFA) notified en ENVI on 14th June her draft motion for a resolution objecting to the Commission Regulation (RPS D089496) amending Annex II to Regulation (EC) No 1333/2008 and the Annex to Commission Regulation (EU) No 231/2012 as regards the food additives nitrites (E 249-250) and nitrates (E 251-252).

Discussed le 26 juin in ENVI, Michele Rivasi's nitrite / nitrate objection was adopted on Tuesday 27th June (42 + / 36 - / 9 O). The plenary vote is scheduled for July, before the deadline of 2 August 2023 for the European Parliament and the Council to oppose the Commission's proposal.

### Why make an objection?

For many years now, the chemical reactions between nitrate additives and the components of meat (in particular iron) present in cured and cooked meats have been the focus of attention because of the risk of cancer.

The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) of the World Health Organisation (WHO), on the basis of more than 800 studies, classifies cured meats as proven carcinogens (Group 1: "definitely carcinogenic to humans"). Decided in 2015, this classification means that scientists have definite evidence of carcinogenicity in humans. Along with alcohol, cured meats are the only food group to be classified in this category. The IARC's final report, published in 2018, merely confirmed the conclusions of the World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF) and the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR), which warned as early as 2007 that consumption of charcuterie significantly increased the risk of cancer. The WHO considers that each 50-gram portion of charcuterie consumed every day increases the risk of colorectal cancer by 18%.

The danger posed by nitrated meat has been recognised by the European Commission, which has agreed that Denmark should not transpose Directive 2006/52/EC into national law with regard to the use of nitrites in certain meat products and that Denmark should maintain its current national legislation, which is more restrictive in this area. In 2010, the Commission acknowledged that " it is recognised that the presence of nitrites in meat products can give rise to the formation of nitrosamines, which have been found to be carcinogenic".

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The argument of MEP's Michele Rivasi is based on the fact that these thresholds, although lowered, do not prevent the formation of carcinogenic compounds. This proposal echoes EFSA, but the EFSA's 2023 opinion is not a full picture, missing for example the impact of other reaction products of nitrosating agents, such as nitrosothiols and nitrosylheme, and omitting to include S-nitro compounds and M-nitro compounds without any justification. Moreover, the French food safety agency (ANSES) confirmed an association between the risk of colorectal cancer and exposure to nitrites and nitrates and recommended reducing the use of these additives to levels that are as low as reasonably achievable (ALARA).

### What are the proposals of this objection ?

This objection call for a ban on the addition of nitrate and nitrite to cured meat as the "technological need" argument is no longer valid. On a voluntary and non-binding basis, part of the agri-food sector has been able to implement added nitrite-free conservation solutions, while complying with sanitary marketing obligations protecting consumers against bacteriological risks . It is now possible to produce cured meat products without using nitrate additives. In France, a majority of industrial producers - Herta, Fleury Michon, Brocéliande, Madrange (Cooperl group), Salaisons Roches Blanches, André Bazin, the distributor brands of various chains - have over the last three years introduced products without nitrate additives.

The Italian traditional dry-cured ham (Parma ham) shows a stable bright red color that is achieved without the use of nitrite and/or nitrate; whereas since 1993, its producers have been committed to using no food additives (nitrite, nitrate, coloring, artificial flavoring, etc.) and the sector including 140 producers delivers 8 to 9 million Parma hams every year, without creating health risks for consumers or increasing the number of cases of botulism.