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**CONSUMER VIEWS OF
MINCED MEAT COMPOSITION
AND LABELLING**

Qualitative research for the FSA

REPORT

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A. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

1. **Research background**

Recent omnibus research has indicated that fat content, or 'leanness', is the most important consideration for people when they buy minced meat; price and quality/appearance emerged as less salient. The research also discovered that over two thirds of people pay attention to packaging descriptions such as 'lean' or 'extra lean', at least some of the time, presumably as a way of determining fat content.

There is, however, no statutory limit (apart from a maximum of 25% fat for 'standard' beef mince established in case law and of 3% fat for anything labelled 'low fat') for the fat content of minced meat, including those products labelled as 'lean' or 'extra lean'. Surveys carried out by the Food Standards Agency have shown that there is in fact considerable overlap between the levels of fat in different categories of mince. The omnibus research found that, when told about this, 82% of people who buy minced meat felt it would be useful if a standard level of fat content for 'lean' mince were adopted by all shops.

Given the potential for consumer confusion and misinterpretation of packaging created by this situation, the FSA commissioned research to explore consumers' understanding of the nature of minced meat and their requirements or preferences for labelling and descriptors.

2. **Objectives**

The research was required to examine and understand...

- consumers' knowledge about minced meat and the effect of this on their purchasing behaviour
- their views on the different 'categories' of minced meat
- their preferences for and requirements of the label

B. METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

1. **Methodology**

Fieldwork consisted of...

- 8 group discussions, each lasting about 90 minutes and involving 8 respondents
- 12 paired depth interviews, each lasting about 60 minutes and involving two friends

The groups and interviews took place in London, Bridgend, Belfast, Liverpool and Edinburgh. All respondents regularly bought packaged mince from supermarkets; those in the groups and interviews specified below also bought it from high street butchers. All were asked to bring the packaging from a recent supermarket purchase to the groups.

Fieldwork was conducted between 11 and 19 December 2007 by Fiona Gillard, Lisa Malangone and Ben Toombs

2. **Sample**

8 group discussions – 8 respondents in each					
	Age/lifestage	Gender	SEG	Type of mince	Location
G1	18-24	Female	BC1	Packaged only	Bridgend
G2	25-34	Male	BC1	Packaged only	London
G3	25-34	Female	C2DE	Packaged only	Edinburgh
G4	35-49	Male	C2DE	Packaged only	Bridgend
G5	35-49	Female	C2DE	Packaged + Loose	London
G6	35-49	Female	BC1	Packaged only	Belfast
G7	50+	Male	BC1	Packaged + Loose	Edinburgh
G8	50+	Female	C2DE	Packaged only	Belfast

12 friendship paired depths					
	Age/lifestage	Gender	SEG	Type of mince	Region
D1	18-24	Female	C2DE	Packaged only	Liverpool
D2	18-24	Male	BC1	Packaged only	London
D3	25-34	Female	C2DE	Packaged + Loose	Bridgend
D4	25-34	Female	BC1	Packaged only	Liverpool
D5	25-34	Female	C2DE	Packaged only	London
D6	25-34	Male	BC1	Packaged only	Edinburgh
D7	35-49	Female	C2DE	Packaged only	Belfast
D8	35-49	Female	BC1	Packaged + Loose	London
D9	35-49	Female	C2DE	Packaged only	Edinburgh
D10	35-49	Male	BC1	Packaged only	Liverpool
D11	50+	Male	C2DE	Packaged + Loose	Belfast
D12	50+	Female	BC1	Packaged only	Bridgend

C. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

1. **Summary of findings**

Respondents buy and value mince because it is cheap, flexible and easy to use. Their views of it (on consideration) are divided: it is a natural product, and shares many of the positive aspects of fresh meat; but since it is cheaper and less easy to inspect than whole cuts of meat, many suspect it contains unknown quantities of fat and other non-muscle tissue. Because they value mince as a useful, cost-effective cooking ingredient, respondents prefer to focus on the first of these views and to 'overlook' the second, and they do not really want to be given reasons why they should not buy mince.

