

“SUITABLE FOR VEGANS”: THE EUROPEAN STANDARD ON VOLUNTARY LABELLING OF FOODS

The consumption of plant-based products is increasing and the market is becoming more and more attractive. Vegan trademarks and certifications are highly valued by producers and manufacturers, even those who do not produce exclusively plant-based food. Many companies which sell meat and dairy products are introducing plant-based product lines to the market, and we are seeing inaccuracies in product information and labelling on packaging. Consumers have the right to be informed in a transparent way in order to enable them to make choices that reflect their lifestyle or diet.

There is a legislative gap at the European level as far as the legal definition of a "vegan product" is concerned. There is no single clear and unequivocal definition. We know that a product is 100% vegetable if it does not contain components of animal origin (ingredients, additives or adjuvants).

But what does "vegan" exactly mean?

The working group led by Safe (Safe Food Advocacy Europe) has worked to define a minimum European standard to clarify the underlying concept of "vegan": a set of rules that together constitute the substantial meaning of the term "vegan". The participating organisations in the working group are all strictly vegan which ensures that the recommendation has come from a credible, reliable source and accurately reflects the needs of ethical vegans.

THE VEGAN ORGANIZATIONS CURRENTLY INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT ARE:

Associazione Vegani Italiani Onlus

Förderkreis Biozyklisch

Safe Food Advocacy Europe

The Vegan Society

Vegan France

VEGANOK

Vegetik

The term "vegan" not only indicates the absence of animal derivatives in a given product but clarifies the PRESENCE of minimum ethical requirements. All the participating organisations have worked together to achieve this goal and the official document was presented to the European Commission.

The working group first met in Bruxelles on 10th June 2015.

The position paper drafted by the Working Group to define food 'suitable for vegans' was officially sent by a group of 6 MEPs on 22nd February 2017.

The document was sent to the European Commission through the work of these 6 MEPs: Claude Turmes, Cornelia Ernst, Eleonora Evi, Dacina Octavia Sârbu, Marietje Schaak, Sirpa Pietikäinen.

Here are the contents of the official document signed by all organisations:

PRODUCTS SUITABLE FOR VEGANS: 3 BASIC RULES

As a minimum, to be eligible for consideration for labelling as 'suitable for vegans' a food needs to:



1. NOT contain ingredients of animal origin. Foods suitable for vegans DO NOT contain any ingredients of animal origin (including food additives, carriers, flavourings, enzymes) NOR any processing aids of animal origin that have been added or used during the manufacturing process, preparation, treatment or placing on the market of foods.



2. During manufacturing, preparation, treatment or placing on the market, involuntary cross contamination with products that do not comply with the requirements of the paragraph 1. can be admitted and is compatible with the vegan labelling of the product.



3. The operator under whose name or business name the food is marketed (or, if that operator is not established in the Union, the importer into the Union market) MUST NEITHER conduct NOR commission vivisection or testing on any animal of the food, nor of the ingredients or processing aids used. If the operator ceases such practices, their foods MAY then be eligible for consideration. The claim that a food is 'suitable for vegans' implies that, as far as possible and practicable, animals have not been used at any stage of the preparation of that food.

A food that is suitable for vegans will meet the requirements to be suitable for vegetarians.

Definition of Animal: an “animal” is any individual member of the Animal Kingdom that is any vertebrate or multicellular invertebrate.

As an intermediate step, a “No Ingredients from Animals” Standard could be considered, as set out in paragraph 1. This would significantly improve the provision of information, and would make it far less likely that consumers would be misled about the foods they are buying. Not only vegans, but also many other consumers such as vegetarians, those with religious beliefs around foods, and those with health conditions relating to food, would benefit from such a preliminary scheme.

