

Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

Trader Notice MH 42/2014

To: Meat Industry Operators

Subject: Repealing the Voluntary Beef Labelling (VBL) Provisions of Reg. 1760/2000¹

Background

Regulation (EU) No. 1760/2000 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 July 2000 introduced a compulsory system of origin traceability and origin labelling for all fresh, frozen or minced beef marketed in the EU (with the exception of offal). There are two elements to the resulting beef labelling regime which apply to all parts of the supply chain:

- the compulsory system, which requires food business operators (FBOs) to label their beef products (unless cooked or processed) with certain prescribed information up to and including the point of sale to the consumer.
- the voluntary system (known in Ireland as the Voluntary Beef Labelling (VBL) Scheme), which covers any other labelling claim that processors or retailers wish to make concerning the origin, characteristics or production methods of the beef they are supplying. The claims made on product labels, marketing material or point of sale notices must be clear and cannot be misleading.

Regulation (EU) No. 653/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 repeals all of the VBL requirements laid out under Reg. 1760/2000, by deleting Articles 16 to 21 inclusive of that Regulation. This becomes effective from 13 December 2014.

It should be noted that the compulsory beef labelling system (under Articles 11 to 15 of Reg. 1760/2000), remains in force.

Future Requirements

Reg. 1760/2000 (as amended by Reg. 653/2014) no longer requires the Competent Authority to approve Voluntary Claims relating to the labelling of fresh/frozen or minced beef. However, the following **new** Article 15a is added to Reg. 1760/2000 under the compulsory beef labelling requirements:

“Article 15a - General rules

Food information other than that specified in Articles 13, 14 and 15 (*the compulsory requirements*) which is added to labels voluntarily by operators or organisations marketing beef **shall be objective, verifiable by the competent authorities and**

¹ Regulation (EU) No. 1760/2000 as amended by Regulation (EU) No. 653/2014

comprehensible for consumers.

That information shall comply with the horizontal legislation on labelling and in particular Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council (*the Food Information for Consumers (FIC) regulation*).

Where operators or organisations marketing beef do not respect the obligations referred to in the first and the second paragraphs, the competent authority shall apply appropriate penalties as laid down in Article 22.”

It should also be noted that the European Communities (Labelling of Beef and Beef Products) Regulations 2000 (S.I. No. 435 of 2000) will also be amended to take account of the repeal of the VBL Scheme.

Implications

The repeal of the VBL requirements by Reg. No. 653/2014 has the following implications for FBOs:

Up to 12 December 2014

- All aspects of the Voluntary Beef Labelling Scheme, including the independent audit requirement mentioned below, remain in operation up to 12 December 2014.
- However, the Department will cease to accept new applications under the VBL Scheme from the date of this notice.

From 13 December 2014

- **In relation to voluntary claims on beef labels, FBOs will be obliged to comply with the terms of the new Article 15a of Reg. 1760/2000 outlined above;**
- **FBOs will no longer have to make application to, and receive approval from, DAFM before applying voluntary claims to beef labels;**
- VBL Certificates of Approval that had been issued to FBOs by DAFM listing approved VBL claims will cease to have legal validity;
- DAFM will require the return of all such Certificates held by FBOs for cancellation. FBOs will be contacted by DAFM’s Beef Policy Section in this regard in due course;
- Where FBOs wish to continue to use voluntary claims on beef labels that had previously been approved by the Department under the VBL Scheme, or where they wish to use a voluntary claim on a beef label that they have not used before, FBOs shall abide by the requirements laid out in the new Article 15a of Reg. 1760/2000 (as detailed on page one above). In particular, such claims must be **objective, verifiable by the competent authorities and comprehensible for consumers.**

- There will no longer be a mandatory requirement on FBOs to engage an independent control body (as was required under the VBL Scheme) to verify the accuracy of their control systems and labelling information.

Nonetheless, FBOs should be aware that these voluntary claims will be subject to audit by the relevant Competent Authorities. FBOs must, as would have been expected under the VBL Scheme, maintain documented Standard Operating Procedures that both define the meaning/specification of the voluntary claims used on their beef labels and also clearly outline the systems and controls they have in place that will guarantee the accuracy and validity of any voluntary claims that they use on beef labels after 13 December 2014.

FBOs are advised to maintain a register of the most up-to-date voluntary claims that they are using on their beef labels.

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12th November 2014