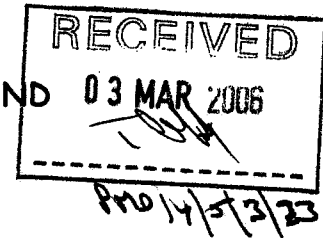


PROPOSED BEEF LABELLING IN SCOTLAND

IS 'FUNDAMENTALLY FLAWED'



'No public health or food safety risk' association tells Executive

1 March 2006: The British Hospitality Association is strongly opposed to legislation proposed by the Scottish Executive that would force restaurants and other catering outlets in Scotland to label the origin of beef on their menus.

In a submission on the Executive's consultation paper, the association says that the proposed legislation in this area is 'fundamentally flawed'.

"The consultation paper admits there is no public health or food safety risk . . . the proposals are effectively 'gold plating' the EC beef labelling regulations, which apply to raw beef, not cooked as sold in the food service sector.

"The European Commission has stated that it is not in favour of legislating in this area because of restrictions and extra costs on the food service industry without significant health benefits."

"That is certainly our view," says Bob Cotton, the association's chief executive.

In its submission, the association urges the Executive to support the work of the voluntary 'best practice' schemes, such as those developed by Quality Meat Scotland and VisitScotland, so that businesses that wish to use country of origin labelling of beef on menus as a marketing initiative are supported while other businesses may be encouraged to join.

more/

British Hospitality Association Queens House 55-56 Lincoln's Inn Fields London WC2A 3BH
 Telephone: 0845 880 7744 Facsimile: 020 7404 7799 Email: bha@bha.org.uk Website: www.bha.org.uk
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But the association claims that statutory regulations would be difficult if not impossible to implement because suppliers did not always provide caterers with information about the origin of beef, nor would beef on pre-printed menus always be available from the stated country of origin when it was prepared and cooked. At the same time, in busy kitchens, meat is sourced from different countries of origin and may not be separated.

"The cost of administering such a scheme will fall disproportionately on small restaurants and catering businesses because they do not have central purchasing arrangements and have fewer resources to keep track of the origin of their meat supply. But even large businesses will find it difficult to trace the origin of all their meat supplies, especially when they come from different suppliers".

The BHA, which represents some 3,000 establishments in Scotland, including both large groups and independent hotels and restaurants, says caterers who are keen to label the origin of their meat should be encouraged to do so.

"But the labelling of meat on the menu is a marketing tool. It should not be a regulatory requirement," says Mr Cotton.

For further information:

Bob Cotton
0845 880 7744

John Dyson
Food and Technical Affairs Adviser, BHA
07831 490385

Miles Quest
Wordsmith and Company
01753 645636
mq@wordsmith-and-co.demon.co.uk

Editor's note: The British Hospitality Association is the national trade association of the hotel, catering and leisure industry, representing 40,000 establishments with more than 450,000 rooms and employing over 500,000 staff.

Clarke A (Tony)

From: John Dyson [John.Dyson@bha.org.uk]
Sent: 27 February 2006 15:03
To: Country of Origin of Beef
Cc: Baird JE (Elizabeth)
Subject: Consultation on country of origin labelling of beef



Response to Origin
of Beef.doc...

This email has been received from an external party and
has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

The response from the BHA following consultations with Members is attached. Our response can be made available to the Public and details of the BHA include. We are happy to contribute to further discussions.

Regards

John Dyson

Food and Technical Affairs Adviser

PLEASE NOTE: THE ABOVE MESSAGE WAS RECEIVED FROM THE INTERNET.

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In case of problems, please call your organisational IT helpdesk

Introduction

The British Hospitality Association is the national association for the hotel, restaurant and catering industry, representing some 3000 establishments in Scotland. Hospitality and tourism is one of the largest industries in Scotland, employing some 190,000 people and contributing £4 billion to the economy (5 per cent of GDP.)

Response to consultation paper on: Country of Origin of Beef in the Foodservice Sector

We have consulted with our membership, in particular our Food & Technical Committee which represents the following organisations (all of which have business interest in Scotland):

- 3663
- Brakes
- Mitchells & Butler
- Hilton
- Inter-Continental Hotels
- Marks & Spencers
- Compass
- Sodexo
- Aramark
- Debenhams
- The Restaurant Group
- Thistle
- De Vere

Executive Summary

In our opinion the proposal to legislate in this area is fundamentally flawed. The consultation paper admits that there is no public health or food safety risk, no intention to encourage or discourage sales of beef from any particular country and that the evidence base from consumers as to whether they need country of origin labelling of beef on menu's is inconclusive.

