

Ms E Elvin
Policy Adviser
Livestock and Livestock Products
Beef Labelling Section
Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department
Pentland House
Room 251
47 Robb's Loan
Edinburgh
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11th August 2005

Dear Ms Elvin,

We would like to seek reassurance in connection with the Scottish Executive's Beef Labelling Guide published in April 2005.

We believe that consumers are entitled to a wide range of information about the food they buy and we support regulation to ensure that it is provided in a format which is clear, reliable and relevant.

We support the compulsory element of the Regulations which requires that there should be complete traceability but we have some concerns in relation to the information that suppliers or retailers may choose to include under the Voluntary Labelling Scheme.

We note (Guide p10) that the Voluntary Labelling Scheme requires approval before beef can be labelled with information about the method of slaughter (eg kosher or halal), and we wish to restate our concern about the possibility of such terminology being misunderstood. It is very important for the Jewish community that the word 'kosher' should not be used unless the relevant Halachic (Jewish Law) requirements have been met, and we would appreciate an assurance that no such labelling will be approved without prior consultation with and agreement from the appropriate Rabbinic authorities (as nominated by the Jewish community).

We are also concerned that the inclusion of any information indicating that beef has been produced by shechitah (the Jewish method of slaughter) should not be in any way pejorative or critical and should not distinguish such beef from that of other suppliers in a discriminatory or unfair manner. There have recently been a number of attacks on kosher butcher shops in England and there is a concern that the provision of this information on meat labelling could be exploited by extremist groups to identify further targets.

The Beef Labelling Guide requires (p10) that the terms used on labels must be clear to the customer. The majority of consumers will not have a great deal of knowledge about the different methods of slaughter and therefore for this to be effective, any supplier who wished to include information about this should be required to explain the various methods of slaughter on the label. This should, for example, include information as to the proportion of animals mis-stunned prior to slaughter and on the risk to human health by BSE/vCJD through the use of captive-bolt stunning.

This is in line with the suggestion in the recent Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) 'Report on the Welfare Implications of Farm Assurance Schemes' that 'essential information for the purchaser' includes 'the nature of welfare standards spanning the life of the animal (conditions on farm, in transit and at slaughter)'. A label that only refers to the method of slaughter and ignores all these other issues provides consumers with a very small part of the picture and is clearly not genuinely concerned with animal welfare or consumer choice but is a barely disguised discriminatory attack on religious slaughter.

We look forward to learning what safeguards are in place with regard to these aspects of the Beef Labelling Scheme and hope that you will be able to provide us with reassurance on the above matters.

Yours sincerely,

Leah Granat
Public Affairs Officer

Note: The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities is the representative body of all the Jewish communities in Scotland comprising Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee as well as the more loosely linked groups of the Jewish Network of Argyll and the Highlands, and of students studying in Scottish Universities and Colleges.