Dear colleagues,

- First I want to thank you for the invitation and for giving me the opportunity to present you an overview on the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed

- My name is David Trigo. I am scientific officer at the National Contact Point of the RASFF in Germany, the Federal Office for Consumer protection and food safety (BVL).

- In the next 15 minutes I’ll try to give you an short overview on the RASFF, It’s aims, the members of the network, the communication channels and last but not least a view statistics with a short focus on spices.
First of all, what are the objectives of the system RASFF?

Already established in 1979 the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed was introduced to share information between the member states of the EU in cases where dangerous food or feed is detected on the market or at the boarders. This information shall enable the competent authorities to take appropriate measures and rapid action in order to protect the consumer.
The members of the network are the 28 member states of the European Union.

The EU COMMISSION itself,

the EFSA,

the EFTA Surveillance Authority (European Free Trade Association) Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway,

And Switzerland

In addition the are round about 60 third countries world wide directly connected to the system and have restricted access to the databank RASFF WINDOW.

These countries receive relevant information in cases where their products are concerned by a notification or distribution took place into their country. Additionaly they are able to response to rapid alerts (for example to transmit their outcome of investigations), too.

At this point I have to mention that the RASFF gives only access to the competent authorities in the member states. Consequently the information...
transmitted are strictly confidential and shall not be given to third parties.
The legal bases for the system are on European level the Reg (EC) No 178/2002 in particular Art. 50 (rapid alert system) and concerning feed Art. 29 of Reg. No 183/2005. In Reg 882/2004 we can find the basis for RASFF border rejection notifications.

Since 2011 we have got Reg. (EU) 16/2011 with implementing measures which gives definitions, precises the role of the Commission, defines the duties of the members, and the way how to exchange information with third countries and how the general public shall be informed of risks to human health on basis of Art. 10 of Reg 178/2002.

In addition the Commission published on their website the SOP’s for the RASFF which had been written by the members of the network. They complement the before mentioned RASFF regulations and give guidance and best practice for the operation of the system. I have to underline that this document is of course not legally binding!

As we have got a federal system in Germany it is necessary to „transfer“ the EU regulations to this governmental form.

Because of this we have got the general administrative regulation on the RASFF which is legally binding for the competent authorities only. It gives definitions. determines the responsibilities of the competent authorities of
the Länder and of the federal level.
The next slide gives you an overview on the communication channels respectively of the information flow in the RASFF.

In most cases the notifications are based whether on official controls on the market, on company own checks or on border controls. In some cases the notification can also be based on media monitoring or on information provided by third countries or international organisations like the World Health Organisation for example via INFOSAN (International Food Safety Authorities Network).

In Germany the competent authorities of the Länder create the notification, transmit it to the national contact point, which transfer it to the Eu Commission. The European commission validates the notification and transmit it to the member states/third countries concerned. Possible feedback (so called follow up) to notifications is transmitted the same way. Additionally the Commission enters all notifications into a database (RASFF Portal) and once a year publishes an annual report on the RASFF.
In the RASFF there are three main categories of notifications.

First the Alert notifications which concern food/feed which is on the market presenting a serious risk and requires rapid action in a member country.

Secondly the Information notification which can be divided into two sub categories. Into information for follow up .......... and information for attention

Thirdly the border rejection notification where food/feed was refused entry in the European union, because of risk to human health and so on.
Content of RASFF notifications

To be useful for the competent authorities in the affected countries some basic informations should be available:

Consequently several informations are obligatory like

1. Type of hazard (including risk analysis conc. if it is serious or not)
2. Product description like name of the prod., lot number, BBD
3. the measures taken whether by the business operator or the competent authority – which simplifies the enforcement of measures in the affected countries by the competent authorities
4. Distribution lists to facilitate the tracing of the goods

The notification form should also be accompagnied by further documents like reports, pictures, withdrawal or recall letters, CVED etc.

Which facilitate the identification of the concerned goods on site.
Just to give you an impression of the RASFF application resp. form I made a screen shot of the used online application interactive RASFF which shows you the user friendly combination of dropdown menus, free text parts and autofill functions which simplify the creation of a notification.
At the beginning I already mentioned that the content of the notifications are confidential and the details like names of the food business operators, product names etc are only visible for the competent authorities. Nevertheless, based on article 10 of reg. 178/2002, the general public should be appropriately informed of the nature of the risk to health.

For this purpose the commission gives access to the RASFF via the database RASFF Portal to the public. This web access allows the user to search for notifications via a search mask, where you can enter concrete notification numbers, products, product categories etc. En plus you can export the result of your search to several data formats like Excel, XML in order to e.g. analyse them.
To give you an impression of how many notifications are transmitted in the RASFF I created this chart by using the data of the RASFF Portal. It shows you the development in the number of notification from 2012 to 2015.

In 2015 3049 original notifications (775 Alerts, 887 Informations and 1387 border rejections) were created.

In general we can say that approximately round about 8000 notification (original notifications plus the follow up notifications) are transmitted per year via the system.
By having a look at the hazards mentioned in the RASFF we found „3 Top“ categories:

Pathogenic micro-organisms
Mycotoxins
And pesticide residues
When we look at the food category herbs and spices and the hazards found in these products in particular the same hazards are Top 3

Pathogenic microorganisms (mostly Enterobacteriaceae (Salmonella spp.); but also Bacillus cereus

Pesticide residues

And thirdly continuous burner: mycotoxins

But what is remarkable, and in my point of view an indicator for the functioning of the system, is that the findings of pathogenic MO and pesticide residues since 2012 are decreasing. One possible explanation maybe that the food business operator and competent authorities became aware of the problems and took appropriate measures to limit these hazards.
Finally I’d like to summerize the bases for the success of the RASFF

Firstly the huge amount of experience from 30 years in operation

Secondly the steady improvements made like the use of an user friendly online application and data banks

Thirdly the legal bases underpint by SOP’s

Fourthly the clear structure of communication

And last but not least the elementary rule of confidentiality which promote the acceptance of the system e.g. by the food business operators
Thank you for your attention

Kontakt: 104@bvl.bund.de