

AHDB Briefing Note on Labelling (30/04/24)

Country of Origin Labelling

AHDB supports the labelling of products that further helps consumers by providing clarity and confidence in the pork products that they purchase. This is especially important for imported products from production systems that do not meet baseline UK regulations. AHDB's Porkwatch in-store audit shows that for the top 10 retailers in the UK fresh primary pork, 88% of facings were British on average in 2023. <https://ahdb.org.uk/beef-lamb-pork/red-meat-country-of-origin-audit>

Regarding questions around a proposal for there being a mandatory requirement to state the origin of meat, seafood and/or dairy products in the out-of-home sector, research from AHDB in 2023 also shows that consumers want certain messaging on menus. These primarily focus around taste and enjoyment although some farming messaging can improve perceptions. Having assurance scheme logos and certain call outs of method of production such as grass-fed are useful to consumers. However, specific mentions of animal welfare on menus can be off putting to consumers who don't want to think about the animal when choosing a meal.

The full research can be found here - <https://ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/opportunities-to-raise-the-reputation-of-red-meat-in-the-dining-out-market>. At present consumers can choose (if labelled) organic / higher welfare like RSPCA assured (as these logos are used on some menus) As explained above, it would be difficult for foodservice and catering sectors to include these on menus or very costly due to the more frequent changes in sourcing.

The UK has a long-established record of producing safe, traceable and high welfare pork, for example. UK farmers invest and ensure that these standards, often higher than global competitors, are achieved to give assurance to UK consumers that the products they buy are produced to the highest standards that they demand. Adhering to such standards comes at a financial cost to UK producers and so imported products that fall short of these standards, and in principle would compete on the domestic market at a lower price point, should be clearly labelled. This would give shoppers choice and make clear that such products while cheaper, may be due to lower standards. Processed pork products are more likely to be using imported product - therefore are more important to include.

Research from AHDB shows that price, taste, convenience, versatility, availability and ease of cooking are important factors that influence shopper's purchasing decisions and are more important than Country of Origin. In our research from 2018, it showed that whilst 9% were influenced by the country of origin, 5% were influenced by the assurance marks and 2% were influenced by animal welfare claims.

The pork industry also has a voluntary system of country of origin and welfare labelling for domestic UK pork products: [Pork Provenance](#) which was established by the Pig Meat Supply Chain Taskforce.

Method of Production Labelling

As outlined above, in our research from 2018, it showed that 9% of shoppers were influenced by the country of origin, 5% were influenced by the assurance marks and 2% were influenced by animal welfare claims.

Despite that, research shows that 54% of consumers believe that a simplified system of production labelling would be very helpful in improving trust in the food system in the UK (AHDB/Blue Marble, 2019). At the moment there is not enough evidence to suggest that showing all tiers on pack is

favourable over a single icon or logo that forms part of a wider labelling system, such as Lidl's welfare labelling. Assurance scheme standards could potentially be used as a basis for a broader welfare system.

Whichever system is chosen, it needs to be easily understood by consumers at the point of purchase. Research shows that consumers spend very little time at fixture considering which product to buy – this is 41 seconds for chicken and 78 seconds for pork. (AHDB/Future Thinking 2018 - <https://ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/consumer-insights-the-meat-shopper-journey>)

Existing welfare labelling uses animal production method as a proxy for animal welfare. This can be misleading to consumers. It has been shown that using production method as a proxy for animal welfare could lead to unintended consequences of poorer welfare, as seen in data from egg production and higher mortality (an indicator of welfare) in free range systems compared to conventional systems (Weeks, et al., 2016),¹

AHDB considers it would be preferable to base any possible future welfare labelling reforms on welfare outcomes measures, rather than production system. Outcome-based assessments would provide the most accurate measure of the level of welfare achieved for animals and its management on-farm, rather than production system-based assessments that may only infer a perceived welfare status. Welfare outcomes, independent of the production system an animal is reared in, provides data direct from the animals regarding their welfare which can be used to reassure consumers of high animal welfare achieved for farmed livestock.

