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Dear Guy,

**Re: Consultation on food supply chain quality schemes and branding**

Thank you for offering Which? the opportunity to comment on the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board's (AHDB's) approach to food supply chain quality schemes and branding.

Although we have not conducted any recent research in relation to assurance schemes, consumer research that we have previously conducted reinforces your findings that consumers find assurance schemes helpful. Our research indicates that the main reasons why people look for assurance schemes are to buy the best quality food, to have a better guarantee of safety, to buy British and for animal welfare reasons.

However, we have previously expressed concern that the many assurance schemes that are available can be confusing for consumers. I have enclosed a copy of an article that we published in Which? magazine in March 2004<sup>1</sup> where we reviewed assurance schemes that were on the market and expressed concern that there were many logos available and that it could be difficult to understand whether the standards behind them were the same or not.

We have, therefore, stressed the importance of: ensuring that the criteria that underpin assurance schemes are transparent so that consumers understand what they mean; ensuring that assurance schemes offer something beyond minimum legal requirements; being clear whether or not the scheme indicates whether a product is British or not; ensuring that the schemes are independently monitored; and

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<sup>1</sup> 'Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer do', Which? magazine, pp22-23, March 2004

ensuring that the standards underpinning the scheme apply across the whole supply chain.

Based on these findings, we would agree with the approach that is proposed in the consultation document. Developing and investing in further assurance schemes when the Red Tractor Logo (RTL) is already well established could cause more confusion for consumers. We therefore, agree that it would seem to be more appropriate for the industry sectors that fall under the AHDB to support the introduction of a single quality framework across all sectors. We therefore agree that it would make sense to integrate the existing standards into the RTL scheme.

I hope that these comments are helpful and would be happy to discuss them further if that would be helpful.

Yours sincerely,

*Sue Davies*

Sue Davies  
Chief Policy Adviser

Do food logos guarantee a better quality food or are they just a marketing ploy?

# DAISY, DAISY, give me your answer, do



Would Daisy the cow, if she could talk, tell you about her nice life grazing in the fields? Or would she horrify you with tales of bad food and ill health? Fortunately, you don't have to be Dr Dolittle to talk to the animals, as food assurance schemes do some of the talking for them.

Before we go on, it's important to point out that all food on sale has to meet basic requirements for safety, animal welfare and environmental protection. Food assurance schemes go a step further by exceeding some or all of these requirements, and they cover a wide range of produce. Behind the red tractor logo, for example, are individual schemes for pork, beef, lamb, dairy products, chicken, fruit, vegetables and cereals. These schemes set standards at a level that the majority

of producers are able to meet, and aim to raise standards in general. Another scheme, the RSPCA's Freedom Food, sets far more demanding standards for animal welfare than are legally required, LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming) does the same for environmental protection, and the Lion Quality mark on eggs includes salmonella controls and date marking. Organic schemes, on the other hand, cover all aspects of production and are strictly regulated by law, combining high standards for protection of the environment with animal welfare. As they're run slightly differently, we haven't looked at them in detail for this report.

More than just marketing, food assurance schemes can bring us real benefits. Although membership is voluntary, they don't make a profit and they require regular inspections, which help to improve standards and increase producers' awareness of food laws. John Don, of the advisory body the Farm Animal Welfare Council, told us: 'The laws are good but, if there's no awareness, they tend not to be obeyed.' In fact, without the scheme inspections, some sectors of food production wouldn't be routinely checked.

For the majority of schemes, farmers' membership fees are relatively low, which means we don't pay extra either. But meeting the higher standards of schemes such as Freedom Foods may cost more, which in turn will add to the price we pay.

## WHICH LOGO?

One problem with food assurance schemes is that there are so many logos. For example, assured beef and lamb, which is eligible to use the red tractor, may use a geographical logo (Specially Selected Scotch or a Welsh red dragon) instead. Not only that, but retailers often add their own specifications to the standards or have a policy not to use the red tractor. So, even if a food doesn't have the red tractor on its packaging, it might still meet the same standards.

## WHO RUNS THE SCHEMES?

The Freedom Food and LEAF schemes are independent. The red tractor schemes are industry run and standards have been developed by producers and

## LOGOS TO LOOK OUT FOR

If the safety of the food you eat is your main concern, then all schemes should provide reassurance. But that's not to say that products without logos aren't safe – all food on sale should comply with food safety legislation, whether or not it's part of a scheme.

If you're concerned about animal welfare, you could look for the Freedom Food logo. It covers beef and dairy cattle, sheep, pigs, chickens, turkeys and ducks. Its welfare standards are above legal and red tractor requirements and, in some cases, Farm Animal Welfare Council recommendations too. It's on a par with other red tractor schemes for environment and food safety. But it doesn't always mean free range, and some practices,

such as tail docking of pigs, are still allowed in exceptional circumstances. Alternatively, organic food meets rigorous standards for animal welfare, so might be a better choice. For example, animals must have access to the outdoors, and practices such as tail docking are usually prohibited.

