businesscompanion
trading standards law explained

Labelling of beef

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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 and Wales

Specific labelling information must 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 information legislation. These requirements do not apply to cooked beef or cooked veal products.

The information must be provided in writing. For prepacked meat and meat sold prepacked for direct sale (PPDS), it must be either affixed to the meat or the packaging; for non-prepacked meat, it must be in writing, which needs to be visible to the ultimate consumer at the point of sale.

'Prepacked' means a single item of food and the packaging into which it was put before being offered for sale, whether such packaging encloses the food completely or only partially, but in any event in such a way that the contents cannot be altered without opening or changing the packaging.

Please see 'Labelling of prepacked foods: general', 'Labelling of prepacked-for-direct-sale foods' and 'Labelling of non-prepacked foods' for more information on the legal definitions and requirements.

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

The following information must be provided on all beef and veal products, both fresh and 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 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.

Prepacked / PPDS cut beef and veal

Prepacked / PPDS 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 the:

- Slaughterhouse approval number and country of slaughter for each of the relevant countries of origin. This is 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. This is 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 must 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.

If you describe your product as 'lean', it must 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), 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 must 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%
Minced pure beef	20%	15%
Minced meat containing pig meat	30%	18%
Minced meat of other species	25%	15%

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

When selling prepacked / PPDS 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.

Trimmings

Trimmings must be labelled with the following:

- Country of slaughter
- Country or 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 less than 12 months old

These animals must be categorised at slaughter with the reference 'V' for animals under eight months old, and 'Z' for animals aged from eight months to less than 12 months. 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 from eight to less than 12 months old must be described as beef. These requirements also apply to offal.

Meat and offal from animals less than 12 months old must be labelled accordingly ('Age on slaughter: up to 8 months' or 'Age on slaughter: from 8 months to less than 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. For information on what parts of an animal are included in the definition of SRM, please see 'Home slaughter for private consumption'.

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.

Further information

Full detailed guidance on compulsory beef labelling is available on the GOV.UK website.

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 this update

General detail added, including clarification regarding the ages of animals in the 'Beef and veal from animals less than 12 months old' section.

Last reviewed / updated: May 2026

Key legislation

- Beef and Veal Labelling Regulations 2010
- Beef and Veal Labelling (Wales) Regulations 2011
- Assimilated Regulation (EU) 1169/2011 *on the provision of food information to consumers*
- Food Information Regulations 2014
- Food Information (Wales) Regulations 2014
- Products Containing Meat etc (England) Regulations 2014
- Products Containing Meat etc (Wales) 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 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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