

Animal welfare labelling

DEFRA call for evidence

December 2021



Question 16: What barriers are there for consumers wishing to buy food produced to UK baseline welfare or higher?

The main barrier is the lack of mandatory method-of-production labelling. People currently have very little information available to allow them to select higher welfare options, despite the evidence that consumers are concerned about animal welfare¹ and willing to pay a small premium for higher welfare products². The array of voluntary labels with different focusses and standards can be confusing and misleading, and the lowest welfare products do not give any production information, leaving people potentially unaware of the conditions the animal were raised in. The shift in buying patterns after mandatory method-of-production was introduced for shell eggs demonstrates that trustworthy labelling can be an effective way to improve animal welfare and empower food users to choose higher welfare options.

Another barrier is the lack of information available about the ingredients in processed foods, in restaurants and in catering. This represents a significant proportion of food consumed.

Also, the importation of foods produced in ways that do not meet baseline UK standards is a major concern, and the absence of labelling informing food users of these differences exacerbates this problem. This situation means that poor animal welfare is simply being externalised, undercutting UK farmers and disincentivising them to improve animal welfare.

Question 17: Should the UK government reform labelling to ensure greater consistency and understanding of animal welfare information at the point of purchase? Please select:

Yes

Yes, as long as it does not present an unreasonable burden to farmers and food industry

Perhaps in some areas

No, it should be up to retailers and consumers

Other (please specify)

¹ [Effects of animal welfare standards on consumers' food choices: Acta Agriculturae Scandinavica, Section C — Food Economics: Vol 7, No 2-4 \(tandfonline.com\)](#)

² [Citizens, consumers and farm animal welfare: A meta-analysis of willingness-to-pay studies | Request PDF \(researchgate.net\)](#)

Why?

People have a right to make informed choices about the food they eat. Food user demand is being impeded by lack of clear information at point of sale as to how meat, fish and dairy have been produced.

The movement towards higher-value, higher-welfare production can be accelerated by allowing people an informed choice: as people opt for these products, the market will inevitably follow. Farmers will be much more willing to move to improved practices if they can be confident that their higher-quality products will be clearly labelled as such. Currently, the confusing range of labels can represent genuinely higher welfare or can be misleading marketing, and producers with lower welfare practices are not required to provide any method of production information.

The Commons EFRA Committee has twice in 2018 recommended “that the Government [should] introduce mandatory method of production labelling”.^{3,4}

Mandatory enhanced method of production labelling covering the whole lifetime of the animal (including slaughter and transport) should be introduced. This should also cover fish, for whom there are many welfare concerns and less protections than terrestrial animals. There is evidence that people are concerned about the welfare of farmed fish and willing to pay substantially more for fish raised in higher welfare systems⁵.

Labelling should apply to both raw and processed food and similar information provision in restaurants and catering should be required. Labelling should also be applied to imports.

A labelling scheme must have adequate enforcement mechanisms and transparency. There should be independent assessment requiring verifiable benchmarking against key input measures.

We would also like to note that the introduction of enhanced method of production labelling, while important, should be in addition to, not instead of, continued and significant improvements to baseline animal welfare standards in the UK.

Question 21: Should the UK government update the welfare standards set out in the existing marketing standards for unprocessed poultrymeat and shell eggs? If so, how?

Currently there are not standard, understandable terms for birds raised according to baseline standards, such as ‘intensive indoors’. Standardised terminology accurately describing all existing ‘production systems’, for all species, should be introduced. Additional levels, for both eggs and poultry-meat, could be added, to better represent the range of systems currently falling under the ‘free-range’ heading, for example.

³ House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, February 2018. Brexit: trade in food, paragraph 133

⁴ House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, February 2018. The future of food, farming and the environment, paragraph 106 and recommendation 16

⁵ [The Impact of Animal Welfare and Environmental Information on the Choice of Organic Fish: An Empirical Investigation of German Trout Consumers | Marine Resource Economics: Vol 34, No 3 \(uchicago.edu\)](#)

Question 22: Do you think that products containing meat should be labelled to indicate the method of slaughter to consumers? Please select:

Yes, as a mandatory label

Yes, through voluntary labelling, with terminology defined in law

Perhaps, but this should be at discretion of the business

No

Why?

There are significant welfare concerns associated with non-stun slaughter and currently no way for food users to address this, as the method of slaughter information is not available to allow them to make choices reflecting their concerns.

If the UK government introduced mandatory or voluntary method of slaughter labelling regulations, should this be:

As part of a wider set of animal welfare standards where the label indicates the welfare of the whole life of the animal

As a standalone label relating only to the method of slaughter

Why?

This should be as a wider set of animal welfare and method of production standards that indicates the whole life of the animal, and it should be mandatory. Method of slaughter alone is insufficient, as it does not accurately represent standards of welfare throughout the animal's full life cycle.

Question 24: Which type of labelling could be most effective at: a. Supporting farmers meeting or exceeding baseline UK welfare regulations by ensuring they are rewarded by the market? b. Improving animal welfare by unlocking untapped market demand for higher welfare products? c. Ensuring UK baseline and higher welfare products are accessible, available, and affordable so that it is easy for consumers to choose food products that align with their values? Please select:

Mandatory

Voluntary, but defined in law

Industry-led

Why?

Farmers will be much more willing to move to improved practices if they can be confident that their higher-quality products will be clearly labelled as such, thus attracting conscious consumers and explaining price differences. Currently, the confusing range of labels can represent genuinely higher welfare or can be misleading marketing, and many of the current

voluntary labelling schemes have standards barely higher than baseline. Producers with lower welfare systems are not required to provide any method of production information.

Question 25: To what extent do you support the principle of mandatory labelling to identify when imported meat, eggs and milk do not meet baseline UK welfare regulations?

Please select:

Strongly support

Partially support

Neutral

Partially oppose

Strongly oppose

Why?

UK baseline standards should be applied to all imports. However, as that is not currently the case, it is imperative that food users can easily tell those foods which come from systems that do not meet baseline UK standards and avoid them if they choose.

Question 29: Which of the following label formats do you think is most effective?

1. Labels indicating tiers only (Beter Leven)?
2. Labels indicating both tiers and descriptions of the method of production (Etiquette Bien-Être Animal, Haltungsform, CIWF Italia/Legambiente labelling proposal)?
3. Labels describing the method of production only?
4. Labels with only a certification logo (American Humane Certified)?

Question 30: For those labels with tiering, which of the following do you think is most effective?

1. Etiquette Bien-Être (graded colours, grade A-E, comparative descriptions – for example ‘good’, ‘quite good’, ‘standard’)
2. Beter Leven (3-stars)
3. Haltungsform, CIWF Italia/Legambiente labelling proposal (numbers with different colours)

Question 31: For those labels with descriptions of the method of production, which of the following do you think are most effective?

1. Labels with both a written and pictorial description (Etiquette Bien-Être, CIWF Italia/Legambiente proposal)?
2. Labels with only a written description only (Haltungsform)?

Question 32: Overall, which of the five labels do you think is most effective? Please select:

Etiquette Bien-Être

American Humane Certified

Beter Leven

Haltungsform

CIWF Italia/Legambiente labelling proposal