

From: [Andrew Opie](#)
To: [Guy Attenborough](#)
Subject: Consultation on food supply chain quality schemes and branding
Date: 30 October 2008 10:58:35

The British Retail Consortium (BRC) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation. The BRC is the trade association for food retailers and our members are responsible for approximately 80% of grocery sales in the UK. Our members are major supporters of British farmers and have an excellent record of both sourcing and promoting home produce.

Our members are best qualified to comment on the value of marketing standards and labeling as millions of customers use these to make purchasing decisions every day in their stores. The key issue is to help customers make clear choices, which means they must understand a quality mark and what lies behind it if it is to have any value. There is also a danger that too many labels simply confuses consumers and de-values their use.

In collating our comments we have discussed your consultation with all our members and it is clear there is widespread support for the work and value of Assured Food Standards (AFS). Our members have worked closely with AFS in promoting the red tractor label since its launch and believe it is important that the investment in building recognition with consumers is not wasted.

We have only responded to those questions that are relevant to us.

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

Yes, it is important to raise consumer awareness of the quality of products so they see the added value in them rather than simply relying on customers to choose to buy British

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

There are too many quality marks and this is both confusing to customers and devalues their use. Legal requirements already restrict the amount of space available and that is likely to be more of a problem if the current food information proposal continues in its present form. There are also other issues other than quality standards that are important to customers, so it is essential labels are clean, concise and help busy customers make decisions easily.

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).*

It is important that any standards are robustly policed to reinforce their value with customers and avoid unhelpful publicity. The strength of policing schemes is they offer consumers a higher level of surveillance above the standard legislative framework. Raising consumer awareness of the standards is key to underpin the value, but the research on AFS and other schemes shows the difference in consumer awareness of recognition of a scheme and what it actually means. In other words AHDB should not underestimate the difficulty in raising consumer awareness of the standards.

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

a) *Create a new scheme?*

No, what is the point when AFS is established and recognition, if not awareness of the standards, is high amongst consumers. AFS has also successfully achieved buy in across the chain and it would seem pointless to throw away the investment and commitment made by the partners.

b) *Adopt the Red Tractor Logo (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)*

This must be the best way forward, this would ensure comprehensive coverage for AFS and help strengthen the brand with consumers. There would also, presumably, be efficiencies for the management of the schemes by incorporating it all within the overall structure of AFS

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