



House of Commons

Environment, Food and Rural
Affairs Committee

Contamination of Beef Products: Government Response to the Committee's Eighth Report of Session 2012–13

**Seventh Special Report of Session
2012–13**

*Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed Tuesday 23 April 2013*

HC 1085
Published on 25 April 2013
by authority of the House of Commons
London: The Stationery Office Limited
£0.00

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

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Seventh Special Report

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee reported to the House on *Contamination of Beef Products* in its Eighth Report of Session 2012-13, published on 14 February 2013 as HC 946. The Government's response to the Report was received on 11 April 2013.

Government response

The Government is grateful to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee for its Eighth Report of Session 2012-13 detailing its conclusions and recommendations on its inquiry into contamination of beef products.

The Government appreciates that the Committee felt that it was important to produce an early report. Given the fast pace of events from across Europe, results from the extensive survey and testing work put in place by Governments both in the UK and in Europe and by the food industry since the Committee took evidence on 30 January, much of the report has been overtaken by events.

This has proved to be a Europe-wide problem. The UK Government was instrumental in prompting action at a European level. We moved swiftly to mobilise industry, local authorities and European partners to embark on an unprecedented food testing regime to find out how it happened and to provide reassurance to consumers. The food industry also deserves credit for the ambition and effort demonstrated by the scope of the testing it has completed.

The UK was the first Member State to present documents to Europol, in support of that organisation's role in facilitating cross-national investigation and co-ordinating the efforts of police authorities in the EU. Also, the Food Standards Agency has been working with domestic police forces to investigate suspected fraudulent activity within the food supply chain. People that have been deliberately defrauding the consumer should expect to feel the full force of the law and our investigations are continuing.

We have carefully considered all of the recommendations made by the Committee. This document sets out the Government's response to each recommendation.

The Government additionally notes that the Secretary of State for Environment Food and Rural Affairs has kept Parliament fully informed throughout these unfolding events with nine Ministerial statements to date.

Responses to Recommendations and Conclusion

Responsibility in the supply chain

1. In its response to this report we expect the Government to confirm that it has sought and received, from all Member States implicated as possible sources of contaminated meat, assurances that they have applied the export checks and controls required under EU law. We recommend that the Government urge the European Commission to assess the implementation and enforcement of food safety and hygiene regulations throughout the EU, and take firm action where non-compliance is identified. (Paragraph 9)

The European Commission is responsible under the Treaties for ensuring that EU legislation on food safety, animal health, plant health and animal welfare is properly implemented and enforced. Member States provided assurances to the European Commission that they were applying the requirements of EU law and official controls to the production of meat products at the Extraordinary Standing Committee meeting held in Brussels on 15 February. In the course of its investigations, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) has been working closely with its counterparts in Europe on the supply chain for implicated products.

The Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) is the European Commission's audit and inspection body. The FVO has two primary responsibilities: firstly to carry out audits to evaluate each Member State's implementation of the EU legislative framework for systems of control for food and feed, animal health and welfare, and plant health; secondly, it has responsibility to carry out audits of equivalent controls in third countries wishing to export food and/or feed to the European Union.

Strict provisions already apply to meat being imported to the UK from outside the EU. All consignments of meat are required to enter at designated Border Inspection Posts where they are subject to veterinary checks to ensure import conditions have been met. All consignments are subject to documentary and identity checks and a prescribed percentage of consignments undergo physical checks which may include laboratory analysis.

The Government cannot routinely detain items moving in 'free circulation' within the internal market, as this contravenes the principles of the single market. The Food Standards Agency continues to work closely with its counterparts in Europe to investigate implicated products and mislabelled material, providing information to other Member States and liaising with Europol as necessary.

2. While private companies should seek redress for breaches of contract it is important that national governments and regulators do not delay taking action to improve controls in the supply chain while responsibility for contamination is pursued through the courts. (Paragraph 11)

EU food law makes it clear that it is the responsibility of food businesses to ensure the food they sell is safe and is as described. The FSA has required food businesses to conduct authenticity tests on all comminuted beef products, such as beef burgers, meatballs and lasagne, and provide the results to the FSA. The testing programme carried out by

industry at the behest of the regulator has been of an unprecedented scale—5430 results submitted in a three-week period. These results have been published (www.food.gov.uk/enforcement/monitoring/horse-meat/horse-meat-test-results).

