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Food Labelling and Farming Methods: EDM 1095

Thank you for contacting me about labelling food with details of the farming system used to produce it and EDM 1095.

By convention, like all members of the Government, I do not, as a Whip, sign any Early Day Motions, as doing so is likely to breach the Ministerial Code's rules on collective responsibility.

That said, I fully appreciate the importance of this issue, given the £200 billion UK consumers spend each year on food, drink and catering services. Consumer confidence is more important in this industry than in any other, and is key to the integrity of the supply chain.

The current regulations on food labelling require that any information, including on packaging, advertising or other media, must not mislead consumers as to the characteristics of the food, including its method of manufacture or production. Specifically there needs to be provided, on prepacked food, the name of the food, its ingredients, any ingredients potentially causing allergy or intolerance, the quantity of specific ingredients where this is important to consumers, the net quantity of the product, the use-by or best before date, any special storage conditions, the name and address of the producer, the country of origin for a number of types of food, including fresh and frozen meat, instructions for use where required, alcoholic strength and a nutrition declaration.

Leaving the EU creates opportunities to introduce clearer labelling. I do think it is important for there to be continuity at first, which is why the EU Withdrawal Bill will put all our existing regulations on food labelling and all other aspects on a legal footing in UK law. However, there will then be opportunities to revisit them over time. I welcome the Environment Secretary's commitment to developing a new 'gold standard' food labelling system after we leave.

In the meantime there are some very good voluntary schemes that relate to methods of production, such as the RSPCA Assured scheme recognising high standards of animal welfare, British Lion eggs and the Red Tractor scheme. I know that my ministerial colleagues are keen to encourage those further.

I also know that Ministers are very much aware of these issues and agree with you how on important they are.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Kind regards,

Craig Whittaker MP