For environmental benefits significantly above the law, look for the LEAF or organic logo. LEAF producers not only meet red tractor safety and welfare standards, but give extra environmental protection covering, for example, soil management, pollution control and water and energy efficiency. LEAF and the red tractor vegetable schemes also aim to minimise the use of pesticides.





## FOOD ASSURANCE SCHEMES

Safety, animal welfare and the environment

Independent inspections are crucial

Different schemes explained

to tell from the label as not all use the logo and many supermarkets operate their own schemes, too. This often means it has added some of its own standards to the existing ones. Marks & Spencer, for example, aims to differentiate its food by setting more stringent standards. So, although it would be eligible to show the red tractor, it doesn't. Similarly, Waitrose and Iceland each have their own policies.

More stringent specifications obviously aren't a bad thing and offer us greater food choices. But Ruth Kirk-Wilson, who completed a review of food assurance schemes for the Food Standards Agency, suggests that supermarkets could be more helpful by making their labelling easier to understand. 'The problem for consumers is that, although retailers support the schemes, they often don't make this public,' she said.

retailers, so independent inspections are crucial. Many take place annually, but others are every 18 months to cover different production patterns. Most visits are announced and only a few random checks are carried out. It's reassuring, though, that all of the schemes we looked at had a procedure for dealing with non-compliance. Most give a set timescale for producers to rectify problems, after which they lose their assured status. Last year, for example, Quality Meat Scotland excluded all Scotpigs farms for failing to meet its animal welfare standards. Consequently, Scotpigs faced difficulties selling its pigs. But the firm could reapply for membership at a later date if it makes improvements.

### SUPERMARKET FOOD

Most fresh food in supermarkets has been produced according to red tractor standards. The supermarkets require their suppliers to be part of the dairy, chicken, pork, beef and lamb schemes. But it might not be easy

### VERDICT

There's still confusion about what food assurance schemes are for, and it's important to realise that they don't necessarily meet the highest standards possible. The challenge is to raise awareness; they will help our shopping choices only if we understand what they mean and can judge whether they meet the standards we expect of them. The good thing is that they're reviewed regularly so we (along with Daisy) can look forward to benefiting from more improvements in the future.

### FURTHER INFORMATION

[www.litteredredtractor.org.uk](http://www.litteredredtractor.org.uk) For details of Red Tractor and schemes eligible to use the logo

[www.britegg.co.uk](http://www.britegg.co.uk) Lion Eggs

[www.freedomfood.co.uk](http://www.freedomfood.co.uk) RSPCA Freedom Food

[www.leafuk.org](http://www.leafuk.org) LEAF standards

[www.defra.gov.uk/farm/organic/](http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/organic/) Organic standards

## THE FACTS BEHIND THE LOGOS

Does the red tractor mean an animal enjoyed higher welfare standards during its lifetime? Just how much do the standards cover?

#### ● Assurance scheme standards exceed minimum legal ones

**True** All the schemes we looked at exceed minimum requirements in some aspects, although many aim to gradually improve standards each year. For example, all livestock and milk schemes require farms to have written animal health programmes for disease prevention and control. Some significantly exceed the law in specific areas – for example, the schemes for chicken and eggs include salmonella controls. But the red tractor scheme also allows birds to be reared in more cramped conditions than recommended by the government. You can't tell all this from a logo.

#### ● The British Farm Standard Red Tractor logo indicates that a product is British in origin

**False** It's an indication of production standards, not origin.

#### ● Schemes are independently monitored

**True** All schemes have developed independent inspection.

#### ● All schemes require animals to be on a farm that meets scheme standards from birth

**False** Some simply require an animal to be on an accredited farm for a certain number of days prior to slaughter. For example, under the red tractor beef schemes, cattle

need to be on the farm for only 90 days before their meat can be sold with the logo. The milk, pig and chicken schemes, on the other hand, require animals to be on accredited farms from birth. This is being phased in for the beef and lamb schemes, and the Northern Ireland scheme plans to achieve it by 2006. This would bring increased welfare, as animals would be assured from birth to point of slaughter.

#### ● All standards cover the whole supply chain – from farm to shop

**True** Foods with the red tractor logo have to meet

certain standards throughout the whole chain. These include feed, transportation and what happens at abattoirs and factories. Lion Quality Eggs sets standards for farms, packing stations, storage and transport, and the Freedom Food scheme covers animals on-farm and during transport and slaughter.

