



Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights
Houses of Parliament
London
SW1A 0AA

Our Ref: SC24467

6 February 2025

Dear Lord Alton of Liverpool, and members of the Joint Human Rights Committee,

Re. Forced Labour in UK Supply Chains Inquiry, UK Supermarkets

I am writing in relation to my recent correspondence with four major UK supermarkets, Asda, Tesco, Morrisons and Waitrose, following the BBC World Service investigation, '*Blood on the Shelves*.' The investigation linked tomato products, sold in UK supermarkets, to state-imposed forced labour in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR). In some cases, the products were advertised as '*Italian*'.

I believe my recent work in this area is relevant to your current inquiry on *Forced Labour in UK Supply Chains* and I would be grateful if my proposals were considered in your recommendations.

Following my Urgent Question on UK Supply Chains, 3 December 2024, I organised a cross-party letter on behalf of fourteen Parliamentarians, to the four CEOs concerned. The letter enquired about the steps the supermarkets were taking to ensure their supply chains were free from forced labour, and what measures they had in place to ensure product labelling could not mislead the customer.

Below, I share a summary of the correspondence, which I believe highlights the insufficiency of our current legislative framework.

Forced labour

Asda, Morrisons and Waitrose denied the allegations made by the BBC, arguing the Trace Element Analysis (TEA) testing carried out was unreliable. The three supermarkets carried out an alternative test, which found no evidence of Xinjiang tomatoes. They did not comment on other forms of evidence gathered by the BBC.

All companies referenced their compliance with the Modern Slavery Act (MSA), with modern slavery statements on the Government registry. Notably, the MSA gives no statutory requirement for companies to conduct due diligence on supply chains, provide remedy for offences, conduct audits, or be transparent about modern slavery cases.

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Companies also outlined the anti-slavery policies and auditing programmes they had in place. Often their corporate policies went above and beyond requirements outlined in section 54 of the MSA, highlighting how the MSA is lagging behind corporate action.

Tesco was the only supermarket to address the allegations in a manner that felt consistent with the gravity of the claims. They suspended supply within 72 hours, later ceasing supply based on the results of further investigations. They then conducted a full review of compliance policies, due diligence and horizon-scanning programmes.

Product labelling and sourcing

The BBC's investigations found that several own brand '*Italian*' tomato purees sold in UK supermarkets appear to contain tomatoes grown and picked in China. In some cases, the purees were advertised as being grown or made in Italy.

This highlighted a loophole in product labelling legislation. Current government guidance on food labelling requires the '*country of origin*' to be displayed on some foods. However, '*country of origin*' refers to '*the country in which the food was produced*', not where it was sourced from.

I am deeply concerned that confusing legislation means businesses can use a linguistic sleight of hand to mislead consumers about where their products are coming from, particularly when they are sourced from regions known for slave-labour.

Morrisons, Tesco and Waitrose outlined how they often "*go above and beyond*" product labelling legislation. Waitrose described that without doing so, product labels would be "*misleading due to the nature of ingredient supply chains*". Businesses highlighting the misleading nature of our current product labelling system, showcases that it is not fit for purpose.

Conclusions and recommendations

Supermarkets had abided by, and sometimes gone above and beyond, UK legislation. Yet the serious nature and findings of the investigation, has shed doubt on the fitness of current legislative frameworks.

To avoid cases like this in future, the UK would benefit from a non-actor specific import ban, that covers all products made (in whole or in part) with forced labour. For example, the US Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (2021) puts the onus on importers to prove their goods were not made with state-imposed forced labour, creating a higher evidentiary burden.



I also recommend the introduction of new laws that go beyond the MSA and mandate companies to conduct human rights and environmental due diligence. For example, the EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (2024) ensures that large companies identify and address the adverse human rights and environmental impacts of their actions, with financial penalties for failing to do so.

Lastly, there would be merits to extending food labelling legislation to display not only the '*country of origin*' but also the country that ingredients were sourced from. This sourcing information ought to be displayed on all products, not just meat and poultry. This would require further supply chain investigation and transparency, giving consumers the ability to make informed choices. In the roll out of stronger labelling regulation, areas and regions known for exploitation should be prioritised.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Champion MP