Fat content is the most salient and immediate factor in assessing the quality of mince, followed by (and often linked closely to) impressions of the amount of other non-muscle content, and the quality of the meat itself. But fat content is judged in relative terms: most want mince which is *lower* in fat, but they have given little thought to how much it *actually* contains. This goes back to their desire to 'do the right thing' by choosing the healthier option, without wanting to know too much about what they are actually buying.

Respondents also want to be able to choose their mince quickly. Mince is a cheap, staple product, and the same type is bought repeatedly; it is not something which warrants much thought or attention.

The descriptor 'lean' fulfils both these roles perfectly: it is relative (compared with standard mince) and vague (it does not give too much detail away), and it is very familiar (it makes a quick choice possible). 'Lean' also seems to have comforting, albeit difficult to articulate, associations with meat quality, and 'lean' mince is known to be only marginally more expensive than 'standard' mince (few would consider buying 'economy' or 'value' mince, even though this is cheaper still). 'Lean' is by far the most salient and valued descriptor for mince, with the country of origin and 'steak' generally coming second and third.

When asked to put a figure on the fat content of lean mince, most opt for between 10 and 15%; and judging by the packaging they brought to the groups, the mince most respondents buy is largely in line with

these estimates. So before being shown the information about the range of fat contents found in lean mince, most respondents were happy with the current situation.

After seeing the information, most respondents were surprised at the range of fat contents available across the UK, and felt this is unacceptable if true and widespread. However, many quickly became sanguine about the situation in reality. When they checked the levels of fat in the products they were buying, they found these were acceptable to them and in line with what they had expected. As a result, this wide range did not seem to affect them personally, and they believed that other reputable retailers would be selling products similar to those that they bought themselves.

All this had important implications for respondents' desires and needs from the packaging label. They wanted to be able to choose mince quickly, and without thinking too much about what it contains, and although many appreciated the need for accurate information, and felt they were being misled *when told about the variation*, in actual fact their perceptions of the fat content in the mince they were buying, as informed by the current labels, were largely accurate.

2. **Conclusions**

Respondents were firm in their perceptions of different kinds of mince, and in particular about what the term 'lean' represents, but they were unaware that there might be significant variation within these types of product. The firmness of these perceptions, and respondents' reliance on the term 'lean' as a way of determining fat content, does indicate the potential for consumers to be misled in instances where the fat content of lean mince exceeds the 10-15% range that they expect.

Respondents were often surprised when told about the range of fat content found in lean mince, but most quickly realised that what they bought was similar to what they had expected. In light of this, it seemed that many respondents would have been happy to continue with the current labelling schemes, and to remain unaware of the 'theoretical' variations in the fat content of lean mince, because they were *not* being misled about the products they bought and they assumed that most other people who bought from 'reputable' sources

were not being misled either. But if this variation is more widespread than respondents assumed, there is a strong argument for greater clarity on the label.

If greater clarity is required, it will be important that what respondents currently value about the labels they use is not undermined. These benefits are practical (the ease and familiarity of the term 'lean' allows them to pick the mince they want with minimal fuss) and emotional (the fact that the term lean does not alert them to the fact that mince actually contains quite a lot of fat). It was also important to many respondents that whatever solution is pursued is proportionate to a problem which they assumed would affect a relatively small number of people.

All this points to one of the two solutions discussed by most respondents in the groups. Showing the fat content as a range of percentages (for example, 10-15% fat) more prominently than it appears at the moment, but subordinate to and not as part of the 'top of label' information, was the most obvious and immediate thought that most had. Since this information is already on many labels, most assumed that it would be easy to move it and make it more prominent.

Standardising the term lean, on the other hand, was less obvious and less frequently suggested spontaneously. Respondents recognised that this would allow consumers to retain the labels as they know them, and to remain unaware of the current variation, and it seemed sensible to many, especially initially. But, on thinking about it, many expected standardisation to be expensive and complicated – often more so than they felt the problem deserved.

