



Dr. Stefania Marrone DG AGRI
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Water in food

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JRC-IRMM

- **Control of water in poultrymeat**
- **Action of European Commission**

European Commission and Food Control

Poultry processing

- In the processing of poultry water is used for hygienically reasons and to enhance the plucking.
- Water is also used for the chilling methods (air-chilling, air-water spray and immersion chilling) to achieve frozen products. There is a rest of extraneous water left in the carcasses and cuts.
- Member States agreed upon limits for the water content depending on the chilling method, to restrict the amount of external water in the product. These limits were forced into action by Commission Regulation (EEC) No 1538/91.

Commission Regulation (EEC) N° 1538/91 introducing details rules for implementing Council Regulation (EEC) No 1906/90 on certain marketing standards for poultry

The marketing standards for poultrymeat established by the above Regulations point out that the water contents authorised under these Regulations are based on the following principles:

Regulation 1538/91-maximum water content

- Article 9 of Regulation 1538/91 lists methods for chilling poultry carcasses: air chilling, air spray chilling, which uses air and water, or immersion chilling.
- The Regulation establishes maximum extraneous water contents depending on the chilling method used and the measuring method (between 2% and 6% for cuts, according to Annex VIa, point 6.4, of Regulation 1538/91, and between 1.5% and 7% for whole carcasses, according to Annexes V and VI of Regulation 1538/91).

Regulation 1538/91-control implementation

- To implement the control, checks have to be carried out by the national authorities (food control institutes) and be reported to the Coordination Board (made by two institutions of European Commission, DG AGRI and the JRC-IRMM, and three national reference laboratories). This scheme represents the efficient hierarchy of control between Member States.

Regulation 1538/91-consequences

- If checks carried out by the competent authorities show that these limits are exceeded, the products may not be placed on the market unless the label indicates “water content exceeds EC limits”. In any event, the Regulation states that extraneous water must be “technically unavoidable”.