AHDB recognises the practical difficulties involved in using welfare outcome assessments. Whilst some organisations already use welfare outcomes (AssureWel as part of RSPCA Assured and Soil Association standards) or are in the process of developing such schemes (Red Tractor), these assessments are at a relatively early stage for some species, and more advanced for others (such as finisher pigs eg Real Welfare Outcome Scheme²⁻⁴). Comprehensive and validated sets of welfare outcome metrics have already been developed for many farm livestock species under Welfare Quality and could be adapted.

In order to introduce a welfare outcomes labelling system we need to ensure we have robust data and evidence of the various outcomes. It is not clear that a detailed enough data set measuring welfare outcomes is currently available. AHDB therefore has concerns about the transparency and accuracy of any methodology being applied in a way that the public could both understand and trust. It is not clear how this will be addressed and could lead to the welfare equivalent of 'greenwashing' in the eyes of consumers, if not managed properly.

The 2% of shoppers who purchase pork according to animal welfare standards will likely already be buying perceived high welfare products. <https://ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/consumer-insights-the-meat-shopper-journey>

Kantar retail data, analysed by AHDB, shows that 8% of primary pork sales are marketed as outdoor bred— We know the share of pigs born outdoors is considerably higher than this, suggesting that there is not the demand for these perceived higher welfare products and/or that producers do not receive a premium for producing these pigs. <https://ahdb.org.uk/news/consumer-insight-consumer-desire-for-outdoor-bred-pork-hindered-by-cost-of-living-crisis>

AHDB does not therefore believe that welfare labelling will result in an increase in purchasing of perceived higher welfare products.

1. Weeks, C et al, 2016 <https://doi.org/10.5061/dryad.60q44>
2. Pandolfi, F et al, 2017a. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1751731117000246>
3. Pandolfi, F et al, 2017b. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0167587717302581>
4. Pandolfi, F et al, 2022. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35268177/>

Welfare outcome assessment should ideally be in place for as many of the tiers as possible, as measuring levels and types of inputs does not necessarily indicate good or bad welfare and can be inherently biased. It is understood that additional time and resources would be needed to establish appropriate welfare outcome assessments that can support accurate welfare labelling that reflects the actual welfare status of farm livestock.

AHDB does not consider that the labels should include these descriptive terms, which without full and clearly understood definitions, could lead to further confusion for consumers. AHDB considers that the proposed system input metrics assessment is at the least expanded or preferably, is developed to focus more heavily on welfare outcomes, rather than production systems. The reason for this is that input-based assessments will not accurately reflect animal welfare status. Farm animal welfare most influenced by the stockmanship and management of those animals rather than the production system they are kept in (FAWC, 2007) **FAWC (2007) FAWC Report on Stockmanship and Farm Animal Welfare. London, UK.**

Timescale and cost

Consideration should be given to the fact that production systems take time to change and in some cases could include significant capital expenditure. Some animal production cycles are over several years. In order to make investment in changes there would need to be confidence and trust in the labels, and the likely consumer demand.

This also needs to be consideration in the context of imports transition and the associated time of to implement overseas so as not to unduly and unfairly penalise the British supply chain. To reduce the negative impact longer lead in times allow for consumer research, development of markets and production system changes.

The pig industry has already made voluntary efforts to define production standards, and so it could be argued that the need for such labelling is greater for other species to bring them in line with what exists for pigs and domestic fowl (meat and laying hens are not separate species).

The extent of the cost which producers will incur depends on several complex factors such as their size, production processes, prior experience with similar regulations, and the level of support available from industry. It is essential for policymakers to consider these factors when assessing the potential impact of proposed requirements on producers.

Changing systems would need significant investment in the short term. Our cost of production data suggests that the UK industry has higher costs than other EU countries - [Pork Cost of Production and Net Margins | AHDB](#)