

Labelling of beef

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Although the United Kingdom left the European Union (EU) in 2021, certain pieces of legislation (known as 'assimilated law') continue to apply until such time as they are replaced by new UK legislation, revoked or permitted to expire. This means that our guidance still contains references to legislation that originated from the EU.

This guidance is for Scotland

The Compulsory Beef Labelling Scheme requires specific information to be provided to consumers. This traceability information gives the origin of the beef or veal.

Certain prescribed information is compulsory for beef and veal at all stages in the supply chain, from slaughter to final retail. Additional voluntary information may be applied to these products as long as it complies with food labelling legislation. (These requirements do not apply to cooked beef or cooked veal products.)

The information must be provided in writing. For prepacked meat, it must be either affixed to the meat or the packaging; for non-prepacked meat, it must be in writing visible to the ultimate consumer at the point of sale.

'Prepacked' means food that is completely or partially enclosed in packaging, that cannot be removed from the packaging without changing the packaging in some way, and that was placed in packaging before being offered for sale.

This guidance relates to 'meat' rather than 'products containing meat'. Products containing meat are meat with added additional ingredients (seasonings, fruit and vegetables, other meats, etc). For information on the requirements of products containing meat please refer to '[Composition of products containing meat](#)'.

Compulsory information

Fresh, chilled and frozen beef and veal

Information that must be provided on all beef and veal products, whether fresh, chilled or frozen:

- a reference number or code identifying the specific animal or group of animals from which the beef was derived
- the name of the country in which the animal or group of animals were born**
- the name(s) of all countries in which the animal or group of animals were raised**
- 'Slaughtered in: [name of country]**
- approval number of the slaughterhouse*
- 'Cutting / cut in: [name of country]'
- approval number(s) of the cutting plant(s)*

Those points marked with * above are not required for retail sale to the public of loose (non-prepacked) beef or veal products.

Where animals have been born, raised and slaughtered in the same country, those points marked with ** above can be replaced by 'Origin: [name of country]'.

Where compulsory information is not available for meat imported from a non-EU country, the labelling must show at least the words 'Origin: non-EU and slaughtered in [name of country]'. You should also show a traceable reference number or code if the meat is cut or repackaged after import.

More information on what must appear in labelling is available in the Scottish Government's [beef labelling guidance](#).

Prepacked cut beef and veal

Prepacked cut beef and veal can be sold with meat from a maximum of three slaughterhouses or cutting plants in the same package. The labelling on these packages must show:

- slaughterhouse approval number and country of slaughter for each of the relevant countries of origin. Shown as: 'Animals in the group slaughtered in [name of country]'
- country of cutting and cutting plant approval number for each appropriate country of cutting. Shown as: 'Cutting of meat in batch in [country of cutting]'

Non-prepacked cut beef and veal

For non-prepacked beef and veal, the requirements are the same regarding mixing batches from a maximum of three slaughterhouses or cutting plants. The information that must be provided to the final consumer is country of birth, rearing, slaughter and cutting. This information should be provided in such a way that consumers can clearly see what information relates to what meat without confusion. Meat from different countries must be clearly separated in the display.

Operators must keep a daily, dated record of licence numbers of the slaughterhouses and cutting plants relating to the meat for sale. This must be shown to consumers on request.

Minced beef

Minced beef must be labelled with the following:

- traceability reference number or code
- country of slaughter
- country of mincing / preparation
- country of origin (from birth to slaughter) if different to country of mincing

You may also include any of the compulsory information for fresh beef and veal products listed earlier in this guidance.

Minced beef from two or more countries of origin cannot be mixed by cutting plants. Minced beef can be mixed with offal from the same country; it must then be marked with all compulsory information.

'Offal' means fresh meat other than that of the carcase, including viscera (organs of the thoracic, abdominal and pelvic cavities, as well as the windpipe and gullet) and blood.

Minced meat should not contain more than 25% fat.

If you describe your product as 'lean' it should not contain more than 7% fat. There is no fat limit set for 'extra lean' mince but if you describe your product as such it should contain considerably less than 7% fat.

Where a meat is named (for example, minced beef) then no other meats can be present.

