

THE IARC AND RED MEAT: ACTUAL RISKS AND RISKS INDICATED BY MEDIA.

The news, **if it was true**, would be sensational : in IARC's opinion (the prestigious International Agency for Research on Cancer), red meat is as dangerous as tobacco smoking or asbestos fibers.

In reality, IARC wrote (press release, n. 240 of 26 October 2015) that:

- Red meat was classified as *probably carcinogenic to humans*; the so called Group 2A
- Processed meat was classified as *carcinogenic to humans*; the so-called Group 1, which includes also tobacco smoking, alcoholic drinks, exposure to asbestos fibers.

As we will see below, the real meaning of IARC's statements is completely different from the interpretation given by the media. In fact, IARC does not claim (on the opposite, it explicitly denies) that red meat is as dangerous as tobacco smoking or asbestos fibers. I am convinced that the vast majority of media incurred a big misunderstanding, because of its lack of comprehension of the actual content and real meaning of IARC assessments. I believe instead that there has not been enough space for an in-depth analysis of the implication of IARC's assessments, which are of great importance for "Made in Italy".

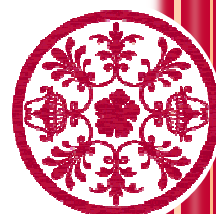
THE ACTUAL CONTENT OF IARC'S ASSESSMENTS

First of all, IARC never wrote that red meat should be included in Group 1, the one where also tobacco smoking, alcoholic drinks and exposure to asbestos fibers are included. Red meat, as said, is contained in Group 2A. This group comprises also *indoor emissions from household combustion of wood fuel and occupational exposure as a hairdresser or barber*. Only processed meat is included among substances listed in Group 1, together with tobacco smoking, alcoholic drinks and exposure to asbestos fibers.

Secondly, including processed meat in the same group as tobacco smoking or asbestos **does not mean that the risks** associated with each of them **are equal**. IARC itself explains this in its "IARC Monographs Questions and Answers", available at this link: <http://www.iarc.fr/en/media-centre/iarcnews/pdf/MonographsQ&A.pdf>, if only one has the patience to read it.

On the contrary, a careful reading of IARC assessments leads to the conclusion that **the risk associated with meat consumption – even with processed meat – is by far less significant than risks posed by tobacco smoking or asbestos**. Note the following IARC's statements:

1. "Processed meat has been classified in the same category as causes of cancer such as tobacco smoking and asbestos (IARC Group 1, carcinogenic to humans), but this does **NOT** mean that they are **all equally dangerous**. The IARC classifications describe the **strength of**



the scientific evidence about an agent being a cause of cancer, rather than assessing the level of risk”.

2. “For an individual, the **risk** of developing colorectal cancer because of their consumption of **processed meat** remains **small**, but this risk increases with the **amount** of meat consumed”
3. “Red meat has nutritional value. Therefore, these results are important in enabling governments and international regulatory agencies to conduct risk assessments, in order to ... provide the best possible dietary recommendations”

IARC’S ASSESSMENT AND “MADE IN ITALY” HAM

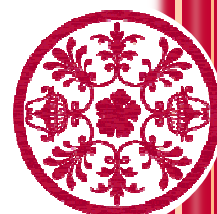
However IARC document is neither conclusive, nor sufficiently precise, concerning an issue of primary importance for “Made in Italy”. **Should Italian DOP (Protected Designation of Origin) hams be considered “processed meat” and therefore included in Group 1?**

IARC, listing processes consistent with the definition of processed meat, mention also “salting”. It is therefore claimed that typical Italian hams should also be considered processed meat. In reality, “salting” is described by the IARC as a process which serves, in some cases and together with others, to “transform” the meat during an industrial process. Even a superficial knowledge of the long – and definitively “artisanal” - preparation of Italians DOP hams is sufficient to understand that in this case we are not talking about an industrial processing, despite the presence of the “salting” phase.

Furthermore we can assume that the majority of epidemiological studies on which IARC conclusions are based concern meat which has undergone a proper industrial process, not products such as Italian DOP ham.

This aspect should be adequately investigated from a technical and legal point of view – possibly challenging the IARC’s opinion - to guarantee an appropriate safeguard of the “diversity” of our best traditional products.

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