

## P-05-889 Labelling of religiously slaughtered meat

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 9 Gorffennaf 2019  
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### Research Briefing:

Petition number: P-05-889

Petition title: **Labelling of Religiously Slaughtered Meat**

Petition text:

We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to legislate that all meat and meat based products that come from religiously slaughtered animals is clearly labelled.

### Background

There is currently no requirement for religiously slaughtered meat to be specifically labelled. Proposals to this effect have appeared in draft European legislation in the past but have never made it into the final legislation.

Both the Muslim and Jewish faiths have specific requirements for the slaughter of religiously acceptable animals.

The Jewish method of slaughter, Shechita, requires animals not to be stunned before slaughter. Islamic food rules, for Halal meat, can be satisfied with animals stunned before slaughter if animals do not die as a result of the stun, but there is no definitive consensus and slaughter without pre-stunning does also take place.

The [most recent Food Standards Agency survey of slaughter methods \(2018\)](#) (PDF 168MB) shows that 71% of sheep slaughtered in England and Wales were slaughtered according to Halal rules, with 46% being stunned before slaughter and 25% without stun. At the time of writing this briefing there were no abattoirs practicing non-stun slaughter in Wales.

Non-stun lamb and beef cannot be labelled as Protected Geographical Indicator (PGI) Welsh Lamb and PGI Welsh Beef. This is a result of a policy decision by Hybu Cig Cymru (Meat Promotions Wales), the body responsible for the PGI Welsh Lamb and PGI Welsh Beef brands.

Food safety is primarily regulated on an EU-wide basis, including labelling. While the UK is a Member State of the EU, the devolved administrations and the UK Parliament must adhere to EU food safety legislation. This includes implementing EU law around food labelling.

In short, the Assembly or the Welsh Ministers can only make new laws where they have competence and there is scope within EU law to do so, or where there are areas of the law where there isn't overarching EU legislation. Any proposals cannot be contrary to existing EU law. This means that there is very little scope for the Welsh Ministers, or indeed the UK Government, to make any legislation which deals with food labelling.

After Brexit, the UK will no longer be subject to EU legislation and UK legislatures will be able to make changes within their competence if they wish. However, along with other areas relating to food safety and standards, the UK Government [has determined that](#) food labelling is one of 21 areas where future UK-wide legislation may be needed post-Brexit – known as Common Frameworks. Following the Welsh and UK Governments' [intergovernmental agreement](#) of April 2018, and the *European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018* becoming law, the UK Government has the power under section 12 of this Act to make regulations to temporarily 'freeze' the Assembly's competence in respect of retained EU law.

Should this happen, the devolved administrations will temporarily be unable to legislate, and the UK Government will not be able to legislate for England while the regulations are in place. The UK Government will 'not normally' make these regulations without the consent of the devolved administrations. The power to make section 12 regulations will expire 2 years after the day the UK leaves the EU, and regulations will be able to last for up to 5 years. Should 'freezing' take place, the Assembly would face a delay in being able to legislate in this area, along with the other UK legislatures, potentially for up to 7 years after Brexit.

The [EU Food Information Regulation \(1169/2011\)](#) came into force in EU Member States in December 2014. A specific provision to introduce identification measures for food labels to indicate whether an animal has been stunned before slaughter was not taken up during development of the Regulation. However, a compromise agreement was reached to look into the issue further.

As a result, the European Commission published a [report on its 'study on information to consumers on the stunning of animals'](#) in 2015. The study made a number of conclusions, including:

- There is little accurate consumer understanding of the slaughter process; and
- Information on pre-slaughter stunning is not an important issue for most consumers unless brought to their attention. The level of interest is generally higher in countries that were EU Member States prior to 2004 (which includes the UK) compared to the countries that joined in 2004.

The study methodology included a literature review, stakeholder interviews and focus groups, Member State case studies (including one in the UK) and telephone interviews with 13,500 purchasers of meat, 500 in each Member State.

## Welsh Government action

The Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths, wrote to the Committee on 23 May 2019 responding to this petition. She said:

... After the UK leaves the European Union it may be necessary to consult on the reform of the information that is presented on food labels, and information relating to the method of slaughter might be included in such a consultation. Until the final terms of the UK withdrawal have been agreed it is not possible to give you a timetable when any consultation might be published.

Producers are able to display the logos of different certification scheme on their products, however this is not mandatory. ...

## National Assembly for Wales action

On 9 May 2018, Neil Hamilton AM, [asked the Minister](#) if she would:

... consider improving public awareness of the meat that members of the public consume by improving accurate labelling of products, clearly stating country of origin, rearing conditions and, most importantly, methods of slaughter, because although we must respect different religious views on ritual slaughter, the public at large often have no idea that they're eating halal meat, for example, and they may not wish to if they had a free choice.

The Minister responded:

I think the labelling of food is becoming increasingly important because I think people are becoming much more interested in the subjects that you referred to, and, again, it's a conversation and a discussion that we're having not just at official level, but also at ministerial level in our quadrilaterals [meetings with Ministers from the other UK governments], and, again, it's another opportunity with Brexit to make sure that we get that right. ...

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.