

Food labelling for catering establishments

What does this leaflet cover?

Foods sold in catering establishments such as restaurants, cafés, canteens, clubs, public houses, schools and hospitals, which is ready for consumption on the premises or to take-away.

How should I label the food I supply?

In the case of food which has been **irradiated**, the food needs to be marked with the word "irradiated" or "treated with ionising radiation".

If the food contains an **ingredient** that has been **irradiated**, the food needs to be labelled that it contains that ingredient, and be accompanied by the word "irradiated" or "treated with ionising radiation".

If **raw milk** is supplied, there must be either a label on the container or a notice nearby, stating: "Milk supplied in this establishment has not been heat treated and may therefore contain organisms harmful to health."

Most food which is sold for consumption at catering establishments is exempt from all other food labelling requirements. **However, if you use a name to describe food, it must not mislead as to the nature, substance or quality of the food, nor must it falsely describe it.**

What descriptions should I use?

Descriptions on menus and notices should give an accurate indication of the true nature of the food. For example:

Traditional names such as 'roast ham' or 'roast beef' should not be applied to foods which have been 'flash' roasted or which have been made from meat which has been formed, chopped, or shaped, or contains other ingredients such as milk proteins.

The term **'home made'** should only be used for food made from basic ingredients on your premises. A customer would not expect a 'home made' product to be mass-produced and simply cooked or reheated by you in the oven or microwave. Also, phrases such as 'Chef's Own Recipe' or 'Our own original recipe' should only be used if they are true.

Food described as **'fresh'** should not have been reconstituted, canned, previously frozen or otherwise highly processed. This also applies to fish which should not be described as fresh if it has been frozen.

The name **'beef burger'** should not be used unless the food meets the 62% minimum meat standard. Describing products called 'economy burgers' as 'burgers' is misleading.

Do not describe **margarine** or low fat spreads as 'butter' in, for example, "bread and butter".

Salmon **sandwiches** made from **tinned salmon** must be labelled with the full name of the salmon as it appears on the tin, e.g. red salmon sandwiches.

Do not sell **skimmed** or **semi-skimmed milk** as milk. The full name should be used.

Non-brewed condiment, whether free of charge or not, must not be described as vinegar or supplied in a distinctive container which customers may associate with vinegar.

Only **whole tail scampi** and **chicken nuggets** made from whole pieces of scampi or chicken may be described simply as 'scampi' or 'chicken nuggets'. If it is a reformed or chopped and shaped product, or if it contains TVP (Textured Vegetable Protein) e.g. soya protein, it must be described as such.

Products that are often described as **'Seafood sticks'**, 'Crab sticks', 'Ocean sticks' etc are sometimes being used by caterers in place of crab in sandwiches, salads and soup. Seafood sticks are normally made from a blend of 'Surimi' (mechanically deboned white fish mince), egg white, starch, flavourings, colourings and other additives. In fact they do not contain any crab at all.

It is illegal to describe a food as **crab**, or containing crab, when you are in fact using these 'seafood sticks' and there is also the risk that a person with a white fish allergy would not expect a 'crab' dish to contain whitefish.

These products should be described in the menu, by the name given by the manufacturer.

If 'crab soup' is made from **seafood sticks** it must be made known to the consumer that the soup contains only crab flavour. Also if '**seaweed**' is not real seaweed but fried shredded cabbage, this must be made clear.

Some **pizzas** are not topped with real cheese, instead an **imitation cheese analogue** is used. This should not be described as 'cheese' but as 'cheese flavour'.

Similarly, some toppings are described as 'ham' when in fact they are made from **turkey meat made to resemble ham**. This should be described as '**ham flavour turkey**' - not 'flavoured' because the flavour is artificial and does not derive from 'ham'.

Products described as '**ham**' should be sliced from a whole cured piece of meat from the hindquarters of a pig. Products which are from the shoulder or are 'formed' or 'reformed' must be correctly described.

Chicken breast, turkey breast, steak, gammon etc. These are descriptions that imply that a product is a 'whole' meat product and should not be used for manufactured, reformed products.

A product described by the manufacturer as 'reformed chicken breast in breadcrumbs' should not be described to your customers as a 'chicken breast'. This would give the false impression that it is a 'whole meat' product rather than pieces of processed chicken meat, moulded into a chicken breast shape.

If you use **Imported frozen chicken breasts** in the meals you prepare you should be aware that these may contain between 15 and 40% added water as well as other ingredients. These should only be described as '**chicken**'. However, some of these chicken breasts may contain added meat proteins from other animals such as beef or pork. If this is the case then the meat should be described as '**chicken with added beef/pork protein**'. This information is especially important for customers who do not eat pork or beef because of their religious beliefs or because they are allergic to such meat.

Vegetarian claims are often difficult to substantiate. Products that contain meat, fish, poultry or animal derivatives such as gelatine or chicken stock should not be described as vegetarian. It is worth noting that most cheese is not vegetarian unless described as such by the manufacturer as it contains 'rennet', an animal derivative. Vegetarian products should not be cooked in animal fats such as lard or dripping. Care should be taken if you cook vegetarian food on the same grill, hot-plate or fryer as meat, fish or other animal products, as the vegetarian food may pick up 'debris' and/or flavours from the non-vegetarian products.

Conclusion:

It is an offence to display misleading or incorrect information. The responsibility for labelling rests with you. The name or description should be the same as used by your supplier, with whom you should check if you are in any doubt.

This leaflet is not an authoritative interpretation of the law and is intended only for guidance.