A totally different ballgame



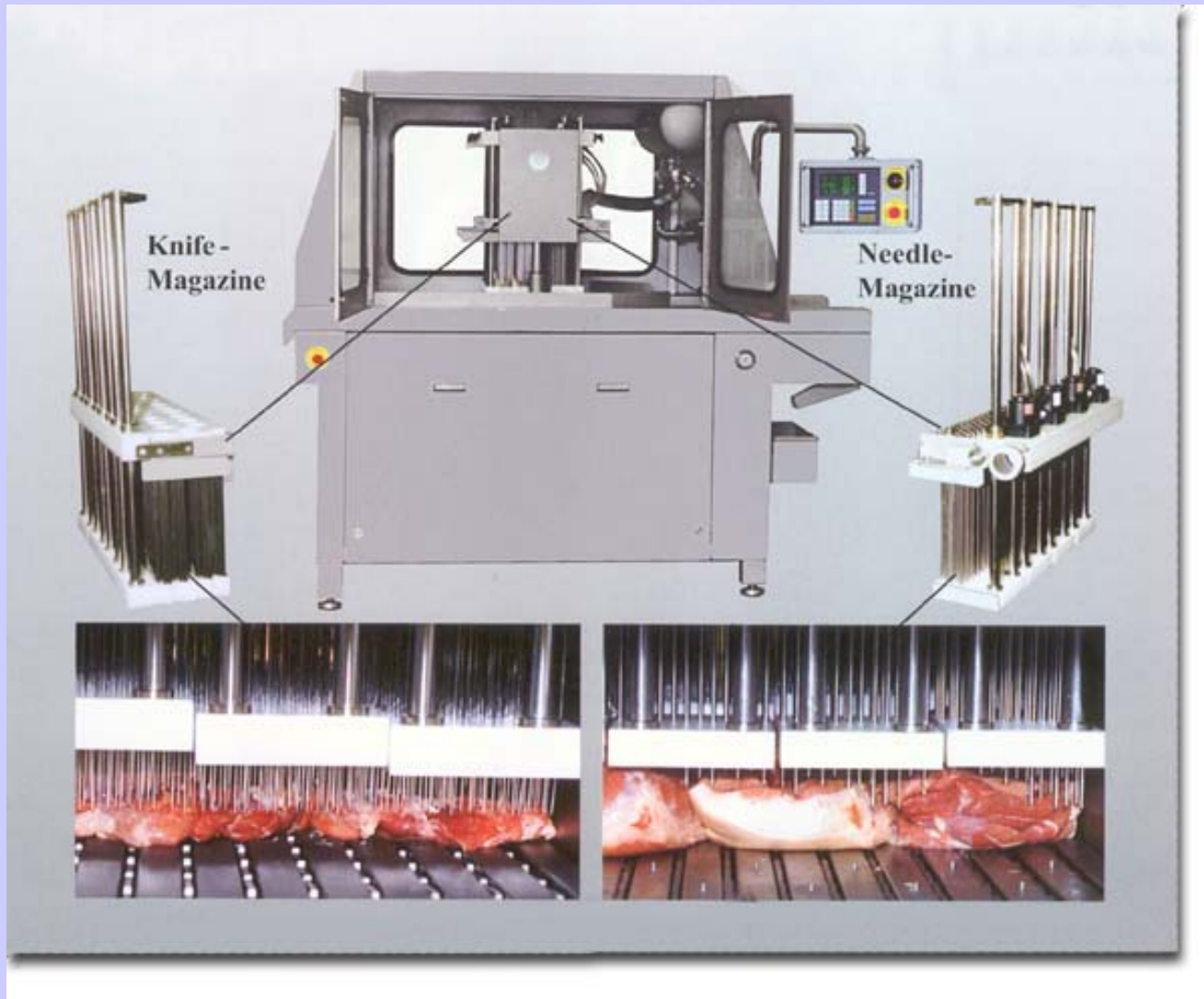
A totally different ballgame

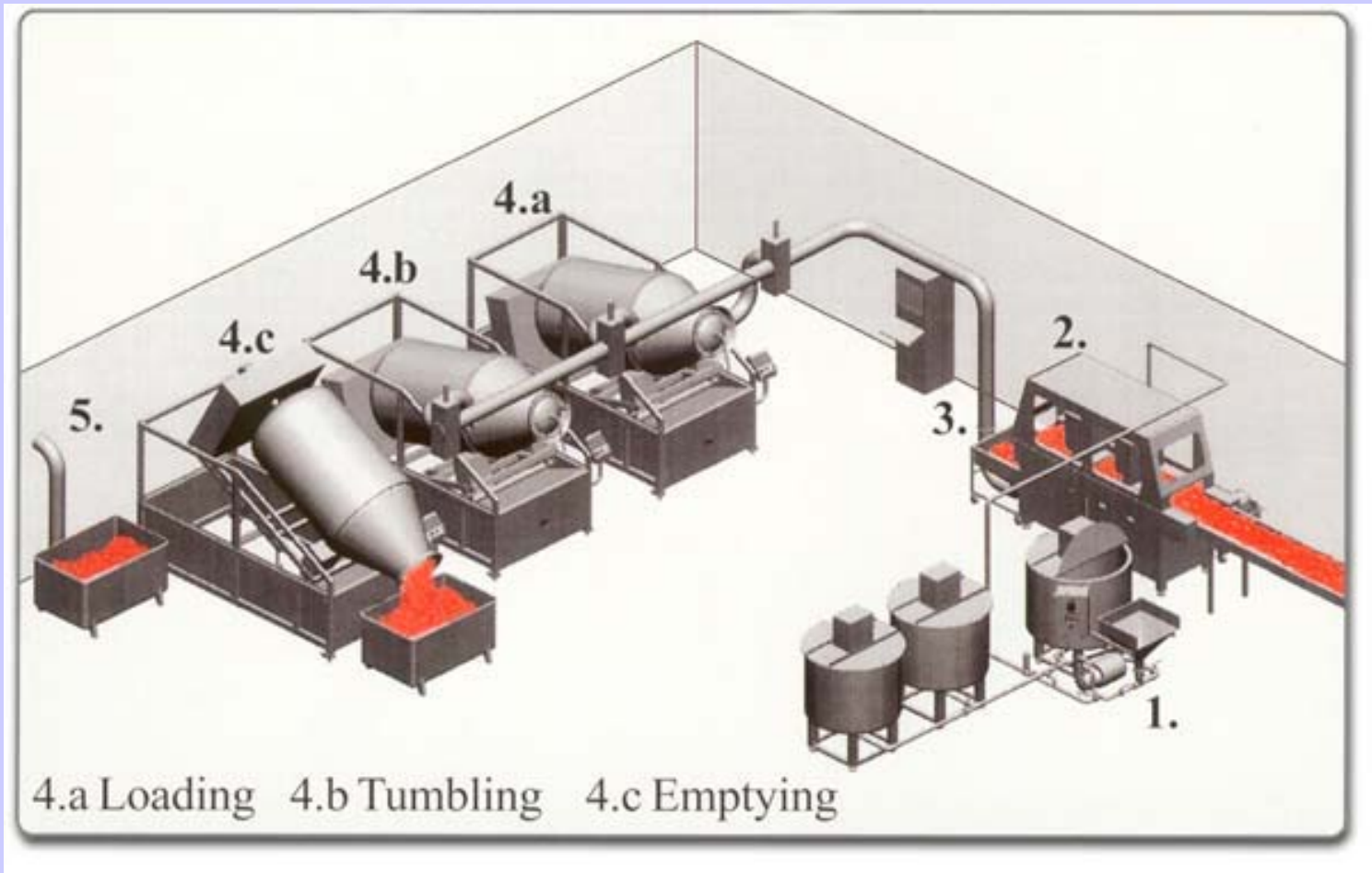
- In 2001 and 2003, the Irish and United Kingdom food safety authorities, in the course of their inspections of fresh poultrymeat (primarily, products marketed as “chicken fillets” intended for the catering industry), detected the presence of water and of water retention agents in the meat. In some cases the added water constituted more than 30% of the end product.

A totally different ballgame

- The water retention agents used included hydrolysed proteins from pigs, poultry or cattle, caseins (milk proteins), plant proteins, salt, etc. These water retention agents and the added water had been introduced into the meat by various techniques, including injection and tumbling.

Type of equipment used by manufacturers of chicken breast with added water





Commission paper SEC(2004) 1130

- The Commission clarified the fact that this practice of adding water and water retention agents to poultrymeat is fraudulent on several levels in the working paper SEC(2004) 1130.

Commission paper SEC(2004) 1130

This practice in particular :

- 1. Contravenes the provisions of Regulation (EC) No 853/2004 laying down specific hygiene rules for food of animal origin, which prohibits the placing on the market as fresh meat of poultry meat which has been treated specifically to promote water retention (Annex III, Section II, Chapter VII).**

Commission paper SEC(2004) 1130

2. It enables the weight of the end product to be artificially increased through the addition of water and water retention agents and thus misleads the consumer since it results in products being placed on the market with the appearance of fresh meat in contravention with the rules applying to meat products and meat preparation.

Commission paper SEC(2004) 1130

3. It involves the placing on the market of products which breach the food labelling legislation.

The Commission's position

1. In view of the persistence of these practices, the Commission considered it necessary to draw attention to the relevant provisions of the legislation in force.
2. The Commission notes that the ban on the use of water retention agents for the purpose of adding water to poultrymeat is apparently not being fully respected by all operators concerned.

The Commission's position

3. It therefore calls on Member States to step up their checks relating to these practices so as to ensure effective compliance with this ban in respect of all fresh poultrymeat, including poultrymeat intended for the production of preparations or processed products.
4. The Commission has also asked the Food and Veterinary Office of the Directorate-General for Health and Consumer Protection to carry out inspections in the Member States in 2004 in order to investigate this banned practice.

Thank you for your attention!

