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German information policy criticised in connection with the EHEC epidemics

On 31 May, Dacian Cioloş, the EU Agriculture Commissioner, criticised the German emergency management in the context of the spreading of E. coli (EHEC) bacteria in Germany. The local health ministry in Hamburg wrongly identified Spanish cucumbers as the source of the epidemics, which led to a slump on the vegetables market in Europe and inflicted losses of 200 million euros weekly on Spanish farmers. Chancellor Angela Merkel promised support for the payment of compensation to Spanish farmers from the EU budget.

The EHEC epidemics are another problem with contaminated food in Germany. In January this year, it was revealed that farm animals in several regions in Germany had been fed with feed containing carcinogenic dioxins, which the feed manufacturers were aware of. As a consequence of this scandal, over 5,000 farms were closed temporarily and 140,000 pigs were killed. Germany was also the scene of scandals concerning the trade in rottenmeat in the past (for example in 2007 and 2009). The services in charge of food market supervision were also blamed on those occasions.

In this case, the federal government has been criticised by both the German opposition and the governments of the other EU member states for providing information about the crisis too late and for releasing unverified data. For example, in effect of the epidemics, Russia imposed a ban on vegetable imports from the European Union. The EU commissioner for agriculture has promised that the farmers who have sustained losses may expect aid from the EU up to 150 million euros. <pop>