

WGP-26 thematic session on access to information

Information on product, food safety and public access to this information is regulated by the national legislation in Georgia.

Pursuant to the obligations under the EU-Georgia Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) and in accordance with the EU respective regulations and recommendation, number of normative acts has been approved by the government in this direction.

Within the process of approximation to the EU acquis and other international legislative norms, the national legislation aims to ensure, among others, that:

- necessary, reliable and complete information is given to the consumer that enables him/her to make right choice;
- consumers' economic interests are protected and they have a possibility to make a free choice;
- labeling rules are defined and the state control is established;
- relation between business operators, state control bodies and consumers are regulated; etc.

Main tool to inform the public regarding the food is a labeling system that defines all required information, including mandatory ones, as well as permissions and prohibitions.

Name of product, list of ingredients, food additives (if any), country of origin, manufacturer, packager, distributor, name, address and a party of the importer/exporter, date of issue and expire date, and storage instructions are mandatory. Also, labeling of food products for placing on the market, defining as "bio", "eco", "organic", "ecologically clean" provide information to the consumers on healthy food product. According to the national legislation, information which could give rise some doubt about the safety of similar foods, as well as the information using comparative and superlative words and phrases such as "beneficial", "for better health", "of high quality", etc., is prohibited.

In general, considering that new requirements are emerging in this direction, different innovation techniques are developed in the countries how to provide the public with product information more effectively and user-friendly. Along with these developments, a greenwashing, which has been around the world for many years, even is increasing. On the one hand, it can be considered as a good signal, indicating the growing demand on a "healthy" and "green" product, despite its higher price. On the other hand, it is a challenge in misleading the consumers that requires effective measures to protect them from the receiving incorrect information.

To meet this challenge it is necessary to have quite a good monitoring system including not only responsible government institutions, but civil society, NGO sector, media and all the population in the countries. At the same time, this challenge can be turned itself in a good opportunity to enhance co-operation between stakeholders, including the public.

Development of a proper monitoring system supports activities between different actors in various directions, such as:

- state agencies in their effective performance;
- operators in improving particular processes;
- commercial centers in checking precisely suitability of product; also,

- in reduction of inappropriate product in stock;
- in guarantee transparency of operators and their accountability towards society, etc.

Along with the regulations and monitoring, awareness raising activities should be carried out permanently for the main target groups, including:

- the public – to inform appropriate institutions on violations; to be sure that challenges can be met more effectively through their efforts; to have a sense of responsibility that their indifference might be cause a harm to others;
- business operators - think not only about their commercial benefits, but keep their own image as solid partners in protection of human life and consumer's interest.

Nowadays awareness on the benefits of a healthy product is quite high and demand on them gradually increasing in many countries, including Georgia. There is no provision in the national legislation offering incentives to the enterprises operating in this direction in Georgia. But observed growing interest on a healthy product encourages operators to produce such kind of good, as well as, supports to expand competitive environment to use or develop more tools to inform the public actively and effectively about “healthy” and/or “eco” product they produce.

With this regard it is very important to strengthen:

- cooperation at the international level between different stakeholders for sharing information on the best practices;
- efforts towards digitalization for easy access to product information;
- active collaboration with NGO sector for the additional monitoring;
- involvement of youth to benefit from new ideas and approaches that new generation has;
- media campaigners, which is considered as one of the effective tools for monitoring the food safety, information on product and awareness raising in these sphere.