

British Meat Foodservice menu transparency campaign: your questions answered



Following consultation with relevant sectors of industry on a draft Code of Practice for origin of meat labelling in foodservice establishments, British Meat Foodservice (the trade marketing arm of the Meat and Livestock Commission) is pleased

to report a largely positive response. Questions that have been raised during the consultation period have tended to fall into a number of distinct areas. Marketing Director for the Meat and Livestock Commission, Richard Lowe (above), provides answers to the most commonly asked questions...



Why is British Meat Foodservice introducing the Code of Practice now?

The launch of the Code follows independent research which revealed that consumers are unclear about the origin of meat served in the foodservice market. The findings indicated that two-thirds of consumers believe that the meat they are eating in the out-of-home market is British, when the reality is that penetration of home-produced meat in the total foodservice market is only around 38%.

Why is the scheme voluntary not mandatory? How can you ensure that less scrupulous caterers will comply with it?

British Meat Foodservice is not in a position to enforce legislation upon caterers, and would not want to do so. Instead we are looking to build support for this initiative amongst the trade and ultimately to raise awareness and stimulate demand for menu transparency amongst consumers. Less scrupulous caterers will find that consumers will increasingly vote with their feet once menu transparency has been adopted by the majority as the norm.

This initiative is to be commended, but why isn't it being supported with a quality grading scheme? It is important that visitors are not served poor quality local food.

A quality grading scheme is a totally separate issue. With the Code of Practice we are simply asking caterers to provide consumers with information on the origin of the meat they serve. Of course consumers may ultimately decide that they have a preference for meat from a different country or region when eating out – that is no different from choosing to order Australian wine instead of French.

What are the cost implications of implementing the Code of Practice?

Minimal costs will be incurred, principally associated with including country of origin details on packaging and invoice documents. Primary processors and wholesalers who do not currently

operate their businesses with fully-traceable supply chain systems in place are likely to be most affected, but they will ultimately benefit from investing in traceability schemes.

What are the implications for caterers who buy meat on price rather than country of origin? They may be buying from several different countries - how are they supposed to include all this information on their menus?

The Code of Practice contains straightforward guidelines for caterers in this situation. The purpose of the Code is to provide caterers with advice on how to notify consumers of their buying policy in the simplest possible terms, so that they do not inadvertently mislead customers. Caterers can choose just how much detail they include on menus (or even on posters or other point-of-sale material in the restaurant if preferred). Statements such as: 'The meat in this restaurant is sourced according to price and availability from Ireland, New Zealand and Argentina' or 'The meat served in this restaurant is of UK origin, except where otherwise stated' would be enough to satisfy the requirements of the Code.

How will the code be monitored and what measures for non-compliance will be introduced?

The Trade Descriptions Act 1968 is in place to protect the public from false statements concerning goods, prices and services. It is an offence to provide misleading information about country of origin. Local Trading Standards authorities have statutory rights to enforce the provisions of this Act and the Act gives them power of entry, inspection and seizure to help them do so. They have similar authority under the Food Safety Act 1990.

What is the definition of origin? Is it where the animal was born, reared or slaughtered?

For the purpose of the Code of Practice the definition of origin is where the animal has spent the majority of its life. Also, it is not enough to put

the breed of the animal on the menu (for example, consumers may assume that an 'Aberdeen Angus' steak originated in this country, but animal breeds are rarely confined to individual countries of origin. For instance, much Aberdeen Angus beef is imported from South America).

Does the Code apply to cooked meats, sandwiches and poultry as well? And why not extend it to fruit and vegetables?

The Code on Origin Labelling of Meat-based Foods on Foodservice Menus applies to any meal or recipe concept (a 'dish') of which meat is a characterising ingredient. This includes any dish where the major prominent ingredient is meat or meat based (e.g. meat that has been cured, smoked or otherwise preserved). Poultry is included. The Code has been introduced following research which has identified that the consumer would like to know the origin of meat when eating out-of-home. The code does not have any terms that apply to fruit and vegetables.

Surely you're just doing this to try and get more British meat on the menu?

It may be that the Code of Practice will result in an increase in the amount of home-grown meat being sold through the foodservice industry, which would of course be good news for farmers and meat processors in this country. Whatever the outcome though, we believe that consumers have a right to know the origin of the meat they are buying in a restaurant, in the same way that they do when shopping in a supermarket. British Meat Foodservice has a responsibility to help the trade achieve clarity on menus in order to allow the consumer to make an informed decision.



For further information contact British Meat Foodservice on 01908 844114 email: foodservice@mlc.org.uk or visit www.britishmeatfoodservice.com