businesscompanion
trading standards law explained

Weighing and measuring meat and products containing meat

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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.

This guidance is for England, Scotland and Wales

There are a number of legal requirements that you need to be aware of when selling meat and products containing meat* by weight (whether at the request of customers or prepacked ready for sale), which include weighing equipment construction and quantity price marking. Examples of these requirements include using a 'Government stamped' scale (as they are known), pricing and selling in metric quantities, and marking prepacked goods with the weight of the product.

[*In food law, 'meat-containing products' is the legal term for foods more traditionally known as meat products (sausages, ham, pies, etc). In metrology terms, they are treated the same.]

Customers must be informed of the weight before paying for and receiving their goods. In general, all foods, whether sold prepacked or non-prepacked, must be priced in a manner that can be seen by customers without them having to ask.

Weights and measures requirements

Weights and measures legislation applies to the sale of fresh, chilled, frozen, salted, cooked or processed meat of cattle, sheep or swine, and to uncooked poultry. It also applies to food that consists substantially of such meat or poultry.

In general, meat and poultry must be sold by the kilogram.

Prepacked items must be marked with the net weight of the product in metric units. This is not required on packs of pies, puddings, flans, sausage rolls, etc where the pack is marked with the number of items or where the number of items can be seen without opening the pack. Very small packs containing less than 5 g of product do not require the net weight to be marked on them.

Non-prepacked items (food sold loose or packaged at the request of the consumer), including products cut or selected from a larger bulk as requested by the customer or displayed prior to sale (for example, joints of meat in a refrigerated display cabinet), must be sold either by net weight or by gross weight. Products can be sold by gross weight if the weight of the bag, wrapper or container in which the product is served is not greater than that allowed for in the table below - for example, a product wrapped in cling film for hygiene purposes.

Again, this requirement does not apply to pies, puddings, flans, sausage rolls, etc or to single cooked sausages or sausage-meat products weighing less than 500 g.

Your local Trading Standards Service will be able to give you more detailed advice regarding which products the above exemptions apply to.

Note:

- **Net weight** means the weight of the goods alone without the bag, wrapper or container
- **Gross weight** means the weight of the goods plus the weight of any bag, wrapper or container
- **Tare weight** means the weight of any bag, wrapper or container (referred to as 'Permitted weight of container' in the table below)

Weights for meat sold gross in a container

Gross weight	Permitted weight of container
Up to 500 g	5 g
More than 500 g	A weight at the rate of 10 g per kg of the gross weight

Weighing

Scales that are used must be accurate, of an approved construction for retail sale use, and have certain required markings and stamps on them. See 'Weighing equipment for legal use' for more information.

The customer must be informed of the weight before paying for and receiving the goods. This can be done by any of the following methods:

- Weighing the goods in front of the customer, so that they have a clear view of the weight indication on the scales
- Marking the weight on the bag, wrapper or container
- Marking the weight on a separate ticket or till receipt

In the case of customer requests for trimmed or boned meat and for dressed poultry, the customer should be advised whether the weight to be charged for will be before or after the product is prepared for them.

Prepacked goods and the average-quantity system

This guide is intended for traditional businesses supplying products at the request of customers.

If your business also prepares large quantities of prepacked products in set quantities (for example, 500 g packs of sausages), you may wish to take advantage of packing them using the average-quantity system, which makes allowances for small variations in package weights.

For more information on this system, please see 'Packaged goods: average quantity'. You may also wish to seek specific advice from your local Trading Standards Service.

If you also make pre-prepared foods, such as ready meals, that require heating or cooking and are sold direct from your premises, then these should be marked with a net weight declaration. The net weight declaration is the total net weight of any individual components, excluding any packaging materials (tare weight) and can also be packed using the average-quantity system.

Price marking requirements

In general, all foods must have their price displayed and include VAT where applicable. The price must be displayed on or near the product, be unambiguous and easily read by customers without them having to ask for assistance.

For most products sold non-prepacked, or for products where the customer requests a particular quantity, the unit price per kilogram must be indicated on or near the goods, or on a price list. You may also display a price per pound, but this must not be more prominent than the metric kilogram price. For more expensive products, you may also assist customers with an additional price per 100 g where this might give a more meaningful indication of the price the customer will have to pay.

For meat counters in shops with a sales area of more than 280 m^2, the unit price of prepacked products must also be displayed on or near the goods - for example, on a shelf edge ticket or a price list.

However, there are exceptions. The main ones are as follows:

- Products near their expiry date and sold at a reduced price
- Products that are not required to be sold by weight (for example, non-prepacked pheasants, rabbits, etc and cooked poultry)
- An assortment of different items sold as a single pack (for example, mixed meats (three or more))
- Any product where the unit price is identical to the selling price

The unit price must be in metric, generally the price per kilogram. The unit price per pound may also be given in addition to the metric marking, but must be given less prominence.

For more information on pricing generally, see 'Providing price information'.

Food labelling

There are a number of food labelling requirements that you will also need to comply with when selling these products. For more information, see Business Companion's 'Food and drink' section.

Differences between food law and metrology law

In food law, alongside prepacked and non-prepacked, there is a third type of process, which is referred to as 'prepacked for direct sale' (PPDS). It does not have a strict legal definition, but it means food that is placed into packaging (prepacked) before being offered for sale and sold / offered for sale or supply from the premises on which it was packed, or from a mobile stall or vehicle being operated by the business. PPDS was introduced to food law to require businesses to add more detail to PPDS food labelling, particularly related to allergens.

Something that is PPDS in food law is likely to be prepacked in metrology law.

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

Removal of obsolete information relating to unit pricing.

Last reviewed / updated: September 2026

Key legislation

- Weights and Measures Act 1963 (Cheese, Fish, Fresh Fruits and Vegetables, Meat and Poultry) Order 1984
- Price Marking Order 2004

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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