



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

The Rt Hon Mark Spencer MP
Minister for Food, Farming and Fisheries

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Dear Chris,

Thank you for your further emails of 17 August and 25 October about food labelling and sourdough bread. I apologise for the delay in replying.

We are committed to transparent food information for consumers. Existing food information legislation lays out that food labelling and marketing must not be misleading to consumers.

There are differing views on what constitutes sourdough, this can be seen in the differences between your proposals and the couple of examples of legal definitions which do exist internationally. During stakeholder engagement for the review of The Bread and Flour Regulations 1998, sourdough was discussed. It was necessary to refine the scope of the public consultation to address the most pressing aspects identified for change. This predominantly focused on mandatory fortification of wheat flour which is an important public health policy to protect against nutrient deficiency. We determined that non-regulatory measures should be explored in relation to sourdough to help achieve a better mutual understanding and address technical differences around the production of sourdough. Hence, for the time being there are no immediate plans for a sourdough definition to be introduced into legislation as part of planned amendments to The Bread and Flour Regulations 1998.

Full ingredients listing is mandatory for prepacked products for sale. For practical reasons, there are fewer mandatory labelling rules when food is sold loose. For loose food, the name of the food and allergen information must be made available.

As mentioned in the previous letter regarding the use of the term wholemeal, Defra officials have engaged with local authorities who have contacted us on this matter and will continue to do so. We hope to provide clarification in guidance which will accompany the planned legislative amendments to The Bread and Flour Regulations 1998 next year to help provide a level playing field for industry and a consistent approach to enforcement. As for a definition of wholegrain, while there are no immediate plans to adopt a definition of wholegrain into law, work to consider a definition for wholegrain has been added as part of the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition future work programme.

Guidance on terms such as fresh, pure and natural also deals with general principles and as such will be relevant to other unregulated terms commonly used to describe foods. We will engage with stakeholders on updates to this guidance when we have the opportunity to do so bearing in mind competing priorities.

We are unable to provide an exact date of publication of the Government response to the consultation on proposals to amend The Bread and Flour Regulations 1998, but we continue to work closely with the Department of Health and Social Care, the Department of Health in Northern Ireland, the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government, the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland and Wales, and Food Standards Scotland to publish as soon as possible.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you need further information.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "M Spencer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "M" being a stylized initial and "Spencer" written in a clear, connected script.

Rt Hon Mark Spencer MP