

COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE BRIEFING NOTE

FOOD LABELLING



The Voice of the Countryside

Westminster Hall Debate

“Future of food labelling” (Julian Sturdy, Con, York Outer)

Tuesday 14 March, 11:00-11:30am

Background

- The Countryside Alliance has campaigned for better food labelling for many years, including our ‘Honest, Fair, Simple’ campaign which we launched in 2011.
- There is wide spread support for British farming amongst consumers at home and abroad. However, British farmers will only benefit from this if food labelling is clear and not misleading, giving consumers the ability and confidence to ‘buy British’.
- Food labelling is not just important for farmers and producers, but the wider rural economy including the important tourist sector. Local food and drink represents a major component of tourism expenditure in rural areas and EU protected product names must be maintained and developed post-Brexit to support this.
- Being part of the Single Market means the law in this area has been determined largely by the EU. Improvements have been made by the EU Commission but these have not gone far enough. The UK Government should use the opportunity of leaving the EU to develop a comprehensive food labelling policy, including the extension of mandatory country of origin labelling.

The importance of food and farming

- The food and farming sector is nationally important, contributing over £108 billion a year for the UK economy and employing one in eight people. It is particularly important for our most rural areas where farming is often central to the economic and social life of the community as well as playing a vital role in conservation.
- UK agriculture underpins our food manufacturing sector by providing over 60 percent of the produce and raw materials involved. This is a vitally important sector, sustaining 3.8 million jobs and contributing over £21 billion (GVA) to the economy every year. Food manufacturing is nationally important and benefits communities across the UK, although it has particular importance in many rural areas. The UK’s new relationship with the EU and any new trade deals with non-EU countries will be vital to the success or otherwise of food manufacturing in this country.
- The ability of the UK to produce its own food must not be undermined. In a volatile world, food security remains important and the ability to produce food domestically must be safeguarded. Food security should not be mistaken for self-sufficiency as the UK will continue to import food and agricultural produce, just as it will continue to export. Food

security will be achieved by ensuring fair competition for UK farmers and producers in EU and non-EU markets and food labelling has an important role to play in this.

The importance of food labelling

- The continuing lack of clarity on food labelling, particularly country of origin, remains an issue of concern to British farmers, producers and consumers alike.
- Without clear labelling identifying the country of origin, and other important information, British farmers and producers are not able to take advantage of the desire amongst consumers to 'buy British'.
- The lack of mandatory country of origin food labelling continues to place British farmers at a disadvantage when much of their competition comes from producers in countries, which are not subject to such robust animal welfare legislation and standards and the associated costs. For example higher welfare standards were introduced in the UK for pig production however pork products continue to be imported into the UK and labelled as 'British' despite originating in countries with lower welfare standards, even within the EU.
- The 2013 horsemeat scandal highlighted the vital importance of clear food labelling, particularly with respect to processed meat products. The introduction of legislation making it a legal requirement for the country of origin to be included on processed meat and products containing meat would support British farmers and provide consumers with greater choice and confidence.
- Tourism in rural areas has huge potential to support local farmers and producers. One of the main growth areas is food and drink tourism, which can generate a year round tourism 'offer' and represents a major component of tourism expenditure in rural areas. Promoting local food and drink as part of a tourism strategy can deliver additional economic and environmental benefits; including supporting diversification of farms and producer businesses, creating additional demands for skills and training, and reducing food miles and carbon emissions.
- Total tourism expenditure on local food and drink has been estimated by Defra to total £2.6 billion across England in 2013, of which £1.4 billion was estimated to be spent in rural areas. This suggests that tourists account for 50 percent of local food and drink sales in rural areas (comprising 5 percent of sales in retailers and 63 percent in food service outlets). This expenditure is estimated to support 81,000 jobs and contributes £1.5 billion (GVA) to the rural economy.

The opportunities from Brexit

- Our new relationship with the EU and any new trade deals with non-EU countries must protect market equality by ensuring that imports are produced to UK standards and product labelling should clearly distinguish country of origin and production methods in a way that is clear and not misleading.
- The UK produces some of the best food in the world, with the highest standards of safety and animal welfare. Our new relationship with the EU, and new trade deals with non-EU countries, must protect these standards and allow our produce to be promoted globally and compete on the basis of quality.

- The EU has established mandatory country of origin labelling for beef, lamb, pork and poultry. However, this does not include foods where the meat is processed or an ingredient, such as sausages and ready meals. Therefore it remains the case that sausages made in the UK using Danish pork can still legally be labelled as 'British'. The introduction of legislation making it a legal requirement for the country of origin to be included on food containing meat would help support farmers by providing UK consumers with greater choice and confidence.
- The EU Commission has resisted calls to extend mandatory country of origin labelling to milk and dairy products on the grounds that such a move would be too costly and bureaucratic. We believe that consumers would be willing to pay more for this information and we would welcome legislation extending mandatory country of origin labelling to these products, building on the work that has already been done under voluntary schemes. The UK Government should also explore options for extending mandatory food labelling to other foods such as cereals, fruit and vegetables.
- The UK has a wide range of regional and speciality food producers which should be promoted at home and abroad. The quality and authenticity of these products is often recognised in their labelling, such as 'Lakeland Herdwick' lamb and mutton, from purebred Herdwick sheep in the Lake District. For producers, these labels help to add value to their products, which often have high costs of production, and ensure their standards can be maintained. The UK currently has a total of 73 products that benefit from protected geographical or traditional status under EU law and the UK Government should look to develop its own system of legal recognition for product names outside of the EU.
- The UK Government must ensure that the three existing types of EU protected product names: Protected Geographical Indication (Scotch Beef), Protected Designation of Origin (Lakeland Herdwick), and Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (Traditional Gloucestershire Old Spot Pork), continue to have the same level of protection both in UK and EU markets. It is also important that this protection is included in any new trade deals with non-EU countries, which may involve working to develop trademark protection in countries that UK producers export to.

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