

Pigmeat Supply Chain Task Force – Improving Food Labelling Sub-Group

Note of second meeting held on Wednesday 9 September

Present:

Mick Sloyan, BPEX (Chair)
Jim Brisby, Cranswick
Sian Philpott, Tesco
Chris Brown, Asda
[REDACTED] Defra
John Bourne, Defra
[REDACTED] FSA
Sue Woodall, Ladies in Pigs
Lucas Daglish, Whitbread
Sue Henderson, Sainsburys

Apologies for Absence:

Rob Smith, Vion
Les Bailey, LACORS
Susan Knox, Consumer Interests

1. Welcome and apologies

1.1 Mick Sloyan welcomed those present and noted apologies received.

2. Review of minutes and matters arising

2.1 The subgroup agreed the minutes of the last meeting as a true and accurate record. The Chair noted that actions from the minutes were all picked up on the agenda and would be addressed throughout the meeting.

3. Work plan progress review

Consumer research update

3.1 Mick Sloyan outlined discussions from the previous subgroup meeting where the group had reviewed consumer research and agreed that this supported the need for clearer labelling, and a statement on what clear labelling was.

3.2 Mick then provided a summary of further research on origin labelling carried out in August 2009 which tested both spontaneous recall and prompted awareness of country of origin on a selection of packaged meat products. This research suggested that in the absence of clear prompts such as flags or wording specifying origin, people make assumptions on origin based on what information is available such as graphics/terminology used on the pack, and in particular on the circular plant mark (which provides information on the packing plant not on origin). When asked what information on origin consumers wanted to see on packs wording was the most favoured form of information over flags or other symbols.

3.3 [REDACTED] gave an update on current FSA research projects looking at origin labelling. Five projects are currently underway; a labelling behaviour project using eye tracker technology; survey on the uptake of FSA guidance on origin labelling; a literature review; citizen's forums/juries on consumer attitudes to origin labelling and an omnibus survey also looking at consumer attitudes. The results of these projects were due in October. A further overarching review pulling together the findings of all five projects should be complete in November.

[REDACTED] provided an overview of some of the headline findings from the labelling behaviour project. These indicate that origin is not the first factor consumers consider, and price is their top priority. Once prompted, consumers tend to see a UK flag as a quality indicator, not in terms of

origin necessarily but in the context of welfare, safety, etc; they feel is confirms that 'this is a good product'.

3.4 Sue Woodall also provided an update on work undertaken by Ladies in Pigs over the summer where they had taken out baskets of products to consumers to look at attitudes to origin labelling. In the inner city areas knowledge and interest in origin labelling was low, and again price was the consumer's primary interest. There was also some confusion around the different quality mark logos and flags on packs, with consumers not knowing the difference between them. At agricultural shows, as may be expected, there was a higher level of awareness and interest.

3.5 Mick noted that these headline findings reflect conclusions noted in the minutes of the last meeting, that price remains consumers' top concern, and that the subgroup was realistic about this but there was still value in focussing on what else consumers care about beyond price. The group would await the final outcomes of the FSA research with interest. In general, the further consumer research discussed suggested that the direction the subgroup had agreed in June to produce a Code of Practice did not need to be reconsidered, and should continue to be pursued.

3.6 Chris Brown raised the issue of whether there were competition issues that needed to be considered in terms of sign up to the Code of Practice and branded products, or tertiary brands. It was agreed this would need further consideration before the Code was rolled out and signed up to by industry. **Action: Mick Sloyan and [REDACTED] to consider in developing code.**

3.7 Mick Sloyan gave a short summary of some earlier BPEX research on origin labelling in the food service sector. Lucas Daglish updated the group on some recent research focusing on beef and steak which indicated that origin and breed were relatively low on the list a factors influencing consumer choices with factors such as value for money, tenderness, butchery and gristle featuring higher on the list. Consumer knowledge of breeds was also very low. Lucas agreed to share this research with the subgroup. **Action: Lucas Daglish**

3.8 The group discussed the fact that when consumers were eating out and making choices from a menu rather than doing their food shopping this is a very different purchasing occasion, and is often viewed as a treat or special occasion. This meant there was more emphasis on the entire experience (service, ambience, etc) than on the origin of the meat. In the food service context origin and breed were used as more a marketing tool.

3.9 Mick Sloyan asked whether there were any particular areas relating to the food service sector that should be picked up in the code of practice. John Bourne asked whether there was value in providing guidance on the need for transparency and on how information on origin is made available for those who do want to know. The potential for further labelling on menus was discussed, although it was recognised there was a need to ensure consumers were not put off by too much information. It was agreed there would be value in exploring this further in the development of the code. **Action: Mick Sloyan and [REDACTED] to consider in developing code.**

Product definitions

3.10 Mick Sloyan gave an update on progress on product definitions. A definition for 'free range' was pretty much agreed with industry but definitions of outdoor reared and outdoor bred were proving harder. There was a need to understand from the supermarkets what requirements were associated with these terms, what they accepted as 'outdoor'.