The FSA met with retailers and processors on 16 January to investigate the supply chain. In light of further findings, Defra's Secretary of State held a meeting on 9 February with the FSA and representatives from the food industry regarding the ongoing contaminated meat incident and action being taken by the industry to identify the scale of the problem and provide assurances to their customers. This was followed by a further meeting between the Secretary of State, Ministers from the devolved administrations, the Local Government Association and food businesses from throughout the supply chain on 18 February.

The results of the industry survey, and of other investigations conducted by the FSA and local authorities to date, have identified twenty products that contain undeclared horse meat at the equivalent of at least 1% of the total meat content of the product. Over 99% of the tests conducted by industry have not identified contamination at this level.

The FSA is working with local authorities on a three-phase Enforcement Sampling Survey, which is in addition to the annual national co-ordinated risk-based food and feed sampling programme. Results to date have been published (<http://www.food.gov.uk/news-updates/news/2013/mar/survey>).

Defra and FSA will continue discussions with the food industry on how food chain controls can be improved.

3. Retailers and food producers have a responsibility to ensure that the food they produce and sell is accurately labelled and safe. Tesco and other major retailers have let consumers down by selling contaminated products to the British public. We intend to take further evidence from representatives of the food supply chain in due course to explore how customers can be assured of the quality of all the products they consume, including, in particular economy products. (Paragraph 12)

The Government shares the view of the Committee on the responsibility of food businesses. The legal framework for these requirements is set out under EU Regulation 178/2002 which establishes that food businesses have the primary responsibility for verifying that food is of the right quality and is correctly labelled: they need to review their own systems and test their products to demonstrate to consumers that they are in control of their supply chains. Food businesses are legally responsible to make sure their food is labelled correctly.

The Government notes the Committee's intention to take further evidence from representatives of the food supply chain. If further issues arise from these hearings, the Government will be pleased to provide further information to the Committee.

4. We recommend that the Government sets out how it will strengthen the enforcement and testing regimes in the UK horsemeat industry to reduce the risk of meat containing potentially harmful veterinary medicine residues entering the human food chain. We further recommend that the Government set out, in its response to this report, what work it is doing at present to improve the operation of the horse passport system. (Paragraph 15)

Defra have policy responsibility for the horse passport system which is enforced by the FSA in horse abattoirs and by local authorities at other locations.

On 11 February 2013, the Food Standards Agency as part of its enforcement activity at approved horse slaughterhouses in the UK, instituted a 'positive release' system for horse carcasses. This means that all horse carcasses have to test negative for phenylbutazone ('bute') before they can enter the food chain. At the moment the Government, and therefore the taxpayer, bear the cost of the 'bute' testing programme. In reviewing the incident the Government will consider the arguments for industry bearing the cost. There are no immediate plans to add any further substances to the testing of residues in horses intended for the food chain. The Commission and the FVO are content with the UK's cover for horses and there is no intelligence at present which indicates concern about any other veterinary medicines. However, the situation in all food producing animals is kept under review.

The Government remains committed to exploring ways to improve the horse passport system within the framework of European legislation, and Defra Ministers met representatives of various equine sectors on 21 February to discuss how this could be achieved and taken forward. In the longer term we will explore, in conjunction with other Member States, whether changes can be made to the European rules that would enable wider changes to be made.

Defra has work in hand with the equine sector to improve the operation of the horse passport system. This includes agreeing, setting and enforcing minimum quality standards for passports and operating standards for Passport Issuing Organisations, providing information to horse owners and vets about their legal responsibilities, and supporting the equine sector in developing a new central equine database which would be managed and funded by the sector. Defra continues to work with the FSA and Local Authorities to ensure that they have the information, advice and guidance they need to enforce the system effectively.

The role of the FSA

5. Whilst Ministers are properly responsible for policy, the FSA's diminished role has led to a lack of clarity about where responsibility lies, and this has weakened the UK's ability to identify and respond to food standards concerns. Furthermore the current contamination crisis has caught the FSA and Government flat-footed and unable to respond effectively within structures designed primarily to respond to threats to human health. (Paragraph 19)

Government rejects the suggestion that its response has been inadequate. The response from Government was swift and effective, with clear, joined-up working between government departments, local authorities and the European Commission.