Many respondents would be happy to pay a few pence more for either of these changes, as mince is not expensive anyway and they saw it as important that quality is maintained. But although most could see how standardisation might cost manufacturers, and therefore consumers, many could not see why quoting fat content more prominently should incur costs at all, since the information is already present in many cases.

D. PERCEPTIONS OF MINCE AND PURCHASING BEHAVIOUR

1. **Context**

1.1 What type of meat do people buy?

While all respondents bought beef mince regularly, the frequency with which they used it ranged from at least once a week to a few times a month. Equally, some picked up mince as a matter of course every time they went food shopping, while others only bought it when they needed it. But beef mince was always seen as a staple item for adults and children, either for the fridge or freezer, and it was used for a variety of dishes, including pasta, stews, burgers and pies.

*“You can do so much with mince.”
“I buy it once a week and make lasagne, chilli, spaghetti Bolognese.”
D12, 50+, female, BC1, Wales*

There were no obvious variations in the way in which respondents in the different age bands used beef mince, whether or not there were children at home. It was noticeable, however, that more affluent respondents and those in London tended to restrict its use to pasta dishes and burgers, and to use it less often, whereas less affluent respondents and those in Northern Ireland and Scotland seemed more likely to use it in stews and other basic recipes, in addition to pasta, and to use it more often.

Other types of mince were less widely used – they tended to be bought reasonably regularly by a few individuals to make specific dishes, rather than sporadically by many respondents. Lamb mince was perhaps the most common of these; it was bought more often for adult consumption than for children.

*“Lamb is more expensive but it makes such a nice Bolognese.”
D12, 50+, female, BC1, Wales*

Pork and turkey mince were bought by some, mainly parents to make burgers or pasta dishes for their children; very few adults said they ate these types of mince themselves.

"It's hard to know what to do with it [turkey mince], you could make a turkey burger with a bit of onion and stuff but other than that I'm not really sure, whereas mince meat, you can have plain with gravy or jazz it up as chilli or cottage pie, anything."

D11, 50+, male, C2DE, Northern Ireland

"I have bought turkey mince but I don't really know what to do with it."

G3, 25-34, female, C2DE, Scotland

Chicken and venison mince were seldom, if ever, bought by respondents in this sample, for themselves or for their children. These types of mince seemed less 'understandable' than the others – people found it hard to see what they would do with them.

"The colour of it [chicken mince] is pasty looking so it puts me off."

D12, 50+, female, BC1, Wales

1.2 What do they think of mince?

Perhaps the most widespread way of thinking about mince was 'a cheap dinner'. Respondents across the sample – all ages, SEGs, locations, degrees of affluence – thought of it in this way.

"It's cheap, mince - it's like frying steak. It's just a cheap dinner meat."

D7, 35-49, female, C2DE, Northern Ireland

HOW HEALTHY AND NUTRITIOUS DO YOU THINK MINCE IS?

"Not very much. It just makes a nice meal. It's just cheap."

D12, 50+, female, BC1, Wales

As many pointed out, mince is indeed cheaper than almost any other form of meat, typically between £1 and £3 to feed four or more people. This cheapness meant that mince was seen simultaneously in two separate lights: few were under any illusions about its general quality (in terms of taste or nutritional value), compared with other forms of meat; but clearly few were sufficiently concerned about this to prevent them from buying and eating it frequently.

"It's obviously not the best quality meat from the animal because it wouldn't be as cheap if it was."

"I don't think you expect much from it."

"On the whole mince is cheap, it's a cheap thing to buy, so you don't really get great mince."

G3, 25-34, female, C2DE, Scotland

“With mince you’ve got to accept that there is an element of unknown in it because why the hell would they mince it up in the first place, so it’s not going to be the finest, choicest cuts.”

G2, 25-34, male, BC1, South

Related to this view was the idea that mince is a flexible product which is fairly bland in itself but can be used as the base for a variety of dishes (as noted, this variety was wider for the less affluent and those outside London). Any concerns about its quality (compared with other forms of meat) were therefore reduced further by the fact that the sauce or accompaniment was more important to the dish than the meat itself (burgers were often the exception here).

