

Principles on Country of Origin Information

FOREWORD

The food industry has always shown itself adaptable and flexible to its customers' demands – and much progress has already been made in providing more and better information on food origin. However, this document marks a significant further step forward. I am very pleased that the food industry has been able to come together, facilitated by Defra, and develop principles for clearer country of origin labelling.

Many individual businesses already provide excellent origin information. These principles formalise and strengthen what they do. Championing the practices of the best performers and bringing others into line will reduce confusion and ensure improvements in both the quality and consistency of origin information for all consumers.

I congratulate the industry on this important initiative and look forward to seeing real benefits to the consumer.

Jim Paice MP

Minister of State for Agriculture and Food

General Principles

We are fully committed to honest labelling and these principles set out how we will continue to improve the level and clarity of country of origin¹ information for meat, meat products and certain dairy products.

We will continue to ensure that labels do not mislead consumers as to the origin of food particularly where some form of voluntary claim is made.

We will keep this document under review particularly in the light of the development of new EU labelling rules (EU Regulation on Food Information to Consumers) and other relevant legislation.

Best Practice

Meat²

Label all unprocessed meat with country of origin

Limit all single country of origin labelling to meat from animals born and reared in the specified country (or, in the case of poultry, reared in the specified country).

Limit the use of 'British' to meat from animals born and reared in the UK (or, in the case of poultry, reared in the UK).

Where the animal has been born and reared in different countries additional information will be provided to make this clear.

Meat products

Label "*lightly processed products*" such as bacon, ham, gammon, sausages and burgers with the origin of the meat ingredient

Limit all single country of origin labelling to processed products containing meat from animals born and reared in the specified country (or, in the case of poultry, reared in the specified country).

Limit the use of 'British' to processed products containing meat from animals born and reared in the UK (or, in the case of poultry, reared in the UK).

Where the animal has been born and reared in different countries additional information will be provided to make this clear.

In other *composite products* (e.g. pies, casserole etc) where a voluntary origin declaration is made, label the country or origin of the meat ingredient if the meat is considered of primary interest to the consumer or a predominant component of the product.

¹ Country of origin is a specific country or place of provenance

² Legal requirements are in place for beef & veal and imported poultry meat

Where the meat is sourced from multiple countries this is made clear either by naming the countries (e.g. produced in the UK with meat from Thailand and/or Brazil), stating “product of multiple countries”, defining a geographical area (e.g. product of the EU, product of South America or product of Scandinavia) or by stating that the origin of the primary ingredients is different from the origin of the product e.g. “Produced in the UK from imported beef.”

Origin claims using UK flags, British imagery (such as icons or landmarks), or any suggestion of British or local origin through the product name or description (e.g. “British Classic”) is limited to products where the meat originates from the UK.

Dairy products (Liquid milk, fresh cream, cheese and butter)

Label all liquid milk³ and fresh cream with the country of origin of the milk.

Label cheese⁴ and butter sold as such with the country of origin of the liquid milk or the place of manufacture.

The use of flags or imagery (such as icons or landmarks) on these products will be limited to those containing liquid milk from that country.

Where the milk is sourced from multiple countries this is made clear either by naming the countries (e.g. produced in the UK with milk from Belgium and France), stating “product of multiple countries”, defining a geographical area (e.g. product of the EU) or by stating that the origin of the primary ingredients is different from the origin of the product e.g. “Produced in the UK from imported milk.”

General provisions

Place origin information either on the label or in close proximity to the product (where not pre-packed).

For catering establishments provide origin information on the menu, on accompanying literature or ensure it is available at the request of the customer.

When using statements such as ‘packed [sliced etc] in country X’ it should be accompanied by the place(s) of production if different.

Additional best practice

Where these principles are followed consumers can be confident in claims that are made. Where possible and achievable the additional best practice elements of the Government’s guidance on origin labelling and for pigmeat, the BPEX labelling code should be applied

³ Excludes evaporated and condensed milk

⁴ Excludes processed cheese (e.g. spreads) and cheese used as an ingredient (e.g. in pizzas).

Annex A

The following information is not considered to be an origin declaration

- Approved premises codes (identification marks indicating country of processing and a code number that relates to the approved establishment in order to meet the requirements of EU Hygiene Legislation).
- Breeds of cattle (e.g. Aberdeen Angus).
- Name and address of the manufacturer, packer and seller
- Control body code numbers under the organic standards.
- Use of slogans such as “UK favourite brand” when supported by sales data.

This information will not be used or placed on the packaging in a way which could confuse as to the origin of the product.