

## **OPigmeat Supply Chain Task Force – Improving Food Labelling Sub-Group**

### **Note of Inaugural Meeting held on Thursday 28 May 2009**

#### **Present:**

Mick Sloyan, BPEX (Chair)  
Rob Smith, Vion  
Sian Philpott, Tesco  
Chris Brown, Asda  
Susan Knox, Consumer Interests  
[REDACTED], Defra  
[REDACTED], FSA  
[REDACTED] FSA  
Les Bailey, Lacors  
Sue Woodall, Ladies in Pigs  
Lucas Daglish, Whitbread

#### **Apologies for Absence:**

Simon Galkoff, Whitbread  
Jim Brisby, Cranswick

Duncan Prior, Task Force Secretary

#### **1. Introductions and Background**

1.1 The Chair welcomed those present to the first meeting of the Sub-Group, and thanked the FSA for hosting the meeting. He briefly explained the background to the main Task Force, sub-groups and workstreams (more detailed background had previously been sent to Sub-Group members by the Task Force Secretary). The Chair explained that Jane Kennedy was giving the initiative personal commitment. With an initial life-span of 12 months, it was important for the Task Force and its sub-groups to maintain focus on key outputs. Chair reminded the meeting that politicians from all major parties were increasingly expressing desire for clearer and more informative food labelling to the benefit of consumers.

#### **2. Regulations and Guidance on Country of Origin Labelling**

2.1 [REDACTED] gave a short presentation (attached) on the FSA's *Country of Origin Labelling Guidance* dated 31 October 2008. The guidance sought to identify best practice within existing regulations, but was not Statutory guidance. It contained a number of references to pork products, including the labelling of bacon, and demonstrated how misleading certain information is presented, albeit within the terms of the law.

2.2. Previous FSA survey had identified that 65% of processed products, and 19% of meat ingredients, gave country of origin information. That survey was currently being repeated, the results of which should be available in early July. Additionally, FSA was embarking on a programme of activity that may throw-up some results relevant to the Sub-Group's work - including research on consumer behaviour; an up-dated literature review; forums of consumers on country of origin labelling; and an omnibus consumer survey. All of those items were expected to be in place by September 2009.

2.2 EC proposals for a new Food Information Regulation (FIR) were still under consideration and subject to the Co-Decision process of the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. As proposed, the new arrangements would allow a voluntary declaration of origin; but, where exercised, that option would trigger mandatory rules on application (eg stipulating places of birth, rearing and slaughter). It was anticipated that the EC would imminently be issuing a Communication on the possible requirement that meat products were labelled with 'place of farming'; but no advance notice of the Communication's content had been received,

nor how such a proposal would sit relative to the proposed FIR. The Chair asked that 'EU proposals' were adopted as a standing item on subsequent meeting agendas so that the Sub-Group could be kept up to date with developments. **Action: Task Force Secretary.**

### 3. Consumer Attitudes and Trends

3.1 Mick Sloyan gave a brief summary of a presentation (attached) about consumers' attitudes and purchasing trends, drawing on existing research - including recent work by IGD and the TNS Family Food Panel - reflecting the impact on consumers' attitudes relative to the global economic crisis. Overall, the conclusions were that:

- consumers continued to place *price* as their top concern;
- provenance of food was still high on consumers' list of information needs (animal welfare was a particular issue of concern that was growing year on year), as was their desire to support British/locally sourced product in times of economic stress;
- retailer pricing during the economic downturn was having a positive impact on pork, though consumers were concerned generally about significant food price rises;
- people continue to eat out, though less frequently (but they do not compromise on the quality of the 'experience');
- consumers were concerned about food waste – and multi-buys (seen as an absolute waste when exceeding need and/or costing more in cash terms than was necessary to feed the family).

3.2 The Chair thanked those who had sent relevant consumer research material to him, and stressed the need for others to do likewise. It was important for reasons of robustness (and the avoidance of duplication) to have as much existing material to hand as possible. **Action: All Sub-Group members.**

### 4. Defining Pigmeat Production Methods

4.1 Mick Sloyan up-dated the meeting on progress being made by industry – working with other stakeholders, including retailers and the RPCA – to formulate definitions of existing industry standards in the production of free-range, outdoor bred and outdoor reared pigs. That initiative was considered important towards being able to label product accordingly, given the lack of standard definitions in regulations or quality assurance schemes. There was evidence suggesting that consumers' perceptions and expectations of production methods were not in keeping with reality, and there existed a strong risk that consumers may be misled as a result (eg the appearance of the word "outdoor" implied "free-range", which was not necessarily true). Not only could that mislead consumers, but it was a threat to competitiveness within the supply chain.