The Machinery of Government changes in 2010 led to some changes insofar as, in England, responsibility for the various aspects of food labelling is now shared between Defra, FSA and DH. Defra is responsible for food composition and labelling policy (other than food safety or nutrition labelling) in England, as well as a food authenticity programme. The FSA has policy responsibility for food safety, food safety labelling and

incidents. It also has policy lead for Regulation 178/2002/EC—General Food Law. The Department of Health is responsible for nutritional labelling policy and health claims in England. Local Authorities are responsible for enforcement of the legislation, supported by FSA and other central government departments as appropriate. Defra, DH and FSA work closely together to deliver these changed responsibilities. At the same time as the changes in England, responsibility for nutrition policy and nutrition labelling in Wales transferred to the Welsh Government. The Machinery of Government changes of 2010 did not affect the remit of the Food Standards Agency in Scotland and Northern Ireland, where it remains the central competent authority in matters of food safety, standards and authenticity.

The FSA leads and coordinates the government enforcement response to food incidents including misleading labelling or food fraud incidents, and routinely works closely with local authorities. The FSA took the lead, responding quickly and decisively when alerted by the Food Safety Authority of Ireland of its findings, initiating investigations into the supply chain, working with colleagues across government, the devolved administrations, local authorities and with its European counterparts. The FSA has been working with UK and European police authorities and the UK was the first to submit a dossier to Europol.

The Government required industry to undertake testing of its products and, as a result, testing has been conducted on an unprecedented scale with 5,430 industry tests reported and published in the three weeks to 1 March 2013.

Every day government inspectors carry out official control duties in approved meat establishments (slaughterhouses, game handling establishments and cutting plants). In all FSA approved meat establishments in Great Britain, the FSA carries out routine audits, of which there were 2,870 in 2011/12. In response to this incident, the FSA carried out an urgent risk-based audit of slaughterhouses, cold stores and other meat plants across the UK. Where there has been evidence of wrongdoing, action has been taken at a number of UK premises, arrests have been made and investigations continue.

At European level, the Secretary of State has been at the forefront in Brussels pushing for the need for rapid and effective cross-border action. This has led to the UK (working in partnership with other European Member States similarly affected) successfully securing agreement for an immediate, Europe-wide programme of testing of beef products as well as rapid sharing of information and intelligence on food authenticity issues including with Europol. The recommendation for a co-ordinated control plan to identify adulteration of beef products with horsemeat was adopted by consensus at the extraordinary meeting of the Standing Committee of the Food Chain and Animal Health (SCoFCAH) on 15 February. This is an important step in establishing where the problem of food fraud is occurring across Europe and seeking commitment from all Member States to not only put an end to it but to prevent it happening again.

6. It seems improbable that individuals prepared to pass horsemeat off as beef illegally are applying the high hygiene standards rightly required in the food production industry. (Paragraph 21)

The Government shares the Committee's concern. However, currently, we know of no evidence supporting a health or hygiene risk. Investigations are continuing which will help to identify the source of the horsemeat and how it entered the food chain.

7. We recommend that the Government and Food Standards Agency undertake a broader spectrum of testing for products found to have the highest levels of contamination (where substitution is suspected rather than trace contamination) to provide assurances that there is no other non-bovine DNA or any other substances that could be harmful to human health present. (Paragraph 22)

The issue that has come to light is of gross contamination of beef with horsemeat, so resources have initially been focused on that issue in response to the current incidents. It is the responsibility of food businesses to satisfy themselves as to the provenance of the products they use, so the Government expects companies to be taking wider steps to assure authenticity. The UK national co-ordinated sampling and surveillance programme already tests food products for a wide range of food safety and authenticity issues. This is risk-based and intelligence-led. Defra, Department of Health and the FSA will consider whether this programme needs to be re-prioritised. It is important to emphasise that national food sampling programmes are intended as a check on what is on the market. The primary responsibility for the quality of food products and their accurate labelling lies with the food businesses which supply them.

8. We urge the Department, as soon as practicable, to ensure the effective imposition of meat traceability requirements in respect of the sale and marketing of processed foods originating from EU Member States (including the UK) and, as part of that exercise, to examine the scope for national action to that effect on consumer protection grounds in accordance with well-established EU case law on free movement of goods. (Paragraph 23)

EU Regulation 178/2002 introduced traceability requirements for all food businesses. They must be able to identify any business who has supplied them with a food or food ingredient, as well as being able to identify the businesses to which their products have been supplied. It is this requirement which is enabling the Food Standards Agency to investigate supply lines in the current incident.

