The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Onishchenko Seeks Quality Control System for Ukrainian Products

By Lena Smirnova

August 17, 2013



In the midst of an escalating trade war between the former Soviet republics, Russia's chief sanitary inspector, Gennady Onishchenko, attributed the ban on Ukrainian chocolate imports to the neighboring government's failure to fulfill last year's promises and set up a strong quality control system for food products.

Last week, Russia introduced harsh risk prevention measures for all Ukrainian imports that are interpreted by some observers as an effective ban on imported products. Some Ukrainian politicians have attributed the move to the Kremlin's dissatisfaction with Ukraine's reluctance to join the Russia-led Customs Union and its attempts to forge closer ties with the EU.

Discussions on the need for a quality control system took place in August 2012 after Russia had banned Ukrainian cheeses. But while the cheeses returned to the Russian market, the underlying problems with food safety and quality have remained, Onishchenko said Friday

after meeting with Ukraine's agriculture minister, Mykola Prysyazhnyuk.

"Ukraine has fallen into the same trap as last year," Onishchenko said. "The things we discussed today don't reveal anything new. We're repeating conversations that we had a year ago."

The Federal Consumer Protection Agency banned chocolates made at the four Ukrainian factories of the country's largest chocolate producer Roshen on July 29 on the basis that they did not satisfy quality standards.

During Friday's meeting, the two sides agreed to create a working group that would meet twice a year to harmonize food standards. Onishchenko added that the Russian agency would now inspect production plants in Ukraine and if satisfied with the findings, would resume chocolate imports to the country. Every shipment would be scanned for quality in the early stages.

The agency will also accredit five Ukrainian laboratories that will carry out systematic quality control checks of food products before they cross the border into Russia.

"Overall, we are happy with the discussions," Prysyazhnyuk said. "I am convinced that in a short time all the actions we set out to take will be taken and a decision about the confectionary products will be made."

Onishchenko emphasized that there are no safety concerns about Roshen's products, but that they were banned because the actual ingredients did not match what was listed on the packaging.

The conflict over Ukrainian cheese that unfolded a year ago was similar. Russian retailers were asked to pull the cheese off the shelves because the ingredients allegedly contained large amounts of vegetable fats, rather than animal-based fats, as stated on the packages.

The agency would not have any issues with the cheese if the manufacturers openly stated that it was not cheese, but a "cheese product" and listed the proper ingredients, Onishchenko said.

Without such statements, the manufacturers' actions were deemed to be misleading to consumers.

Contact the author at e.smirnova@imedia.ru

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2013/08/17/onishchenko-seeks-quality-control-system-for-ukrainian-products-a26850