No additives can be used in minced meat. Please note that products that contain minced meat as an ingredient are 'products containing meat' rather than 'meat' and may contain certain additives. For more information on the requirements for products containing meat, see '[Composition of products containing meat](#)'.

If you wish to use any of the descriptions in the table below, you should comply with the stated limits on fat and collagen (note that the reference to collagen in the table means 'connective tissue').

Allowable percentage of fat content and the collagen / meat protein ratio

Type of minced meat	Fat content: less than or equal to ...	Collagen / meat protein ratio: less than or equal to ...
Lean minced meat	7%	12%

Type of minced meat	Fat content: less than or equal to ...	Collagen / meat protein ratio: less than or equal to ...
Minced pure beef	20%	15%
Minced meat containing pigmeat	30%	18%
Minced meat of other species	25%	15%

If your product does not meet these limits you can still use the description, but you must state 'For the UK market only'.

When selling prepacked minced meat using any of the above descriptions you must state on the label how much fat and collagen (connective tissue) is present using the following wording:

- 'Percentage of fat content under X%'
- 'Collagen / meat protein ratio under X%'

You do not need to declare the amounts of fat and collagen (connective tissue) if the product is sold loose or if you use a description other than those above - for example, beef mince - but you will still need to comply with the compositional requirements.

Trimming

Trimming must be labelled with the following:

- country of slaughter
- country of production
- countries of birth and rearing

If all of the above are the same country, the labelling may read 'Country of origin: [name of country] (where birth, rearing and slaughter took place)'.

Protected food names

Products with 'protected designation of origin' or 'protected geographical indication' must show all compulsory information listed at the start of this guide. Information on [protecting food and drink names](#) is available on the GOV.UK website.

Beef and veal from animals under 12 months old

These animals must be categorised at slaughter with reference 'V' for animals under eight months old, and 'Z' for animals between eight and 12 months old. They must be marketed according to their designated names in the EU. In the UK, animals with a 'V' code under eight months old are required to be described as veal. Animals with a 'Z' code aged between eight and 12 months must be described as beef. These requirements also apply to offal.

Meat and offal from animals under 12 months old must be labelled accordingly ('Age on slaughter: up to 8 months' or 'Age on slaughter: 8-12 months') at each stage of production or sale, but this can be abbreviated to 'V' or 'Z' until retail to the final consumer.

Offal must also be described appropriately - for example, 'calves' liver' may only be used to describe liver

from animals under eight months old. Offal from different aged animals may be mixed, but must be labelled with the appropriate information for both sources. Beef or veal meat from 'V' and 'Z' coded animals may not be mixed.

Specified risk material (SRM)

SRM is the parts of an animal that represent the highest risk of carrying disease.

The sale of SRM and the sale of any food containing SRM for human consumption is banned, as is the use of SRM and the sale of SRM for use in the preparation of food for human consumption.

For cattle, SRM varies according to whether it originated in the UK and its age, but generally includes the skull (including brain and eyes), tonsils, spinal cord, thymus, spleen and intestines.

Further information

Full detailed guidance on the Compulsory Beef Labelling Scheme is available in the Scottish Government's [beef labelling guidance](#).

The GOV.UK website also has guidance on [beef and veal labelling](#).

Trading Standards

For more information on the work of Trading Standards services - and the possible consequences of not abiding by the law - please see '[Trading Standards: powers, enforcement and penalties](#)'.

In Scotland, food labelling laws are not generally enforced by the Trading Standards service, but rather by Environmental Health. However, we have included In-depth Guides on food for Scotland in order to provide more comprehensive guidance.

In this update

Updated the terminology from 'meat products' to 'products containing meat'.

Last reviewed / updated: January 2024

Key legislation

- [Beef and Veal Labelling \(Scotland\) Regulations 2010](#)
- [assimilated Regulation \(EU\) 1169/2011 on the provision of food information to consumers](#)
- [Food Information \(Scotland\) Regulations 2014](#)
- [Products Containing Meat etc \(Scotland\) Regulations 2014](#)

Please note

This information is intended for guidance; only the courts can give an authoritative interpretation of the law.

The guide's 'Key legislation' links may only show the original version of the legislation, although some amending legislation is linked to separately where it is directly related to the content of a guide. Information on changes to legislation can be found by following the above links and clicking on the 'More Resources' tab.

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