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The Rt Hon Tessa Jowell MP  
House of Commons  
London  
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**Your ref:** 01091191  
**Our ref:** MC129664/CS  
**20** May 2009

**From the Secretary of State**  
The Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP

Thank you for your letter of 6 April on behalf of a number of your constituents and enclosing a copy of an e-mail from your constituent of London about food labelling and the welfare of chickens. Please accept my apologies for the delay in replying.

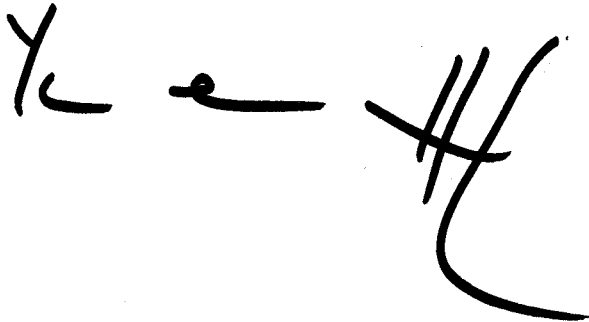
I recognise the importance for many consumers of having more information about methods used in food production, including animal welfare standards. Although there is currently no legal requirement for food labels to provide information on methods of production, there is nothing to stop manufacturers providing this information voluntarily, and some food labels do carry claims on methods of production. Where this information is provided, the legislation requires that it should be accurate and not misleading.

In England we have just come to the end of a 12 week public consultation on Council Directive 2007/43 which sets down minimum welfare rules for meat chickens excluding flocks with less than 500 birds, hatcheries, breeding chickens and extensive indoor, free-range, and organic meat chicken. We will carefully consider responses received.

The Directive contains a provision for the labelling of poultrymeat. The Commission will report by 1 December 2009 on the possible introduction of a specified harmonised mandatory labelling scheme for chicken meat, meat products and preparations based on compliance with animal welfare standards. The report will consider the possible implications for the community's economic partners and the compliance of such a labelling scheme with World Trade Organisation rules. The Commission's Community Action Plan on the Protection and Welfare of Animals 2006-2010 also envisages an EU wide welfare labelling scheme which aims to promote EU products and recognises those producers who adopt higher welfare standards.

In the meantime, the EU Poultrymeat Marketing Standards Regulation specifies the criteria which must be met before claims about certain types of farming can be made such as free-range, extensive indoor etc.

The Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 lay down requirements in respect of general welfare, inspection, housing and feeding for all farm animals. Enforcement action can be and is taken against farmers who do not comply with this legislation. Furthermore, Council Directive 2007/43 is a big step forward into looking at the welfare of meat chickens as a whole and is unique in that it is the first piece of EU welfare legislation which looks not only at the way in which meat chickens are kept but also the welfare outcomes of the birds kept in those conditions. This is achieved primarily through monitoring at the slaughterhouse where post mortem inspections are assessed for possible indication of poor welfare.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'H' followed by a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke.

**HILARY BENN**