

CCBS – LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

23/04/2015 - 30/04/2015



Northern Ireland
Assembly

28 April 2015

Plenary Debate

Lamb Labelling

Summary: During questions to the Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development, Mr Rogers asked the Minister what the Department is doing to address labelling issues with the Republic which is causing a significant reduction in the price of lamb. The Minister advised the Member that she has raised this issue with Simon Coveney, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and together they are trying to find a solution through a voluntary labelling process.

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what her Department is doing to address the lamb-labelling issue, given that the good weather has contributed to a great lambing season, with farmers having great crops of lambs, but, just as they are about to bring them to market, there are labelling issues with the Republic, and they are taking a significant reduction in the price of their lamb.

Mrs O'Neill: The Member is right: historically, a significant number of our lambs have gone to the Twenty-six Counties for slaughter and then further export into premium markets across Europe. Recently, there was an issue when some processors refused to take lambs in some instances, while others took them but the farmers had to take a reduction in the money they were offered. I am very concerned about this, and I have raised it consistently because it is based around the country-of-origin labelling. I have raised it consistently with Simon Coveney. I chatted with him last night, and I am speaking to him again today.

We have tasked officials with looking at whether we can produce a voluntary label. I have approached Europe, which has an open mind on producing a voluntary label that would serve the industry well across the island and take away any trade barriers that there would be as a result of country-of-origin labelling. The Member will be aware that the European legislation now says that you have to indicate where the animal was born, reared and slaughtered. If it was born in the Six

Counties and slaughtered in the Twenty-six Counties, it cannot be sold as Irish lamb in other European markets. I am extremely concerned, because this is the time of year when farmers go to market. I assure the Member that, at a European level and working with DEFRA and Simon Coveney, we are trying to find a solution through a voluntary labelling process.

Link: <http://data.niassembly.gov.uk/HansardXml/plenary-28-04-2015.pdf>



23 April 2015

Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement

Summary: Representatives from *Safefood* discussed North-South co-operation in food safety and initiatives to promote healthy eating and to combat obesity. *Safefood* Ireland is involved in a range of cross-Border initiatives involving schools and community groups, such as the community food initiative, and to educate and promote healthy eating with a focus on disadvantaged communities.

Mr. Ray Dolan: *Safefood* was set up as the Food Safety Promotion Board under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement as one of six implementation bodies established under the Belfast agreement in December 1999. *safefood* implements, on an all-island and cross-Border basis, policies agreed in the North-South Ministerial Council, the most recent of which was held in Derry last Wednesday. Departmental responsibility rests with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in Belfast and the Department of Health in Dublin.

Our budget for 2015 is €7.8 million, roughly £6.3 million sterling. Funding is provided by the Oireachtas and by the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Oireachtas provides 70% of the funding, with 30% coming from the Northern Ireland Assembly. *safefood* does not have a direct involvement in public communications relating to food safety incidents and alerts as these responsibilities are assigned to the Food Safety Authority of Ireland in the South and the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland. Our headquarters is in Little Island in Cork, with a sub-office in Dublin that houses our marketing and communications people. This leaves us with four directorates reporting to the chief executive.

safefood's strategy links economic, social, and cultural factors continue to change over time, influencing consumer concerns and their perceptions of behaviour in regard to food. The food industry continues to grow globally and, from time to time, there are outbreaks of food-borne illness or incidents that will further alter consumer perceptions and occasionally dent confidence. *safefood* monitors these concerns and utilises its resources to appropriately inform and, where necessary, reassure consumers so that they may continue to make healthy and safe food choices. We also use

targeted consumer messages to further inform, support and motivate consumers to put food safety and healthy eating at the centre stage of their lifestyle choice.

Our focus has evolved from individual food poisoning crises and pathogens to an emphasis on the four c's, cook, clean, chill and cross-contamination; from limited individual nutrient information to a holistic approach to the obesity epidemic; from bench research to applied and behavioural research; from mass media campaigns to multi-component integrated campaigns; and from print and traditional media to social media. We are aware of the wider public health context in which we operate and we work in partnership with Governments and professional partners across the island of Ireland to inform consumers of positive lifestyle choices to improve their health, particularly nutritional advice and good food safety practice.

