

What's in a label?

To open this edition's packaging and labelling feature, Ron Alalouff reports on the move towards clearer labelling on animal welfare and farming methods.

Meat products should be subject to similar labelling rules that apply to eggs, according to animal welfare and food charities.

The Labelling Matters campaign – supported by Compassion in World Farming (CIWF), the RSPCA, the Soil Association and Eurogroup for Animals – is calling for labelling on meat and dairy products to show the farming method used and conditions in which the animal was reared.

Eggs are required to be labelled according to how they have been produced – either cage-free or from caged hens. According to CIWF, since the introduction of mandatory method of production labelling in 2004, the UK production of cage-free eggs has increased from 31% to more than 50%.

According to the campaign, there is no legal requirement to label how animals farmed for meat and dairy were reared, with the exception of labels for eggs, and farming method labelling tends to be limited to premium products.

The campaign states that this does not give shoppers the information they need in order to make an informed purchasing decision and it is also unfair to farmers looking for a level playing field.

It adds: “We need a clear labelling law, like that which currently exists for eggs, extended to all meat and dairy products. This would allow animal welfare to be part of every shopping choice.”

Peter Stevenson of Compassion in World Farming told The Times that there should be consultation with the industry on

the precise terms used on labels. He favoured simple and clear wording that would be easily understood, such as ‘intensive indoor’ where animals are given the legal minimum space and a few objects to perch on or play with.

For pigs this standard would include the use of farrowing crates. ‘Higher welfare indoor’ would require more space and more enrichment, such as deep straw bedding.

However, this approach to labelling could become complicated. Pork labelled as ‘outdoor bred’ could come from pigs born to sows living outdoors, where some piglets spend four weeks with their mother outdoors and are then taken inside for 16 weeks before being slaughtered. ‘Outdoor reared’ pork could refer to pigs that spend about eight weeks outside and the next 12 weeks inside.

The Government made a commitment to clearer labelling in a consultation paper released in February on the future of food and farming after Brexit. For now, all industry can do is wait as the responses to this consultation are currently being considered. ▶

Making labels transparent

According to The Times, shoppers are “being deceived” by labels on meat products which show rural scenes while the meat itself comes from animals raised inside.

“Food labelling needs to be reformed,” Defra Secretary of State Michael Gove has commented.

“Consumers deserve better information. We need to be clearer in our labelling about where food comes from and how food is produced. Better information can help us make the right choices for health and for the environment.”



• Defra Secretary of State Michael Gove.

Food industry in voluntary pledge to cut plastic packaging



◀ **A** range of UK food businesses – including many of the major supermarkets – have signed up to eliminate unnecessary single-use plastic packaging by 2025.

The aim of the UK Plastics Pact is to achieve this target by redesigning and innovating packaging and using ‘alternative delivery methods’. If the pledge is adhered to, all plastic packaging will be reusable, recyclable or compostable by 2025.

In April, 42 businesses responsible for over 80% of the plastic packaging on products sold through UK supermarkets signed up to the pact. Amongst them are Asda, Marks & Spencer, Morrisons, Premier Foods, Sainsbury’s and Tesco, as well as plastic re-processors and packaging suppliers. Iceland supermarket specifically announced it will be removing plastic from all of its own brand packaging by the end of 2023.

“We are delighted to launch this pioneering national implementation initiative with WRAP in the UK,” said former record-breaking yachtswoman Ellen MacArthur, founder of the Ellen MacArthur Foundation. “This bold new pact will bring together businesses, policymakers and the public to create a circular economy for plastics that tackles the causes of plastics waste and pollution, not just the symptoms. Focusing

on innovation, better packaging design and end-of-use systems will not only generate long-term benefits for the environment but is also a huge economic opportunity.”

Without this new action, conservation charity WWF states that the amount of plastic waste produced by the UK will rise from 5.2 million tons this year to 6.3 million tons in 2030. The majority of this waste (67%) is from packaging, a higher proportion than the rest of the EU, due in part to more people in the UK buying convenience foods and takeaway meals.

“This bold new pact will bring together businesses, policymakers and the public.”

Currently 31% of total plastic waste is recycled, and this is projected to rise to 42% by 2030 as a result of lifestyle changes and future policies taking effect.

Tanya Steele, CEO of WWF, said: “We must act now – banning avoidable single use plastic by 2025 – and introducing incentives to help people and businesses make the right choices to reduce, reuse and recycle.” ▶

• Managing director of Iceland, Richard Walker, has announced that the retailer intends to eliminate plastic packaging from all of its own brand products by the end of 2023.