For most respondents, this picture related to fresh mince only – frozen mince was another matter. A number had used frozen mince; they fell into two groups. The majority had tried it for its convenience, but had been put off by the quality and had rarely bought it since. The minority (mostly less affluent parents cooking for children) acknowledged that it was of a lower quality than fresh mince, but continued to use it because it is convenient and cheap.

“I have seen it [frozen mince] and it looks a bit like the cheap stuff. It’s not compact, it’s flaky and looks like it would cook badly.”

“I can safely say that I have never bought frozen mince.”

D5, 25-34, female, C2DE, South

“The frozen mince is in a massive bag with little bits, all mixed together. It’s cheap and it tastes it. You have to fry it really thoroughly and even then it’s no good.”

D2, 18-24, male, BC1, South

Most of those who had been put off frozen mince and had not bought it since could not understand the convenience and price arguments of those who continued to use it: fresh mince was cheap enough and easy enough to use and store; and many said they bought fresh mince and froze it anyway.

1.3 Where do they buy it?

The recruitment criteria ensured that all respondents bought fresh, packaged beef mince in a supermarket, at least on occasion, and that a number bought fresh beef mince from the high-street butcher as well. Some also bought pre-frozen mince from the supermarket, as well

as fresh mince. Few respondents bought fresh mince from the meat counter in the supermarket (it was either packaged from the supermarket or loose from the high street), and few of those who bought frozen mince also bought fresh mince in a butcher – these two groups were largely mutually exclusive.

The frequency of, and reasons for, use of high street butchers in general varied noticeably by age and region. Older respondents and those outside London often visited their local butcher regularly, and bought most of their meat there; they bought meat from supermarkets if they happened to be there anyway, but often preferred to go to their butcher because they trusted their butcher and thought they knew what they were getting.

“I prefer to go to a butcher but it’s the time. I’m in the supermarket buying things anyway so I get the meat when I’m there. If I had a choice and the time I’d probably go to the local butcher.”

“I think you believe your good butcher, well I do, more than a supermarket... it’s a slightly more personal service when you go to the butcher. He knows his customers, knows what they like. He couldn’t really cut back on his quality very much because that would affect his regular customers.”

“I think the butcher is easier for me in some ways because if you ask for something that’s what you’ll get, as compared to looking at a pack or something. If I want the lean mince that’s what I’m getting.”

“With supermarket mince you don’t know what you’re getting. If you go to the butcher you see what you’re getting and that’s fine.”

“The butcher I go to can almost tell you the name of the cow. For some reason that’s reassuring.”

G7, 50+, male, BC1, Scotland

Younger respondents, and those in London, tended to visit their local butcher for ‘special purchases’ – good cuts of meat for special occasions – because they thought that the quality would be better than at the supermarket. They went to supermarkets for most of their everyday meat, together with everything else they needed.

It follows that older respondents and those outside London were much more likely to buy mince in butchers than the others. Mince was always seen as ‘everyday’ rather than a ‘special purchase’, and younger respondents did not think it worth a trip to the butcher. But it was also something of an unknown (see below); older respondents

often trusted their butcher more than the supermarket, and in any case visited often.

Other types of mince (lamb, pork and turkey) were almost always bought packaged from the supermarket, largely because they were rarely stocked by the butcher.

2. Considered perceptions of mince

On an immediate level, mince (and especially beef mince) was a straightforward product for most respondents. It was seen as everyday, basic, taken for granted, a kitchen staple, a cheap meal; and few had given its content, nutritional value or other attributes much consideration before.

"I'm sure most families every week use mince to have spaghetti or shepherds pie, burgers. It's cheap, and it's just an easy meal."

D5, 25-34, female, C2DE, South

All knew that, compared with other food products, mince contains fairly high levels of fat, largely because this comes out when cooking. Few were very concerned about this, however, partly because fat was accepted as part and parcel of mince's cheap, basic nature, and partly because many browned their mince and poured the fat away before adding the meat to their dishes.

