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The online market of food products: new opportunities for consumers, new challenges for the control system

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The online marketplace for food products is continually expanding and all types of food and beverages can be purchased over the internet. Advantages for both retailers and consumers are evident: for retailers it permits a virtual platform to target particular segments of the market, while for the consumers it offers the convenient option to shop whenever they like without leaving home, having access to any kind of products worldwide.

However, in comparison with the electronic commerce of non-foods, higher logistic requirements are necessary for online market of foodstuffs, such as the maintenance of the cold chain during the transport, the presence of appropriate labeling and information to the consumers, and the use of hygienic packaging. A major problem related to the online food market is that these products can easily circumvent the direct controls of the competent authority differently from what happens for traditional food markets. Therefore, the safety of the food sold on internet and the conformity with regulatory norms are a matter of concern.

The aim of this project is to collect information on the online food shopping service with particular emphasis on the food safety aspects, through: an inventory of the different kind of channels (e.g.: single retailers / large scale platforms) offering online food; the study of the microbiological and physicochemical characteristics of online purchased foodstuffs once delivered; the evaluation of the labeling and packaging of these products in the context of EU guidelines and regulations.