

France



The cutting-edge legaliser in the European Union

written by: S. Stolzenburg
(Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg)

revised by: Daniela Peine and Axel Saalbach
translated by: Axel Saalbach and B. Wiese

Daforto GbR

Hohmannstraße 7

04129 Leipzig

Germany

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In the field of the sale of stevia, France used the same regulations as the rest of the European Union until 2009: it was forbidden to sell stevia as a food. In 2006, a man named Dr. Joël Perret of the small stevia distributor "Greensweet" filed a petition on legalising stevia as a sweetener in his country. The petition was addressed to the "Agence Française de Sécurité Sanitaire des Aliments" (AFSSA) which is responsible for examining the aspects of hygiene and health effects of products and for the subsequent decisions of whether a product is appropriate to be marketed or not. Joël Perret's request was assisted by a recommendation of the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA). The JECFA examined stevia and decided that a daily intake of steviol glycosides in the amount of up to 2 milligrammes per kilogramme of body weight would be acceptable and had no influence on human health.¹

Based on the JECFA recommendation, the French government decided to ease the restrictions on stevia and was the first country of the European Union to do so. One component of the stevia leaves, more precisely rebaudioside A, with 97 percent purity, was legalised to be sold as a sweetener.² This enactment was published on the 7th of September 2009, and thereby became *res judicata*.³ The French government enacted the legalisation to be tentative for two years, since the European Union allows its members to legalise food additives which oppose European law for only this amount of time. It is not known why France narrowed its decision to rebaudioside A.⁴ Off-the-record sources guess that France expects the whole European Union to make its own decision on the sale of stevia shortly, so France would not need to take further steps.

Already in September 2009, which means shortly after the decision by the French department of health, the Swedish sweetener manufacturer "Granular AB" and its marketing director Florence Berglund announced that they would start to sell stevia based sweeteners in France as soon as possible.⁵

1 JECFA [2006]

2 AFSSA [2009]

3 Legifrance [2009]

4 Halliday, J. [2009a]

5 Halliday, J. [2009b]

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