The proposals are effectively "gold plating" of the EC Beef labelling regulations which apply to raw beef, not cooked, as sold by the food service sector.

The European Commission has stated that it is not in favour of legislating in this area because of restrictions and extra costs on the food service industry without significant public health benefits. The consultation document provides no evidence which would contradict this view. We would therefore urge that the proposal to legislate is dropped and that efforts are made to support the work of the voluntary "best practice" schemes such as those developed by Quality Meat Scotland and VisitScotland so that the businesses who wish to use Country of Origin Labelling of Beef on menus as a marketing initiative are supported and other businesses may be encouraged to join the scheme.

Questions

1. Do you consider that the current requirements provide adequate information to consumers in the food service sector?

We do not believe that the information provided in the consultation paper provides significant evidence in either direction with respect to consumer requirements to justify regulation. The evidence base would suggest that the consumers are provided with adequate information by virtue of the only "independent" evidence provided via the Food Standards Agency and MAFF i.e. 20% and 22 % of consumers requiring labelling respectively.

It would seem reasonable that if the Scottish Executive sees regulation as the way forward it should carry out its own independent research.

2. Do you consider that the absence of country of origin information confuses consumers about the source of beef in the food service sector?

We are not persuaded by the argument that Aberdeen Angus (a cattle breed) confuses consumers in the way suggested. Consumers are fully aware that jersey cows are a breed, that cheddar cheese is a process and that brussel sprouts do not come from Brussels.

3. If you consider that the current requirements are not adequate, do you favour a voluntary or compulsory scheme to indicate country of origin of beef in the food service sector?

We do not believe that regulation is necessary and it is effectively "gold plating" the EC Beef Labelling Regulations which apply to raw meat not cooked as sold by the food services sector.

We do however, believe that voluntary schemes provide a good basis for those food service operations who wish to provide country of origin labelling on their menus as a marketing initiative and therefore support them.

3. Do you agree with the proposed approach?

We see difficulty with your proposal on the following grounds:

- (a) There will be a significant administrative cost for businesses because although suppliers are required to provide information about the origin of beef, this does not always happen and therefore will be disproportionately disadvantaged small restaurant business that has fewer resources for obtaining the relevant information.
- (b) The requirements will be also create some practical difficulties with buffets for events such as weddings which may be ordered several months in advance. During the intervening period it is conceivable that the beef supplier will change and pre-printed menus would need to be re-printed.
- (c) We do not believe that it is practical for food service businesses to decide labels on packaging. Therefore if the requirement is that UK beef only (rather than Scottish or Scotch) has to be provided to consumers as information than

we believe that this further strengthens the case for not legislating in this area.

(d) The proposal that the method of presentation to consumers is left up to the restaurants will lead to confusion in the industry and will inevitably lead to a large number of calls to local authorities for assistance /advice.

(e) The rationale that legislating in the manner proposed because of alleged information failure contrasts with the admission in the consultation document demand which would further reinforce our view that legislation is not the way forward but the further development of voluntary schemes.

5. Do you consider the requirement should be applied to veal as well as beef?

We do not agree with this proposal therefore cannot find any reason for it to be extended to veal.

6. Do you agree with the proposals for monitoring and enforcement?

We are aware that there is already a shortage of Environmental Health offices in Scotland. Additional checks just put more burdens on overstretched service whose main aim is protect public health and consumer safety. This further strengthens the case for not legislating.

The question of civil action would not arise if this was left to "best practice." If a food service business misleads a customer with respect to description of food on a menu, there is available redress under the Trades Description Act and the Food Safety Act 1990.

Regulatory Impact Assessment

Competition Assessment

We disagree with the answer to Q4 will respect to the costs falling on some businesses more than others. It is now our view that small restaurant businesses will bear a greater proportion of costs than large businesses that have central purchasing arrangements.

We also disagree with the answer to Q9 because once a small restaurant business has obtained the necessary information it may lead to unwillingness to change and market factors such as price increases could then affect the business disproportionately.

The statement that food service businesses operate in other parts of the united kingdom will be less affected ignores the fact that a number of large contract catering businesses operate both sides of the border with England and there will be costs ensuring compliance with two different approaches.