9. We recommend that the Secretary of State press for EU Food and Veterinary Office inspections of abattoirs and port authorities in order to ensure that Member States' national authorities are complying with the necessary certification processes and physical and labelling checks on meat consignments destined for export. (Paragraph 24)

The Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) is the European Commission's audit and inspection body. Where relevant the programme of sector-specific audits will check that Member States' national competent authorities are complying with the necessary certification processes and physical and labelling checks on meat consignments destined for export.

10. If the current investigations identify sites in a particular Member State as the source of contamination, we recommend that the Government discuss with the Commission now the circumstances and legal basis for a suspension of meat exports from that

particular Member State should that course of action become appropriate. (Paragraph 25)

The Government notes the Committee's recommendation to discuss with the Commission the legal basis for a suspension of meat exports from particular Member States if current investigations identify them as the source of contamination of beef products with horsemeat.

Regulation 178/2002 lays down that where it is evident that food originating in the Community is likely to constitute a serious risk to human health, animal health or the environment, and that such risk cannot be contained satisfactorily by means of measures taken by the Member State(s) concerned, the Commission, acting on its own initiative or at the request of a Member State, shall immediately adopt one or more of the following measures, depending on the gravity of the situation:

- a) suspension of the placing on the market or use of the food in question;
- b) laying down special conditions for the food or feed in question;
- c) any other appropriate interim measure.

Any action to ban imported meat would have to be on grounds of 'a serious hazard to animals or to human health'. Existing legislation (the "Trade in Animals and Related Products Regulations 2011") would permit us to ban imports if there was a serious threat to public or animal health. A ban would only be brought in if there was evidence of a risk to human health. At the moment there is no evidence that any of the horse meat in beef products is a risk to human health. If there was such evidence of a serious hazard, the Government would not hesitate to take appropriate action.

11. We expect the FSA to provide us with an account of its actions in relation to the information provided by the FSAI in November, including whether they recommended that local authorities undertake DNA testing of processed beef products. (Paragraph 27)

On the 23 November 2012, at a regular liaison meeting, the Food Safety Authority in the Republic of Ireland (FSAI) told the Food Standards Agency that they were developing a methodology for testing for horse DNA in meat products, and that FSAI would keep FSA informed. FSA suggested a joint sampling initiative at some time in the future should the methodology prove robust. FSAI gave no indication of any intelligence to suggest a heightened risk of meat substitution at that stage and, hence, there was no reason for FSA to adjust their testing programme.

After 23 November there were no further discussions or communications between FSAI and FSA regarding any investigation or intelligence about the presence of horsemeat in beef products until, on the 10 January 2013, FSAI advised the FSA they were undertaking some authenticity checks on meat products and would keep the FSA informed of the results. On the 14 January they told the FSA that they had found contamination and that Tesco, Iceland and Lidl products were implicated. On the 15 January FSAI published the results of the survey on their website and the FSA were then able to access these results and immediately launched an urgent investigation and action plan.

12. The requirement to test a wide range of products in a short space of time will stretch the UK's testing capacity. This suggests a promise to the public made in haste without the necessary thought and planning to ensure that it could be delivered. (Paragraph 30)

The Government rejects the suggestion that testing was initiated without the necessary thought or planning.

The requirement for testing and reporting results was demanding, but reflected the urgency of this situation. The known cases of significant amounts of horsemeat in meat products pointed to gross negligence or deliberate adulteration in the food chain. This needed to be addressed as a matter of urgency to protect UK consumers and confidence in the UK food supply. This required the food industry to urgently carry out its own enhanced testing of processed beef products to establish whether horsemeat was present.

Within the UK there are at least seven official control laboratories (OCLs) currently undertaking the analysis of official samples for the occurrence of horse DNA/meat. There are also at least five major UK food analysis laboratories and at least six UK commercial laboratories that are able to offer the analysis on a commercial basis to the food industry. The FSA is aware that many of the UK OCLs are currently working at or near to full capacity, which is not unreasonable given the urgency of the situation. If the appointed public analyst is unable to analyse official samples themselves then they are permitted, through the Food Safety Act 1990, to send samples to a third party laboratory for analysis under their direction. The third party laboratory need not be situated within the UK.

Notwithstanding these constraints, industry reported the results of 5,430 tests to the Food Standards Agency in the three weeks to 1 March 2013, which represent more than 90% of processed beef product lines on sale in the UK.

