

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) submission of 7 March 2024

PE1997/H: Introduce mandatory braille labelling for food products sold in Scotland

Thank you for forwarding for comment the petition to introduce mandatory information in braille for products sold in Scotland. I am answering this from the perspective of the food labelling team in Defra and I apologise for having missed your first deadline for response. Thank you for your patience. It may be useful for you to know that there is a Common Framework for Food Composition, Standards and Labelling, through which cross-UK food information policies are discussed with the aim of avoiding or managing divergence in this policy area and that this subject will be discussed through the framework process.

At present, the UK Government has no immediate plans to initiate a public consultation on policy for the introduction of mandatory braille labelling on food products. However, we are aware of moves by some retailers to provide information on food in braille format, and we are interested in seeing how this works.

The UK maintains high standards on the information that is provided on food labels, whether that be mandatory or voluntary, so that consumers can have confidence in the food that they buy. All food sold on the UK market must comply with food labelling rules. The fundamental principle of food labelling rules is that information provided to the consumer must not mislead and must enable the safe use of food.

The availability and accessibility of essential food information to all consumers is vitally important. It is already a requirement that food information must be easily visible, clearly legible, and where appropriate indelible, in addition to there being a required minimum font size for mandatory information.

Before launching a public consultation on the introduction of mandatory braille labelling on food products, many factors must be considered. For example, we must consider the practical viability of braille labelling on a diverse range of packaging formats, and the costs and effectiveness of

the use of braille labelling relative to that of using different methods to provide information to people with visual impairments.

We know there are exciting possibilities, including the use of mobile device apps and QR codes via which consumers with visual impairments may be able to access not only the basics, but the full range of information available on the label, as well as additional information provided via the App or QR code. We note that the European Commission's review into accessible labelling concluded that digital means such as the above could be one of the ways used to improve accessibility of food information to visually impaired individuals. This is clearly an area of interest with potential and one with which we will be engaging in the future through the Common Framework for Food Composition, Standards and Labelling.