"I think it's quite a high fat content. It's not something I'd want to eat every day, maybe once a week."

G1, 18-24, female, BC1, Wales

"The reason I don't think about is, when I cook it I drain the fat out of it."

G6, 35-49, Female, BC1, Northern Ireland

On further exploration, however, some contradictory and complex feelings and knowledge emerged. This complexity was due to the fact that mince often occupied an ambiguous and individual position in respondents' perceptions of food products. Most categorised meat and meat products by reference to two 'extremes': fresh meat and processed food. Fresh meat was seen as simple, natural, transparent and unadulterated: nothing significant has been added and there is little doubt over its contents (although there might be questions over its quality or hygiene); it is easy to inspect visually as there is nothing

hidden or invisible; and it is basically healthy – the only arguably ‘bad’ aspect is the fat content, and the fat is visible and often removable. Processed food, on the other hand, was seen as complex and opaque: it can contain any number of additives and unknown ingredients; both the packaging and the nature of the product make it difficult to inspect; and it can contain high levels of salt, sugar, fat, additives and other ‘unhealthy’ components.

It follows that respondents’ information requirements were far higher for processed food than for fresh meat. When choosing the former, most looked at at least some of the detail on the package labelling. In the case of the latter, many looked for no further detail than the type (and sometimes the source) of meat.

For many respondents, when they thought about it, mince had attributes from both ends of this spectrum. Most believed fresh mince is just meat, without the additives and high levels of sugar and/or salt which can be found in processed food (although some suspected that some cheaper mince has colour added). Fresh mince, like other types of meat, is also packaged so that it can be inspected. On the other hand, the fact that mince is relatively cheap made many suspect that it contains large quantities of fat and other non-muscle tissue (connective and otherwise), and since the meat is minced up, these ‘extras’ are not always easy to identify, and not separable from the meat, so it is difficult to know what, or how much, of these other things are present.

“Less than 10% fat’. What is the rest of it? It’s a worry.”

D7, 35-49, female, C2DE, Northern Ireland

Frozen mince, especially for those who had used it ‘once but never again’, came closer to the ‘processed food’ end of the spectrum than fresh mince. It was thought to be much fattier, and impossible to inspect because of the packaging and the fact that it is frozen; impressionistically it was also closer to processed food simply because it is frozen and convenient, and therefore somehow less natural.

As a result of these beliefs, most respondents were comparatively uninterested in and uninformed about the contents and nutritional aspects of the mince they buy (as with fresh meat), but aware that it contains elements which are not particularly healthy (as with processed food). These points had a strong influence on the type and amount of

information about mince that respondents wanted and expected to find on packaging. Almost all wanted to know enough to assess the quality of the mince (see section 3 below), but very few looked at or wanted more detailed information, such as nutritional details. Moreover, many were actively keen not to think too much about what was in the mince they ate: they appreciated it for its price and flexibility, and their long and frequent use meant that any concerns about its contents had been 'brushed under the carpet'; and they did not want to be given reasons for not buying it.

HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW ABOUT WHAT IS IN MINCED MEAT?

"I don't think I want to know!"

"I think there's a lot of rubbish."

G1, 18-24, female, BC1, Wales

"I don't really know what is in it really. I'd rather not know."

"We are better off not knowing, the same as sausages - it's odds and ends really isn't it?"

D1, 18-24, female, C2DE, North

3. **Assessing quality**

3.1 Factors to consider

Judgements about packaged mince were made on the basis of labelling, price, and the appearance of the meat, in that order of importance for most respondents. For most, the quality of mince was determined by the impressions these criteria gave of at least two of the following three factors: the amount of fat it contains; the amount of other non-muscle tissue it contains; the quality of the original meat. These clues were sometimes contradictory, however, as discussed below.

WHAT WOULD YOU BE LOOKING FOR ON THE LABEL?

"The lean, the price, the colour of the meat."

D4, 25-34, female, BC1, North

SO DOES THE PACKAGE MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE?

"Yes, of course, you look for the wording to attract you."

"The colours and the pictures on the front play a part – the first bite is with the eye all right."

