

Meat labelling

Mention of place of rearing and slaughter to be made mandatory

By Sophie Petitjean | Friday 13 September 2013

Labels for fresh meat sold in the EU may soon need to specify the country where the animal was reared and slaughtered, says a draft regulation on the origin labelling of fresh meat, including pork, mutton, goat and poultry.

Currently, the indication of origin is mandatory for honey (Directive 2001/110/EC), fruit and vegetables (Regulation No. 1580/2007), fish (Regulation No. 104/2000), beef and beef products (Regulation No. 1760/2000) and olive oil (Regulation No. 1019/2002). Regulation No. 1169/2011 on the provision of food information to consumers, which will come into force on 13 December 2014, will also make this obligation applicable to fresh meat (pork, mutton, goat and poultry) as well as products that are likely to mislead the consumer. Furthermore, it will allow operators in the food sector who so desire to indicate the origin provided that it does not take up the space reserved for mandatory information.

MIDDLE GROUND

Until now, three options had been put forward by the Commission on the labelling of fresh meat from pigs, sheep, goats and poultry: 1. mandatory EU or non-EU origin labelling; 2. mandatory labelling of the country of rearing and/or slaughter; and 3. labelling of the country where the animal was born, reared and slaughtered, a system that is already used for beef.

The draft rests on an intermediate option, namely mention of the country the animal was reared and slaughtered in. According to this scenario, it should be mandatory for three things to appear on the label: 1. the name of the member state or of the non-EU country where the last rearing period took place (at least two months for pigs, sheep and goats and one month for poultry), written as 'Reared + name'. If the minimum rearing period has not been completed, the indication should then refer to the country where the animal (pig, sheep, goat) was reared up to and including 15 days before it was slaughtered. In the case of poultry, it should be up to and including five days. 2. The memberstate or non-EU country where the slaughter took place, written as 'Place of slaughter + name'; and 3. a reference code guaranteeing correspondence between the meat and the animal.

Various member states, such as Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, the UK, Sweden and Denmark, have expressed their disagreement with this proposal. The first four resort to slaughtering in countries in Eastern Europe because of the lower costs and fear that indicating this on labels could discourage consumers. The latter two were more in favour of the first option, the minimalist approach.

MEP Glenis Willmott (S&D, UK) has welcomed the Commission's intentions, encouraging them to adopt the same approach to meat in processed foods.

PROCESSED PRODUCTS

The legislation on the provision of information to consumers therefore foresees a feasibility study on the possible extension of mandatory origin labels to all types of meat used as ingredient in foods, for meat other than beef, pork, mutton, goat and poultry, milk as a product or ingredient, unprocessed foodstuffs, single ingredient products and ingredients that represent more than 50% of a food.

Following the horse meat scandal (where products labeled as "beef" were found to contain horse meat), the Commission has decided to speed up the submission of their report on the labelling of products containing meat. This will be presented during the second half of October (instead of December) and could be followed by legislative measures.

France, Germany, Greece, Portugal and Finland, have already expressed their support for legislative measures to be taken to establish a mandatory origins label for meat in cooked dishes.

Copyright © 2013 Europolitics. Tous droits réservés.