businesscompanion
trading standards law explained

Protected food and drink names (geographical indications)

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In this guide, the words 'must' or 'must not' are used where there is a legal requirement to do (or not do) something. The word 'should' is used where there is established legal guidance or best practice that is likely to help you avoid breaking the law.

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 England, Scotland and Wales

These requirements apply equally to all food regardless of how it is sold (non-prepacked, prepacked, prepacked for direct sale, for immediate consumption at / from a mass caterer such as cafes, restaurants and food vans).

Some foods and drinks are traditional to certain countries or regions, or have a particular character when produced in those countries or regions. Where this is the case, the description may be registered as a geographical indication (GI) (see the link to the GOV.UK website for more information on the GI schemes).

Geographical indications

Each GI has a product specification that details how the product is to be made, what ingredients it must contain, and restricts the manufacture of the product to a specific geographical region. The specified region can be a country (such as for Scottish Salmon) or a specific region within a country (such as for Carmarthen Ham).

A searchable register of geographical indications can be found on the GOV.UK website (covering food, wine and spirit drinks). In some cases, the detailed specifications of the protected items are not available through the register, though they can be obtained from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) by emailing protectedfoodnames@defra.gov.uk. Alternatively, many of the specifications are available on eAmbrosia, the EU's geographical indications register.

You can only use a GI if you comply with the rules on both composition and manufacture, and manufacture the product within the protected geographical region. For example, you cannot describe your product as a 'Melton Mowbray Pork Pie' unless the product is manufactured in the area around the town of Melton Mowbray.

If you wish to use a GI, your business must be audited to ensure that you are meeting the requirements of the GI; however, you do not have to use a GI if you do not want to.

You must not mislead the consumer in any way as to the geographical origin of the product, even if you state the true origin on the label. For example, you cannot use the description 'salmon' on a background made up of the Scottish Saltire unless the product comes from the coastal region of mainland Scotland, Western Isles, Orkney or Shetland Isles because the appearance of the product would imply to the consumer that it is Scottish salmon.

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 this update

New guidance: November 2026

Key legislation

- Assimilated Regulation (EU) No 1151/2012 *on quality schemes for agricultural products and foodstuffs*
- Quality Schemes (Agricultural Products and Foodstuffs) Regulations 2018

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 go to the legislation.gov.uk website. The site usually updates the legislation to include any amendments made to it. However, this is not always the case. Information on all changes made to legislation can be found by following the above links and clicking on the 'More Resources' tab.

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