

Pigmeat Supply Chain Task Force – Improving Food Labelling Sub-Group

Note of third meeting held on Wednesday 11 November

Present:

Mick Sloyan, BPEX (Chair)
Susan Knox, Consumer Interests
Rob Smith, Vion
Les Bailey, LACORS
[REDACTED], FSA
Sue Woodall, Ladies in Pigs
David Mainon, ASDA
Julia Wrathall, RSPCA
[REDACTED], Defra
[REDACTED], Defra
Duncan Prior, Task Force Secretary

Apologies for Absence:

Jim Brisby, Cranswick
Sian Philpott, Tesco
Chris Brown, Asda
Lucas Daglish, Whitbread
Sue Henderson, Sainsburys
[REDACTED], Defra
Rob McFarlane, Brake Bros

1. Welcome and apologies

1.1 Mick Sloyan welcomed those present and noted apologies received.

2. Review of minutes and matters arising

2.1 The Sub-Group agreed the minutes of the last meeting as a true and accurate record. Actions from the last meeting were either complete or covered in the meeting agenda. Referring to the minutes of the last Task Force meeting on 21 September, the Sub-Group noted that the Task Force had commented that tertiary brand products should be included within the scope of the Labelling Sub-Group's work – especially the proposed Code of Practice.

3. Work plan progress review

3.1 *FSA Consumer Research and Best Practice Guidance*

3.1.1 [REDACTED] explained that the main purpose of research conducted for the FSA during the summer was to provide underpinning evidence for policy (especially in the development of EU FIR), rather than awareness-raising per se. Five separate research workstreams had been conducted, and the FSA was pulling the results together, identifying common themes. FSA was anticipating publishing the results of that work (ie the five research elements and an overview) towards the end of the year. Meanwhile, FSA did not anticipate the results providing significant new evidence, but would most likely underscore the indicators already being used by the Sub-Group in taking forward its own work on labelling. On country of origin labelling specifically, there was evidence that the use of voluntary origin labelling/declaration statements on products was increasing, not least in response to growing public interest in that area. **Action:** [REDACTED] to keep Sub-Group informed of results of FSA research and publication arrangements.

3.2 *Consumer research update*

3.2.1 Mick Sloyan said that BPEX's consumer research over the summer had also found an increase in the use of FSA's best practice Guidance. Overall, the Sub-Group concluded that the workplan objective to identify consumers' principal areas of confusion had been effectively addressed, providing confidence that the other elements of the workplan were justified and targeted appropriately. Notwithstanding the published results of the FSA's work, and the offer by Julia Wrathall to share relevant research held by the RSPCA, the Sub-Group concluded that

no further consumer research was necessary. That workplan objective had therefore been met.
Action: Julia Wrathall to share relevant RSPCA-held research.

3.3 *Product definitions*

3.3.1 Mick Sloyan gave an update on progress on product definitions. He reminded the meeting that BPEX/RSPCA/NPA had identified a need for formal marketing definitions for non-indoor pigmeat production methods. A definition for 'free range' was pretty much agreed with industry, but definitions of outdoor reared and outdoor bred were proving more challenging – both in terms of consumer perceptions of what these terms might or do mean. Work between industry and RSPCA continued, including with consumer engagement.

3.1.2 The meeting was concerned that the end result was a labelling solution that provided consumers with clarity and access to information based on audited production standards/definitions. It was important to adopt consumer-friendly language on packaging/menus, and avoid industry jargon. In adopting domestic production standards, care would be required to ensure that the purpose remained clearly to provide relevant information to enable consumer choice in purchasing decisions. The exercise was certainly not one of attempted UK trade protectionism.

3.1.3 The meeting noted an EU dimension to this work. For example, the type and extent of non-indoor production in other Member States. There was a risk that the European Commission might consider regulatory marketing standards for pigmeat, so it was sensible – as far as possible – to develop UK definitions that were capable of wider EU application (or at least not ones to which the EC/MSs might take exception). [REDACTED] said that was a point on which she would like to consult her Defra colleagues. **Action:** [REDACTED] to consult within Defra and advise the Sub-Group accordingly.

3.1.4 Julia Wrathall said that when the final definitions were agreed and ready for use, the RSPCA would be very willing to play its part in promulgation and publicity – an observation repeated by others (eg retailer magazines, Blog sites, etc).

3.1.5 The immediate next step was a planned meeting of producers on 19 November to consider the matter in detail. Overall, the adopted timetable was to have finally agreed definitions in place by the end of March 2010 – hopefully to be incorporated into the proposed labelling Code of Practice (see below).

