

# It's time for honest labelling... NOW



The bucolic scenes and reassuring phrases on meat and dairy packaging are often a world away from the reality. Animal welfare campaigner Philip Lymbery believes it's time for a change

A shopper standing in the supermarket meat and dairy section can be overwhelmed by confusing and misleading labels. Phrases like 'all natural' and 'farm fresh' give the impression that animals are treated well on farms, but these terms have no legal definition – they're meaningless.

To add to the confusion, there's another factor at play. Some products have packaging designed to give an impression of high-welfare farming: images of green fields, trees, outdoor scenes, cosy family farms, happy animals... At best this packaging gives an unclear impression. At worst it's misleading, presenting a factory-farmed product – from an animal confined indoors throughout its life or crammed into a barren cage, unable to express natural behaviours, for example – as coming from a higher-welfare system.

Understandably, many consumers are taken in by this power of suggestion. Even I, the CEO of Compassion in World Farming with a wealth of knowledge on the subject, find labels hard to decipher. It's not hard to work out why these smokescreens are used: the truth about factory animal

farming isn't advertised on food labels because it's an unsavoury one. In the UK, more than 70 per cent of the animals raised each year are factory farmed. These inhumane farming practices are hidden behind closed doors, out of the public view.

This is the bleak reality, but consumer power can change it. We can demand that shoppers are given clarity when choosing their products, making it easier to opt for foods that are better for animal welfare. In 2004, the mandatory labelling scheme for


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eggs was introduced. Under it, eggs must be labelled as 'from caged hens', 'barn eggs', 'free-range' or 'organic'. After its introduction, UK production of cage-free eggs increased from 31 per cent in 2003 to over 60 per cent at present.

This is an inspiring example of how honest labelling can re-shape the market. Consumers finally had the full picture,

which led to increased demand for higher-welfare eggs and helped to drive welfare improvements for millions of egg-laying hens.

Consumers should be empowered to choose, not be kept in the dark or misled. A clear, mandatory labelling scheme based on production method is essential. Such a scheme would ensure that products that are farmed to high standards of animal welfare are marked accordingly – and that those from intensively reared animals are clearly marked too.

Experience shows that informing consumers of the realities of intensive food production can be an effective way to change the system for the better. Building on the success achieved in the egg industry, honest labelling can help shed light on the horrors of factory farming and create a kinder system – for farm animals, people and the planet. 

**Do you agree with Philip or do you take a different view? Tell us at [info@deliciousmagazine.co.uk](mailto:info@deliciousmagazine.co.uk) and we'll print the best replies**

