



MEAT LABELLING AND YOUR LOCAL FOOD WHOLESALE AND RETAILER – FACTS YOU NEED TO KNOW

RECENT MEDIA REPORTS ON THE ACCURACY OF MEAT LABELLING IN SOUTH AFRICA AND ACROSS THE WORLD HAVE JUSTIFIABLY RAISED CONSUMER CONCERNS ABOUT THE INTEGRITY AND QUALITY OF MEAT PRODUCTS. THE CONSUMER GOODS COUNCIL OF SOUTH AFRICA (CGCSA), WHICH COUNTS SEVERAL OF THE COUNTRY'S REPUTABLE FOOD RETAIL GROUPS AMONG OUR MORE THAN 11 000 MEMBER COMPANIES, WOULD LIKE TO PROVIDE PERSPECTIVE ON THE MEAT LABELLING ISSUE FOLLOWING THE RECENTLY RELEASED REPORT BY STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY MEAT RESEARCH AND ITS FINDINGS.

THE FACTS OF THE MATTER:

1. This is not a food safety matter.
2. The CGCSA welcomes the recently released report by the University of Stellenbosch and its findings. As per the report there was one isolated incident of water buffalo and the retailer concerned is conducting a thorough investigation into the matter.
3. Where miniscule samples or traces of undeclared meat species – some of them invisible to the naked eye – were identified at reputable food stores by the University's extremely sensitive DNA testing processes, this was as a result of unavoidable cross-contact rather than any intentional mislabelling by the suppliers and retailers.
4. Cross-contact with another meat species can occur at any stage of the complex supply chain and is virtually impossible to totally eliminate in an environment where multiple species are processed, even with the highest standards of ethical and legal meat practices followed by CGCSA's retail and wholesale members.
5. A beef carcass briefly touching a lamb carcass in a cold transport truck could show as cross-contact in DNA testing.
6. Cross-contact of meat products does not pose any health or safety risks for consumers. However, all meat species should be declared on packaging when they are actively added to the product's recipe and in compliance with South African labelling laws.
7. The European Union and the United Kingdom currently allow a 1% DNA threshold as an acceptable level of cross-contact with another meat species (i.e. it is reasonable to accept that trace DNA from other species could be detected). While South Africa has no legal threshold in place, it is important to remember that the University of Stellenbosch report identified some prominent retailers on the basis of less than 0,1% DNA presence of a non-declared meat species.
8. CGCSA's retailer and wholesaler members have strict food supply practices and protocol systems in place. The suppliers are audited by independent third-party agencies to verify compliance with product specification, processes and food legal requirements on an on-going as well as an ad hoc basis. Furthermore, their own Food Technologists on an ongoing and ad hoc basis, verify actual practices at supplier facilities, against their product requirements and recipes.
9. The CGCSA welcomes any suggestions to further improve the already safe food quality products and related procedures and protocols implemented by reputable South African food retailers and wholesale members, in keeping with global practices. In the interests of all consumers, the Consumer Goods Council and its retailer members have voluntarily approached the National Consumer Commissioner's (NCC) office to participate fully in the current NCC investigation into meat labelling.
10. In March 2013 the CGCSA launched the Consumer Goods and Services Ombud whose board members include two major

consumer bodies, namely South African National Consumer Unions (SANCU) and Consumer Fair in a show of support for the rights of the consumer, and in an effort to promote and protect their basic rights. The Ombud will deal with consumer complaints against suppliers within the consumer goods and services industry, including the retail, manufacturing and wholesale sectors. The hotline which consumers can use is **0860 000 272**.

11. CGCSA's retail and wholesale members are currently reviewing their supply chain, meat preparation and point-of-sale processes and systems to see where any changes could be made in the interests of the South African consumer and ensure that unavoidable cross-contact is minimised where, and if possible.

Discussions have been held with consumer bodies, SANCU and Consumer Fair. Their input and concerns for consumer welfare are welcome and suggestions made are being considered such as signage detailing meat species at butcheries and food delis.

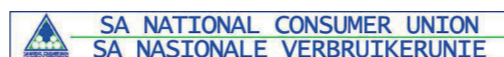
The Consumer Goods Council of South Africa will continue to work with its members as well as the relevant government agencies to uphold the highest standards of ethics and food safety, for the ultimate benefit of the consumer.

Furthermore, CGCSA's retail and wholesale industry members ask for clear regulations from the South African food regulators regarding unavoidable cross-contact to ensure consumers can make informed decisions when buying meat products.

This statement is supported by:



Endorsed by:



Consumer hotline number – 0860 000 272

