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*Re Bill,*

Thank you for your correspondence of 27 September to the Minister of State on behalf of your constituent, Mr Peter Cook of north Herefordshire about bread's quality and its labelling. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area.

I appreciate your desire for consumers to have clear information on the food that they buy. I would like to reassure you that as the new food minister I am fully committed to delivering informative food labelling and promoting robust food standards nationally and internationally, to protect consumer interests, facilitate international trade, and ensure that consumers can have confidence in the food that they buy.

In Mr Young's letter, he expresses concern around the use of additives and processing aids in UK loaves. EU Regulation 1332/2008 sets out the list of approved additives, their conditions for use, purity criteria and labelling rules. Whilst the responsibility for food safety and thus food additives lies with the Food Standards Agency, I am confident that the food additives regulations have been specifically developed to harmonise the rules around the use of food additives in food in the European community and directly ensure the safety and quality in the storage and use of food additives. I appreciate that some specialist bakeries may only use a very limited amount of ingredients in their bakery products and want to market their products to ensure that consumers are aware of this, however bakeries such as these do not represent the full range across the market. Consumer choice is very important, and it is crucial that consumers have access to a range of different products, employing often different methods of production and price points to suit today's customers diverse needs. Some people may prefer speciality breads, while others opt for the convenience of supermarket bakeries that offer different pricing. The Government has no desire to create further red tape nor intervene in the market place but businesses must ensure that they fully comply with the law and provide consumers with information that does not mislead. If you believe that there is an issue of non-compliance then this should be taken up with the appropriate enforcement authorities.

Thank you for raising the issue of allergens, recent events have made clear that allergen labelling requires an urgent, thorough review working in partnership with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and the Food Standards Agency (FSA). A review is underway on whether and how we can strengthen the current legislative framework on allergens. A critical part is looking at how we can improve and strengthen domestic regulations to make sure all UK consumers have complete trust in the food they are eating.

With regard to Sourdough bread, while the term is not legislated, the use of additives in its production are limited to the additives specified in regulation 1332/2008, as with all food products. There are many descriptors in food law that do not have legal definitions; however, the use of any descriptions will be subject to the rules of EC regulation 1169/2011, where there is no name prescribed by law for a food, the name used must be sufficiently precise to inform the purchaser of the true nature of the food and must not mislead. We do not plan to introduce a legal definition of sourdough through the Bread and Flour Regulations at this time, but there are other means to afford protections to traditional food production methods and products. The detail on applying for 'traditional specialities guaranteed' scheme has been provided in previous meetings with the campaign with Minister Eustice and we have expressed our support for industry coming together to agree common principles, for example on a definition of a traditional UK sourdough.

Choice is important to consumers, while some of the RBC's proposed measures may yield benefits for an important but select group of businesses, they do not represent the entirety of the market. Our departure from the EU may bring opportunities to look again at our food labelling to further improve transparency for consumers and ensure we uphold our world-wide reputation of UK food. We have committed to explore what changes if any, are required post EU exit on food labelling and on the regulations relating to bread and flour. When we do so, it is imperative we legislate for the benefit of the consumer and the market as a whole.

Thank you once again for taking the time to contact me about this important issue.

With best wishes,

  
DAVID RUTLEY MP