

# Labelling Matters recommendations – EU poultrymeat labelling review



The European Commission is currently reviewing its marketing standards for poultrymeat and eggs.

## **Poultrymeat labelling - summary of our position**

Labelling Matters is a partnership project of Compassion in World Farming, Eurogroup for Animals, RSPCA, and Soil Association. This paper represents our shared position.

- We strongly recommend that the existing voluntary scheme be made mandatory. Producers who do not meet the standards needed to use one of the existing terms denoting higher welfare should be required to use the labelling term 'intensive indoors'.
- We believe the maximum permitted stocking density for 'indoor extensive' should be raised from 25kg/m<sup>2</sup> to 30kg/m<sup>2</sup>.

## **Egg labelling - summary of our position**

- We strongly support the retention of mandatory labelling of shell eggs.
- We recommend that mandatory labelling should be extended to other egg products.

## **Poultrymeat labelling in more detail**

- Commission Regulation 543/2008 on marketing standards for poultrymeat already defines methods of production for free range and extensive indoor chickens. This Regulation, in force since 1991, sets out the standards that must be reached if retailers wish to label chicken 'free range' or 'extensive indoors'.
- We strongly recommend that these labelling terms be changed from voluntary to mandatory and to add a requirement that meat from chickens reared intensively indoors must be labelled 'intensive indoors'.
- Meat chickens are not usually moved from one system to another during their lives. The vast majority stay in the same system from their arrival from the hatchery as day-old chicks until slaughter. Hence there is no danger of uncertainty as to which labelling term should be used for a flock.
- Recent research, by Qa Research on behalf of Labelling Matters, demonstrated strong public demand for the extension of mandatory method of production labelling, based on the EU shell egg labelling scheme, to meat and dairy products. In the UK 83% of consumers support this change (Qa Research, 2013).
- This review provides an opportunity to deliver on behalf of consumers.
- We recommend that the use of one of four labelling terms be made mandatory. This would be in line with the four mandatory labels used in the shell egg labelling scheme. The existing terms, 'organic', 'free-range', and 'extensive indoor', should be used, and the term 'intensive indoor', should be added to describe poultrymeat from birds housed in systems that are not currently eligible to use the higher welfare terms.
- Qa's research tested these recommended terms. A majority of consumers in each country supported the introduction of the proposed system and felt that it was 'clear'. (UK: 70%, Czech Republic: 70%, France 63%)

- Around 90% of meat chickens in the EU are produced in standard intensive systems (around five billion annually) (Compassion in World Farming, 2013).
- The current marketplace for higher welfare produce in the European Union is unhelpfully distorted, against meat and dairy products from higher welfare farm systems, by the use of confusing language and images on labels, which suggest animals are kept in extensive, spacious, 'natural' conditions even when the animals have been reared in standard intensive systems.
- Qa's study shows genuine confusion about the farm system used to produce meat and dairy products with some existing labels.
- Market distortions created by misleading or unclear labels are important because they influence consumer behaviour directly at point of sale. They can have a potentially significant adverse economic impact on those producers operating to higher welfare standards because they disturb natural consumer preferences, preventing the marketplace from operating efficiently.
- As well as affecting farm incomes, this market distortion represents a significant challenge to European Commission ambitions for farm animal welfare, as described in the EU Animal Welfare Strategy 2012-2015. The strategy emphasises the EU's intention to increase transparency and the provision of adequate information – empowering consumers to make informed choices in order that the market can drive further improvements in farm animal welfare.
- Clear, objective method of production labelling would in effect prevent the use of misleading words and images and would help provide clarity for consumers. It would give consumers the information they most want to know: 'how was this animal kept?'.

#### Stocking density issue

- We believe the permitted maximum stocking density for 'indoor extensive' should be increased from 25kg/m<sup>2</sup> to 30kg/m<sup>2</sup>.
- We are not aware of any producers at all (with, possibly a very small number supplying a very niche market) who operate indoor systems below 30kg/m<sup>2</sup>. A report in 2000 on broiler welfare from the EU Commission's then scientific advisory body - the Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare, 'The welfare of chickens kept for meat production (broilers)', concluded that when stocking density exceeds (specifically) 30kg/m<sup>2</sup>, there is a steep rise in the frequency of serious welfare problems, regardless of the quality of the management or the housing specification.
- We are however aware of several commercially viable producers who operate successfully at 30kg/m<sup>2</sup>, this leads us to believe that 30kg/m<sup>2</sup> is an appropriate cut-off point.

#### **Egg labelling in more detail**

- Mandatory shell egg labelling was introduced for shell eggs in 2004.
- European Commission figures show the proportion of cage-free egg-laying hens in Europe rose from 19.7% in 2003 to 42.2% in 2012 (European Commission, 2013).
- In the UK cage-free egg production rose from 31% in 2003 to 51% in 2012 (Defra, 2013).
- The Commission has officially and correctly recognised the link between increased sales of higher welfare eggs and mandatory labelling since 2004. They have also recognised that the labelling scheme allows consumer-supported price differentiation. In other words – that the egg labelling scheme has been successful. In answer to a recent European Parliamentary Question, the Commission said that, 'The mandatory marking of eggs according to production system<sup>(1)</sup> does allow the consumer to choose between eggs from caged systems or alternative systems. It is furthermore true that recent consumer surveys<sup>(2)</sup> show that the majority prefer to buy eggs from non-cage systems. Such labelling furthermore allows for a differentiation in price.'

(1) Article 12(2) of Commission Regulation (EC) No 589/2008 of 23 June 2008 laying down detailed rules for implementing Council Regulation (EC) No 1234/2007 as regards marketing standards for eggs; OJ L 163, 24.6.2008, p. 6.

(2) <http://www.labellingmatters.org/> and <http://www.animalwelfareplatform.eu/documents/ProjOutput-consumerconcerns.pdf>

- Mandatory method of production labelling of eggs has been successfully implemented across the EU, and has proved popular with European consumers.
- Qa's research showed comparatively high levels of recognition for the EU egg labelling scheme, with 48% of consumers actively aware of the EU egg labelling system in the UK.
- Qa found that a majority of consumers felt 'the EU system for labelling eggs by method of production is very helpful or quite helpful to them when choosing what to buy.' (UK: 61%, Czech Republic: 55%, France: 79%).
- This can be compared with research undertaken by UK consumer watchdog, Which?, in early 2010, which tested awareness of a range of food labelling schemes amongst a representative sample of the UK population. The UK's Red Tractor food label was introduced in 2000, but received only a 20% recognition rate. The RSPCA's Freedom Food label was introduced in 1994, and also received a 20% recognition rate (Which?, 2010).
- Qa also concluded that many people who claim that they don't use the egg labelling scheme may actually do so without realising that they are.
- Egg labelling has proved popular with producers too.
- In February 2014, the British Egg Industry Council (BEIC) called on the European Commission to extend mandatory labelling to egg products such as egg sandwiches and quiches (*The Grocer*, 2014).
- Mandatory method of production labelling of shell eggs has delivered straight-forward information for consumers and enabled them to make informed choices when shopping for eggs.

## References

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