13. The retailers depend on public trust. They are responding to the requirement to undertake testing. We can see little reason why the agency responsible for food safety should not have the statutory power to require those in the food industry to undertake tests to determine that their products comply with food standards regulations. We recommend that the FSA be given the power to require testing to be undertaken taking into account the level of risk. All testing results must be reported to the FSA whether they are mandated by the FSA or carried out independently. (Paragraph 31)

The Government notes that the Committee has raised a valid question on establishing statutory powers for the FSA to enable it to require food industry testing to check compliance with food standards regulations. The Government will reflect on this recommendation in the context of the existing regulatory framework and as part of the consideration of the lessons learned.

14. In our further work we will explore with local authorities how they decide what and when to test and about their engagement with the FSA. We will also consider whether resources for local authorities' food testing responsibilities are appropriate. (Paragraph 35)

The routine local authority annual sampling programme continues, with the FSA working with Defra and the Department of Health each year to formulate priorities for local authority sampling as part of the programme which include food authenticity. In 2012/13,

a total of £1.6 million was made available to local authorities across the UK for co-ordinated sampling and analysis under this programme.

The Defra food authenticity programme also links to this work in making sure that validated food authenticity methods are available for the local authority to use when testing samples.

15. The FSA's position has been undermined by the discovery of pork DNA in beef products certified as Halal. We recommend that Defra consult with representatives of the supply chain and food safety authorities to explore the limits of tolerance of trace contamination. (Paragraph 37)

Neither FSA nor DEFRA are responsible for private marketing standards. There are no specific regulations governing the sale and labelling of halal or kosher meat; certification is provided by private organisations. The FSA is responsible for official controls in approved meat premises, including meat hygiene requirements and regulations relating to the welfare of animals at slaughter, but not for certifying that slaughter methods meet the specifications required by those private organisations.

In light of this incident, Defra and FSA have commissioned some urgent research by the Laboratory of the Government Chemist (LGC Ltd) to assess and measure low level contamination in current manufacturing and production processes. The project will look at unavoidable carry over between processing of different types of minced meat through the same equipment or prepared sequentially on the same production lines according to good manufacturing practice. Simultaneously, FSA is undertaking research using established consumer forum methodology to explore consumer acceptability of trace level carry-over. Taken together, this research on industry achievability and consumer acceptability will inform a decision on an appropriate future threshold for trace levels under good manufacturing practice in food production and processing. The FSA Board is due to have an initial discussion of emerging results at its open meeting in April.

In addition, Government is working with LGC to carry out research to fully validate limits of detection for methods to detect DNA, used by Public Analysts to support accurate interpretation of meat speciation survey results as a whole in a standardised way.

16. The Government should consult with faith groups on providing assurances that certified religiously prepared food is sufficiently controlled. (Paragraph 38)

The Government recognises that recent events may have caused particular distress to people who choose Halal and Kosher food. We recognise that even very low levels of contamination with pork may be unacceptable to some faith groups.

This is why very early on during this contamination incident, Defra consulted the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) which hosts the Faith Communities Engagement Team. Defra, FSA and DCLG met with representatives of Halal and Kosher certifying organisations on 14 March to brief them on how the Government is responding to the recently reported contamination of meat products through its testing programme, the approaches being used to detect contamination (and their sensitivity) and research projects commissioned from the Laboratory of the Government Chemist. Participants were invited to give their views and a commitment was made to

share information about the testing programme results and the research project outcomes, as it becomes available.

Whilst there are no specific regulations governing the sale and labelling of Halal and Kosher meat, if meat is labelled as such it is subject to the same legal requirements as any other food that it must be labelled correctly and that consumers must not be misled. Certification of religiously prepared food is provided by private organisations. It is not the role of Government to provide assurances of private certification schemes but we can provide information on the regulatory framework and share knowledge of analytical testing to assist and this was one of the aims of the aforementioned DCLG-hosted meeting. It is the responsibility of all food businesses, including certifying bodies, to provide assurance of their processes and to ensure that the food they sell is what it says it is and that consumers are not misled.

17. We recommend that Defra consult on the implications of regulating to require separate production lines for different meat products. (Paragraph 39)

The majority of abattoirs and manufacturing facilities in the UK process more than one meat species. A move to separate production lines would require a fundamental change to the existing operational structure and plant design which would entail significant cost to industry and may not be realistic in economic terms or proportionate to the benefit gained.

