

# Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board Consultation on Food Supply Chain Quality Schemes and Branding

Response from Albert Bartlett & Sons, levy payers to the Potato Council dated 29/09/08

## Question 1

Should AHDB invest levy payers money to promote the quality and standards of its sectors products?

### Response:

While recognising the value of promoting the quality and standards of potatoes to our customers and being content for our levy contributions to be used in this way, we doubt if this can be achieved adequately through an amalgamation of diverse standards and priority actions across a hotch potch of sectors sharing only the Union Jack as a common denominator.

## Question 2

Does there need to be a rationalisation of existing quality marks?

### Response:

We know from market research in our own sector that our consumers understand little of the current RTL and take little note of it. We understand that they are often blind to quality marks taking a great deal for granted in a perceived duty of care. They are considerably more interested to know that the product is British and to trust that a high level of care has been taken to deliver a quality product. We use a variety of methods to deliver this message, sometimes building on the communications of the own label brand standards of our customers and sometimes building on our own brand standards.

## Question 3

Should AHDB invest levy funds to promote uptake within the industry, police the proper use of a mark and build consumer awareness about the quality and standards of all sector products? (The cost of this is estimated to be about £0.5m. per annum to AHDB and would be apportioned back to AHDB sector organisations).

Response:

We do not think that this would be a good use of levy funds. The matter has been extensively discussed at the Potato marketing strategy committee and it was unanimously agreed that the Potato Council should not contribute any potato funds to the further promotion of the RTL Scheme.

The reasons for this were based on a number of issues including a preference to prioritise areas specific to our own sector, addressing current market failures and targeting identified potential growth markets. In our sector these would currently include addressing low potato consumption amongst the younger life-stages, the misconceptions about convenience, promoting versatility and health. Our own sector research has shown that consumers already perceive potatoes to be good quality and whilst the industry believes that there should be a basic quality standard for potatoes, the RTL on potato packs will not persuade consumers to choose potatoes over pasta and rice.

It was also felt that it was not appropriate to spend money on what is inevitably a base line quality standard. Many retailers have their own quality standards that supersede the RTL. Why invest on promoting what will represent the very least of what we do?

Question 4

If levy payer money was to be invested, should AHDB;

- a) Create a new scheme?
- b) Adopt the RTL scheme as it is now? or
- c) Integrate existing standards in the beef and sheep sector into the RTL scheme? (Note: pig sector standards already integrated)

Response: A. appears to be an unwarranted expense and the creation of more clutter in communications. B. does not appeal for the reasons given above. The implication for the Potato sector of C. is unclear if any.

### Question 5

In your sector, which products or market segments do you believe would most benefit from the promotion of quality characteristics (either general quality characteristics common to your sector and other sectors or ones specific to your sector)? Would you support levy payers' money being invested in this promotion?

#### Response:

Consumer research in our sector shows there to be a market segment seeking to buy local, British, good value product with a strong provenance. This segment currently opts to buy organic as a way of sourcing this when actually the criteria are met by much of the conventional product on the supermarket shelves. We are not finding an adequate way of communicating the value now commonly found in conventional non-organic product. We do not however believe that the answer to this lies in a multi sectorial quality mark. We believe the message needs to be more specific.

### Question 6

If in your view, no products in your sector would benefit from promoting such a scheme (beyond a baseline investment outlined in paragraph 21), would you accept other AHDB sectors working together at a sector level on such a scheme through AHDB?

The question implies a 'with you or without you' approach. Have you considered smaller more relevant groupings within the mix of industries that are now bundled together under the AHDB umbrella?

### Question 7

Do you support levy-funded investment even though this will mean that EU guidelines for promotion would need to be observed by all parties participating in the scheme throughout the supply chain even where private funds were invested?

Response: We would not want to embark on any course that restricted our ability to use the Union Jack or other national flags on our product.

GK 29/09/08