Our most recent campaign was on childhood obesity, the aim of which was to communicate practical solutions that parents can adopt to help them tackle the everyday habits associated with excess weight in childhood. To date, six television ads have been developed covering the topics of portion size, treats, fizzy drinks, physical activity and sleep. Some members may have noted that our sleep television ad went out this week.

These messages have been augmented with radio and outdoor advertising as well as considerable digital and social media activity. We have partnered with the [HSE](#) and Healthy Ireland in the South and the Public Health Agency in Northern Ireland. Resources have been disseminated through Early Childhood Ireland in the South and Early Years in Northern Ireland. All GP surgeries have been circulated with leaflets detailing practical tips for parents and we have also partnered with the Irish College of General Practitioners in the development of a resource to help general practice tackle this important and sensitive issue.

Our most recent food safety campaign related to chicken and campylobacter. With eight out of ten adults eating chicken every week, consumers need to be reminded to ensure that chicken is cooked and handled properly to avoid food-borne illnesses. In November 2014, we launched a food safety awareness campaign in partnership with the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland with the theme, Don't Wash Raw Chicken. Campylobacter is one of the most common causes of bacterial food poisoning on the island of Ireland.

I would like to mention another strong piece of consumer communication in the area of obesity on which *safefood* is delighted to have worked, that is, the RTE programme "Operation Transformation". On review of one of the earlier programmes in the series, we spotted the opportunity to get involved in the programme and have worked closely for the past five years with the programme makers in the development and roll-out of the series. The show and its format have been a phenomenal success across the island and is being applauded around the world. It has been adopted in Belgium, France and the USA. It has not only worked on an individual level in helping people to lose weight but also on a community level, managing to get hundreds of communities engaged, motivated and moving.

The 2015 programme ran for six weeks in January and February to an audience of just under 500,000, and 314 communities across the island started weight loss groups. Some 20% of those who watched the show claimed to have lost weight, with 46% of those claiming to have lost between 0

lbs and 6 lbs. Some 23% of those who watched the show have claimed that, since the show ended, they are being more active and 21% are now eating healthier food.

I refer to our education initiatives. With up to one in five teenagers leaving school early, this can impact negatively on their longer-term health, as limited knowledge about healthy eating and physical activity is a contributory factor to the growing problem of obesity on the island. In partnership with Youthreach and the Northern Ireland NEET forum for those not in education, employment or training, we developed www.eatright.eu and launched it in 2014 to help inform these early school leavers about nutrition and general cooking skills. One of our successful programmes mentioned by the Chairman in his introduction was the community food initiatives.

We are in our second tranche of ten projects, which we fund for the years 2013, 2014 and 2015. These are collaborative, community projects that cover areas from Antrim to Cork. They are targeted at a low-income audience and the emphasis is on cooking skills, growing food, nutrition and food education and food supply. It has proved to be successful.

*safe*food has promoted food safety and hygiene across the food chain through the establishment of all-island food safety networks. These collaborative arrangements, called knowledge networks, create and augment linkages across the island between food safety professionals. Many food professionals, not only North-South but also east-west, do not get the opportunity to meet and share the issues that arise. This has been a great success over the years.

With regard to research, we have continued to undertake appropriate research and knowledge-gathering in order to address gaps in scientific knowledge related to our core areas of food safety, hygiene and healthy eating. This builds the evidence base that facilitates *safe*food's communications to consumers and food safety professionals across the food chain. Our aim is always to provide messages that are supported by science and that are clear, concise, authoritative, relevant and independent. Our information must be accessible, accurate, and supportive of public policy. I, and my colleagues, will be delighted to take any questions that members have.

Link: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/committees/?id=2015-04-23a.2280&s=cross+border#g2281>