3.11 The group discussed consumer perceptions of these terms. Consumer research indicates the consumers consider free range to literally mean free to range, with animals outside all their lives. Consumers also assume that there is already a definition in place and that this is being enforced. Mick agreed to circulate the consumer research. **Action: Mick Sloyan**

3.12 The group questioned whether outdoor reared and outdoor bred meant anything to consumers and whether consumers understood such terminology. It was noted there is confusion between these terms and free range and that it essentially means animals are outdoors all the time. The group considered whether there was actually a need to go back to basics and look at new terms which would have more meaning for consumers. It was agreed that finalising a definition of free range was the first priority as this is an embedded and widely used term, but that a more radical approach to looking at the other terms could also be taken. **Action: Product definition subgroup**

3.13 It was agreed that the timescales on product definition within the current workplan should be reviewed to ensure they were realistic. **Action: Mick Sloyan/Task Force Secretary.**

3.14 The group considered the LACORS guidance on the use of breed names, which advises that reference to the exact parentage should be provided on the label, and essentially unless the meat comes from a purebred animal the terminology of 'cross' should be used. Concerns were raised that this suggested a disconnect from requirements for beef under the beef labelling rules, and it was agreed that this would need to be considered in taking this forward.

4. Defra update on country of origin labelling work

4.1 John Bourne provided an update on the work Defra has been doing to consider potential domestic legislative options for origin labelling. John explained that this had to be considered in the context of both WTO rules and EU legislation. Any proposals for domestic legislation have to be notified to the Commission. A number of other EU member states including Malta, Italy and Ireland had looked at introducing national legislation for mandatory origin labelling but the Commission had objected to these proposals. An alternative possibility would be to look at early introduction of the proposed Food Information Regulation measures through domestic legislation. Evidence is being gathered in order to go back to Minister's with further advice on the options and relevant issues.

5. FSA update on EU developments on country of origin labelling

5.1 [REDACTED] provided an update on EU proposals for a Food Information Regulation. The draft regulation does not extend mandatory labelling but requires that where an origin claim is made the origin of the primary or characterising ingredient of the product must be provided, if it constitutes over 50% of the product. For meat, where an origin declaration, or statement that could be taken as an origin declaration, is made then the label must include details of where the animal was born, reared and slaughtered. [REDACTED] explained that timescales for implementation were still to be confirmed but 2011 looked likely. The practical detail, such as how this would work for composite products and how an origin declaration which would require additional mandatory origin information, is still to be determined and there are discussions to be had on this. Once the proposals get to this stage FSA will be speaking to industry about the implications and what the Regulation will mean in practical terms.

5.2 [REDACTED] noted that the recent Commission communication on agricultural quality policy looks at the requirements for 'place of farming' information through the marketing standards regulations. Although it was not currently clear how this was being progressed. The group questioned how country of origin and place of farming requirements would work together, and [REDACTED] explained this was still to be discussed.

5.3 The group agreed it would be important to follow progress of EU proposals to ensure as far as possible that the subgroup's work was going in the same direction as the EU. However, as the subgroup's timescales preceded the Commission's the subgroup work would continue and then later could be reviewed to see how it fit with EU requirements once they were finalised.

6. Next steps

6.1 Mick Sloyan proposed that he and [REDACTED] would prepare a first draft of the Code of Practice and circulate to other subgroup members in advance of the next meeting, with a view to getting the draft signed off at the meeting. The draft would include all the issues discussed by the group earlier in the meeting; labelling issues including issues arising from brand names, process descriptions or recipes; production definitions; use of breed names; and menu labelling and availability of information in the food service sector. The code would cover pork, bacon, ham and probably sausages. **Action: Mick Sloyan and [REDACTED] to draft, and all other subgroup members to review and comment.**

6.2 Once a draft was agreed this would need to be road tested with wider stakeholder groups and through consumer research, and it could then be refined.

6.3 The code could be available on the BPEX website, but it was envisaged it would be accompanied by examples of what it meant in practice to illustrate. Endorsement of the code would be sought from as wide a range of relevant organisations as possible.

6.4 Lucas Daglish suggested it would be good to have wider food service input into the group as it a broader sector than Whitbread represents. The group agreed this would be valuable.

7. Sub group report back to Task Force

7.1 John Bourne suggested that it would be good to use the Task Force meeting as an opportunity to generate debate and discussion as well as update on progress. The group considered issues to raise with the Task Force and identified the following areas:

- Additional food service sector input into the subgroup
- The difficulties of determining product definitions and possible options
- Competition issues and tertiary brands
- How the code of practice should be rolled out in the context of forthcoming EU proposals

Action: Mick Sloyan

7.2 It was also agreed that [REDACTED] would provide a summary of the Food Information Regulation proposals for information.

Action: [REDACTED]

8. Risk register

8.1 The risk register was reviewed by the group. It was agreed an additional risk should be added relating to the draft Food Information Regulation proposal, and ensuring the subgroups work would fit in with this.

9. Issues log

9.1 No issues were identified.

10. Date of next meeting

10.1 It was agreed the subgroup would meet in mid-November. Wednesday 18 November was suggested as a potential date. Possible dates would be circulated. The meeting would be held at Defra, Nobel House. Action: Task Force secretary.

September 2009