4.2 The meeting agreed the need for properly defined industry standards of pig production. Whilst defining free-range and outdoor bred/rearing was a priority for immediate attention, the meeting also agreed that over time indoor production methods (eg the different housed production methods, such as 'enriched' accommodation for pigs) could be included in a suite of definitions. It was agreed that adopting a common suite of definitions across the supply chain (including to retail and food service/catering sectors) would help facilitate clearer marketing and labelling to consumers (through consumer education/publicity initiatives where suitable).

### 5. Principal Aim and Objectives of the Sub-Group

5.1 Against the background of presentations and discussion during previous agenda items, the Chair introduced the draft Sub-Group workplan which had been distributed in advance of the meeting. During discussion, the following points were noted:

Overarching Aim – clearer labelling

- agreed, but with a need to define the meaning of “pigmeat products” (eg where was the cut-off on the spectrum between a prime cut of pork to toppings on pizzas?).

Objective (i) – Code of labelling practice

- agreed, based on FSA guidance but product specific, illustrated with examples of good practice and less helpful labelling; important to be seen as industry-owned Code to underpin its authoritativeness and clout within and across the supply chain. The Code would be capable of being adopted very publicly by individual companies; and leadership by the major retailers and food service companies would, in effect, be the competitive incentive for the rest to follow;
- *Ladies in Pigs'* would feed back findings from its upcoming road shows of “basket of food labels” to help identify tangible examples of good and bad labelling practice, which could usefully be compared with the results of FSA research and possibly act as a quarry of evidence for the Code of Practice; **Action: Sue Woodall.**
- Defra/FSA/Lacors agreed to provide advice as the Code was developed on its fit within the law (ie to avoid the Code inadvertently contravening specific or general labelling/trades descriptions regulations).

Objective (ii) – compliance with FSA labelling guidance

- agreed as an interim step towards delivering Objective (i), with staged, incremental targets/timescales.

Objective (iii) – identifying and addressing consumer confusion

- agreed. **Action: BPEX** would undertake further consumer research (possibly to include consumer focus groups) shortly to supplement existing knowledge, the results of which would significantly guide the work of the Sub-Group. Specifically, the scope of the research should include:
  - which categories of pigmeat products, and the proportion of meat within a product, are important to consumers in terms of provenance information (eg fresh pork, sausages, pies, ham, bacon, and so on);
  - the extent to which provenance and product content of pure/rare breed pigmeat products are important to consumers, as well as terminology/imagery (eg recipe names and geographical association).

Objective (iv) – pig production definitions

- agreed, with the longer-term addition of all methods of production (including indoor).

## 6. Key Issues and Risks

6.1 The meeting considered, but did not identify, any issue to be raised at the next Task Force meeting on 10 June. But the Chair left open the option for any member of the Sub-Group to let him have issues subsequently. **Action: All Sub-Group members.**

6.2 The meeting noted the two identified risks on the Sub-Group's risk register; and added the risk of non-compliance by significant numbers of individual companies (retail and food service). It was felt that if the major companies (ie those represented on the Task Force/Sub-Group implemented outputs, then others would probably feel obliged to follow for reasons of competitive equality.

6.3 The meeting acknowledged the importance of monitoring the impact and effectiveness of its outputs to minimise the risk of not knowing if this aspect of the Task Force's work had been successful. But the meeting recognised that, realistically, the success or otherwise of the Sub-Group's work y may not be evidenced to a large extent until after the life of the Task Force. Nevertheless, the meeting agreed that it would be sensible to road-test solutions on members of the public at critical stages of solution development/adoption to satisfy itself on fitness for purpose. Also, it may be necessary to make recommendations towards the end of the Task Force period on further actions to maximise the impact of the Sub-Group's outputs – eg a programme of consumer education.

6.4 The Chair said that further thought would be given to identifying additional risks at the next meeting, when the work of the Sub-Group was further advanced.

## 7. Conclusion, Next Steps and Date of Next Meeting

7.1 The Chair concluded by thanking everyone for attending and for their contributions towards a positive meeting. He asked the Task Force Secretary to distribute a formal note of the meeting to Sub-Group members, together with a revised workplan and risk register, reflecting decisions/key points made. **Action: Task Force Secretary.**

7.2 The second meeting of the Sub-Group would take place in September, before the main Task Force met on 21 September. The Secretary would be in touch to trawl for suitable dates. **Action: Task Force Secretary.**

## 8. Any Other Business

8.1 The Chair handed to those present a copy of an anticipated BPEX report entitled *BPEX Labelling Report – Updated 2009*. The report presented findings of a review of the labelling of country of origin of pork and pork products since the first such report was published in 2006. The Chair anticipated the new report being published around mid-June, though said he wanted to extend the courtesy of advance notice to the Sub-Group. He asked everyone to respect an embargo on use until after formal publication.

Secretary to the Pigmeat Supply Chain Task Force  
May 2009