

Written evidence submitted by the Jeremy Collier Foundation (FFS0013)

Call for Evidence: Fairness in the food supply chain

Response from the Jeremy Collier Foundation

The Jeremy Collier Foundation (JCF) seeks to address the consequences of intensive animal agriculture and drive the shift to a sustainable food system. Given the scope of both JCF's work and the enquiry, this response will focus on animal products and livestock farming. We would welcome a separate call for evidence on public sector procurement of food, and food and animal welfare standards.

The Groceries Supply Code of Practice regulates retailers' relationships with producers – in the context of this response, 'producers' will refer to livestock farmers, and will focus on the points 'potential merits of expanding the scope of the Groceries Supply Code of Practice,' and 'other potential reforms to the Groceries Supply Code of Practice.' We would like to see producers compensated fairly and given financial incentives to use high welfare practices on farm, and we would also like to see the introduction of a mandatory animal welfare labelling system across all animal products. Many farmers are tenant farmers and so lack the capital to invest in infrastructure for high welfare systems on farm, such as expanding existing buildings to provide greater space, enrichment and ventilation for animals. Farmers often operate on a very tight margin of profit, and retailers need to recognise that paying low prices for products, alongside short-term supply agreements, severely limit farmer progress on implementing higher welfare systems.

Welfare labelling would allow retailers to sell higher welfare products at a premium, thus compensating farmers more fairly. This has been shown to be a success in Germany, where a number of dairy farms receive compensation for 'Elternzeit' (parent time) milk, where calves stay with their mothers for least 3 months in the herd.ⁱ Supermarkets pay a higher premium for this milk and are able to use it as an appealing selling point for consumers. Furthermore, welfare labelling would provide support to domestic livestock farmers by setting high-welfare British meat apart from lower-welfare imports meat.

In an impact assessment of a potential labelling scheme, Defra found that the scheme would deliver an increase in profit for farmers of £40 million a year, as well as improve the welfare of approximately 110 million meat chickens, 700,000 laying hens and 510,000 pigs per year. The assessment also noted that there was significant consumer confusion over animal welfare standards, with only 27% recognising the RSCA Assured label.ⁱⁱ Furthermore, there is appetite for introducing welfare labels – a 2023 survey of 1,000 UK individuals by Bryant Research found that 91% of respondents supported animal welfare labels on animal products,ⁱⁱⁱ and 88% of individual respondents to a Defra call for evidence supported mandatory labelling to support farmers in meeting or exceeding UK baseline welfare standards.^{iv}

In conclusion, the Groceries Supply Code of Practice should ensure that retailers are supporting producers in transitioning to high-welfare systems on farm, through fair compensation and longer-term agreements. This would allow farmers more of a safety net when investing into new infrastructure on farm, such as larger barns in order to reduce stocking density. Currently, small profit margins and short-term supply chains prevent farmers from doing so and so halt any possible progress on improving animal welfare on farms in the UK.

ⁱ <https://www.eyesonanimals.com/work-at-a-german-dairy-farm-that-produces-milk-for-eltern-zeit-label-keep-the-calves-with-their-mothers-in-the-herd/>

ⁱⁱ https://consult.defra.gov.uk/transforming-farm-animal-health-and-welfare-team/consultation-on-fairer-food-labelling/supporting_documents/Fairer%20Food%20Labelling%20Impact%20Assessment%20%20PUBLIC.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://bryantresearch.co.uk/insight-items/transparent-animal-labels/>

^{iv} <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6308b016e90e0729e63d39b2/animal-welfare-labelling-summary-of-responses.pdf>

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