

Mandatory Method of Production Labelling

Key Information

- Consumers have a right to know how the animal that produced the product they purchase was reared. Currently this is not necessarily the case, except for shell eggs and fish where information relating to the method of production (Method of Production labelling [MoPL]) is mandatory.
- The RSPCA would like to see mandatory MoPL for all animal products, as well as labelling of meat from animals that have not been stunned before slaughter, ensuring consumers have the knowledge required to adequately inform purchasing decisions.
- This policy should extend to all food and drink items that contain animal products, such as processed and ingredient products as well as 'primary' products, and should be applied across the whole food business sector including retail and food service.

Background

Method of production labelling (MoPL) identifies and describes the system used to rear the animal and helps consumers make an informed choice about which production methods to support through their purchases.

This form of labelling has been a mandatory requirement for shell eggs and fish since 2004 and has been instrumental in driving consumer awareness and purchasing of non-caged eggs. It has also helped support and recognise those farmers that have invested in higher welfare (non-cage) systems.

The previous UK Government publicly launched a consultation on fairer food labelling in March 2024 and this closed in May 2024.

Why we need Mandatory Labelling

Meat sold in the UK must be labelled with the country of origin (for example, reared in the UK), and shell eggs with MoPL. MoPL is something that consumers actively want, and this type of labelling can also be effective in driving higher welfare purchasing behaviour. It has existed for shell eggs since 2004 and is generally considered to have contributed to the

significant shift away from eggs from caged hens, allowing growth of the cage-free industry and making a huge contribution to farm animal welfare in the UK.

This is reinforced by the growth of higher welfare purchasing. Since the introduction of MoPL legislation for shell eggs, cage-free eggs (organic, free-range and barn) now account for 77% of all egg sales in the UK (up from 34% in 2003), and recently all UK supermarkets have pledged to only sell shell eggs from cage-free systems from 2025. However, the current lack of transparency in labelling for eggs used as ingredients means that many millions of hens will still be reared in cages each year without a change in legislation.

Currently, there is no opportunity for consumers to have information, such as the method of slaughter for animals from which the meat products they eat are produced. It is understood that meat from animals that are not pre-stunned under religious exemption may be entering the secular market despite the exemption from stunning under the Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (England) Regulations 2015 only applying to animals being slaughtered by - and for - the Muslim and Jewish communities. Pre-stunning ensures that an animal is unconscious and cannot feel pain before slaughter up until the point of death. 'Non-stunned' may be an appropriate, non-contentious, factual label for labelling meat from animals that have not been stunned, to provide sufficient information for the consumer to make an informed choice.

Mandatory MoPL and slaughter labelling would also help provide a fair and positive future for those farmers producing to higher standards, but who have no means of marketplace differentiation due to current ambiguous labelling terms already in existence. It will also reward those farmers who are prepared to invest in higher welfare systems and contribute to the development of the unique brand of British food as the UK Government continues to negotiate new trade deals and market access post-Brexit.

RSPCA's Position and Recommendations

- **The UK Government should mandate and effectively implement a clear, transparent, and meaningful MoPL and slaughter labelling system whereby all relevant food products are labelled with an agreed MoPL and slaughter term.**