3.4 *Pigmeat Labelling Code of Practice*

3.4.1 Mick Sloyan tabled a paper outlining the components of a draft Code of Practice. In introducing the paper, he stressed that a Code was a commitment (not optional guidance). It was therefore important to get it right so that all parties throughout the supply chain were able to sign-up to it, and that its adoption would address the concerns of consumers. Although the Code would be pigmeat specific, it drew on the guiding principles taken from FSA's best practice guidance. It would also adopt specific guidance from recent LACORS guidance to local authority trading standards offices. The final Code need not be an overly long document – simplicity was the key, combined with helpful illustrative examples of what, in practice, constituted good and bad practice.

3.4.2 The Code would have a structure that included:

- Introduction (the evidence-based justification)
- Background (context of Code within existing regulation/enforcement)
- Scope (all pig muscle meat and products where pork was a main ingredient)

- Application (retail, food service, production, all breeds of pig)

3.4.3 In discussion, the Sub-Group welcomed the outline and supported the approach of a Code based on labelling principles (illustrated as proposed). It would not be necessary to require all products to carry protracted information about origin, but where it was necessary for consumers to seek information from another source (eg the supplier's website) access information should be provided at the point of purchasing decision (eg on the pack or the restaurant menu). The Code would not only cover direct origin claims (such as "produced in England") but would also apply to potentially confusing or implied statements (eg "sourced locally" or "Full English Breakfast").

3.4.4 In preparing the Code, it would be important to ensure it was in harmony with existing law (including competition issues) and compliant with wider trade issues, such as protectionism/WTO.

3.4.5 Mick Sloyan said that the main Task Force was expecting to see a full draft Code (which had been agreed by the Sub-Group) at its next meeting on 7 December. He would therefore circulate his paper to Sub-Group members electronically via the Task Force Secretary, requesting comments not later than Friday 20 November. Thereafter, he would produce a full draft Code and circulate that for final Sub-Group comments ahead of submitting it to the Task Force. **Action: Mick Sloyan/Duncan Prior** to circulate paper; **Sub-Group members** to provide comments on it.

[Promulgation of the final Code was discussed later in the meeting under *Communications Strategy* – see below.]

4. FSA update on EU developments on country of origin labelling

4.1 [REDACTED] explained that there had been virtually no development on the EC FIR proposals since the last meeting. No substantive discussions had taken place at EU level, and the dossier was not considered a top priority by the current nor incoming Presidencies. Country of Origin Labelling remained a key influencing component of the dossier. For planning purposes, it was still considered reasonable to assume that a final FIR would not materialise until the end of 2010 at the earliest.

5. Communications Strategy

5.1 Duncan Prior explained that the Task Force was expecting to be advised of outputs and key messages from each sub-group, and to be invited to consider a strategic approach for communicating those outputs between now and the end of the Task Force initiative. A 'Communications Grid' had been prepared to capture information from each sub-group which would feed into and inform the Task Force's deliberations. The Sub-Group thought the draft Grid to be on the right lines, and undertook to send comments about content to Duncan Prior as soon as possible. **Action: Sub-Group members.**

5.2 In discussion, the Sub-Group noted that a February launch of the Code of Practice was likely to be the optimum time for publicity and promulgation. BPEX would be planning to create a website for the Code and associated information (eg research evidence to support the need, identifying signatories to the Code, and so on). Mick Sloyan requested the participation of Ministers in a formal launch event, and other present committed using their promotional mechanisms to support up-take and use. These points would all be reflected in the proposed communications strategy for consideration by the Task Force. **Action: Mick Sloyan** agreed to represent the Sub-Group at a communications strategy planning meeting at Defra on 23 November. Given his own knowledge and experience, Rob Smith agreed to prepare a short

note in time for the 23 November meeting on how best to prepare a communications plan and its key components. **Action: Rob Smith** to provide a paper on communications planning.

6. Issues Log, Risk Register and Workplan

6.1 The Sub-Group reviewed the latest issues log, risk register and workplan documents, as distributed with the meeting papers. It was agreed that no new issues had been identified. On risks, it was agreed that the impact of certain risks were difficult to quantify; and in the case of non-compliance at EU level the Sub-Group had limited control of the risk if the EC introduced new unpredicted measures that made domestic arrangements obsolete. Generally, the workplan remained relevant, though some target dates required fine-tuning. **Action: Task Force Secretary** to revise documentation in light of specific points made.

7. Sub-Group report back to Task Force

7.1 The Sub-Group agreed that the principal topic for Task Force consideration was the draft Code of Practice and how/when it would be launched/promulgated.

8. Date of next meeting

8.1 It was agreed that the Sub-Group would next meet around mid-January, in time to prepare further inputs to the 1 February Task Force meeting. Possible dates would be circulated. **Action: Task Force Secretary.**

Task Force Secretariat
November 2009