Under existing legislation, food business operators are required to maintain equipment in a good state of repair, to minimise the opportunity for build up of food. They must disinfect food contact equipment frequently enough to avoid any risk of contamination. While there may not be a full clean down and disinfection of slaughter lines between species it is best practice to clean and wash the slaughter lines when there is a change of species.

Defra and FSA are working with LGC Ltd and with industry on research using DNA testing to establish what level of cross contamination between meat species occurs in industrial practice on production lines with multi-species plants where the most stringent and rigorous cleaning regimes are in place.

This research will gather evidence to help define a threshold trace level as good hygiene practice in food production and processing. Until that work is completed, it seems premature to consider the option of regulating to require separate production lines for different meat products.

18. Defra is the Government department responsible for setting up reliable systems to guarantee food safety and correct labelling. It has failed to do so in this case. This is not the time for the Government to be proposing reducing the labelling standards applied to British food. All food should be labelled accurately and provide the consumer sufficient information to make informed decisions about their purchases.

The Government rejects the notion that there are inadequate systems in place to guarantee food safety and correct labelling. The legal framework provides this protection through legislation such as the Food Safety Act 1990, and EU legislation such as EU Regulation 178/2002, Directive 2000/13/EC. Under the Food Standards Act 1999, the Food Standards Agency is the (non-Ministerial) government department responsible for food safety. As

outlined in our response to recommendation 5, local authorities enforce the legislation, supported by the FSA and other central government departments as appropriate.

The Government shares the Committee's view that food should be labelled accurately and correctly to enable informed consumer choice. The Government rejects the suggestion that it is proposing reducing the labelling standards applied to British food. On the assumption that this refers to the recent consultation on implementation of the EU Food Information to Consumers Regulation it should be noted that this legislation will deliver significant improvements in labelling standards, for example in introducing country of origin labelling for fresh meat. The Government is naturally seeking to implement these new rules in the least burdensome ways possible for food businesses which we would expect the Committee to welcome, given its views on the issue of DSM. We apply better regulation principles to ensure a proportionate approach with a view to achieving the right balance between protecting consumers and burdens on business and enforcement bodies.

Defra's Secretary of State pressed the Commission, and successfully agreed with European Commissioner Borg and at the Agriculture Council on 25 February that production and publication of the Commission's report on extending mandatory country of origin labelling to meat in processed products be accelerated. The Secretary of State asked that this also include a proper impact assessment so that evidence of the practicalities, costs and any unintended consequences are mapped out.

Our aim is always to maintain or improve the current level of consumer information, to ensure clear and consistent labelling to facilitate consumer choice. Where consumers are already sufficiently protected from unfair commercial practices through existing legislation such as the consumer protection regulations, Food Safety Act 1990, etc., it is only right that these aspects are considered carefully before introducing any additional new tiers of legislation when existing rules are already in place and give the necessary protection.

Conclusion

19. While this is primarily a food labelling issue, the suggestion of fraud on a massive scale, suggests that measures must be put in place now to prevent any further contaminated meat entering the food chain. The Government will need to consider its role in achieving the correct balance between affordable food prices and regulations that ensure transparency and quality. We are concerned that the consumer will be caught in a Catch 22 between paying the costs of higher traceability, labelling and testing standards or having to accept that they will not be provided with comprehensive information about the provenance and composition of the food that they eat. The strong indications that people have intentionally substituted horsemeat for beef leads us to conclude that British consumers have been cynically and systematically duped in pursuit of profit by elements within the food industry. (Paragraph 43)

The recent incidents are ones of food fraud which are completely unacceptable. Consumers need to be confident that food is what it says on the label. It is completely unacceptable that consumers have been buying products labelled beef, but which turn out to contain horsemeat.

The legal framework in place requires food businesses to apply controls and checks on product and ingredient traceability and to ensure that the labelling, advertising and presentation of food must not mislead consumers. It is the responsibility of industry to ensure that the requirements of this legislation are met all along the supply chain. Most of the current incidents are examples of fraud in breach of the existing legal framework, rather than necessarily indicating that the law is inadequate.

The Government is committed to learning the lessons from this incident, and to make any changes that are needed to reinforce the integrity of the food chain, and build and maintain consumer confidence. Also, once the immediate incidents have been resolved we will also be discussing with European partners what lessons can be learned at a European level.

The Government additionally notes that the Secretary of State for Food, Environment and Rural Affairs and the Minister of State have kept Parliament fully informed throughout these unfolding events with Ministers statements and detailed response to Urgent Questions in the House.

April 2013