D7, 35-49, female, C2DE, Northern Ireland

"Always go for the lean and you can normally get two packets for £5 as well, which always helps."

G2, 25-34, male, BC1, South East

In addition, or sometimes instead, loose mince from the butcher was generally assessed through trust, based on previous experience of mince from the butcher and a belief that butchers had to provide good meat to maintain their reputation, and, in some cases, actually seeing the meat being minced.

“You see what you’re getting. It’s a piece of meat and he minces it for you. Supermarket mince, God alone knows what you’re getting.”

“If you buy from the butcher, you know that the guy is tossing in shoulder steak, fillet tails, and bits of sirloin. He’s not putting eyes and lips in.”

G7, 50+, male, BC1, Scotland

“You can walk into any butchers and at least if you’re buying it from them you know what you’re buying.”

G8, 50+ female, C2DE, Northern Ireland

“If you get a piece of beef or something it’s nicer from the butcher than it is from [a supermarket] or somewhere.”

G5, 35-49, female, C2DE, South

3.2 Fat content

For almost all respondents, the amount of fat in mince was the most important determinant of its quality; the only notable exceptions were young men without children, who were less concerned about this.

“When you’re cooking with it and you drain it, you see how much fat it is. I got mince once from [a particular supermarket] and the amount of fat that was in it just made me never want to buy it again.”

D4, 25-34, female, BC1, North

Judgements were usually *relative*, however. Lower fat mince was thought to be better, although most believed that some fat is necessary for it to taste ‘right’, and some found mince with very low fat levels too ‘meaty’. But few had stopped to consider how much fat (in *absolute* terms) there actually was in their mince, and few supposed that any mince is truly low in fat, compared with other foods. In any case, since many respondents poured this fat away before using the mince, this preference seemed to be based more on views about what they ‘should’ buy and the experience of cooking the mince than about what they were about to eat.

LEAN...HAVE YOU EVER CONSIDERED HOW MUCH FAT IT HAS GOT IN IT?

"If you buy low fat yoghurts, you don't look at how much fat is in a low fat yoghurt. They are probably not that much lower fat than a normal yoghurt, so I think it's the same."

G2, 25-34, male, BC1, South East

"Lean can actually mean not very interesting mince. There comes a point with low fat and mince where low fat becomes a bad thing."

G7, 50+, male, BC1, Scotland

Many respondents, especially older, were confident they could judge the (relative) amount of fat in mince from its appearance. They thought fatty mince would be lighter in colour, or speckled white, and roughly ground into thick ribbons. Less fatty mince, on the other hand was expected to be dark red and finely ground into thin ribbons. For some, appearance was the best indicator of fat content, especially at the butcher. Most, however, judged fat content by the labelling and price.

"I always go for the lean one because I don't like it if there's lots of white bits on the meat."

"If there's lots of little white bits it makes me think it's cheap."

G3, 25-34, female, C2DE, Scotland

"I consider that the marbling of the meat is as important as the burgundy of the red."

D11, 50+, male, C2DE, Northern Ireland

"You need to see the colour, deep red, it can't be a brownie colour, it matures... I just think it's gone off."

"I don't really look at the packaging, I look at the quality of the meat."

D5, 25-34, female, C2DE, South

"I think the cheaper stuff is coarser because there's fat and all in it."

G8, 50+ female, C2DE, Northern Ireland

Almost all believed that mince which is less fatty is described as 'lean' or 'extra lean' (and in some cases as 'steak', 'organic' or 'premium'), and is relatively more expensive, whereas more fatty mince is simply called mince, or even 'economy' or 'value', and is at the cheaper end of the spectrum. The great majority of respondents were confident that these rules were a solid basis for making decisions about which mince packages to buy.

3.3 Other content

Fewer respondents expressed interest or concern about this aspect of mince than about fat content. If anything, the idea that mince might contain non-meat material was more unpleasant for respondents than the idea of it containing fat, and many did not want to think too much about it. When they did think about it, however, levels of fat and non-meat content were often expected to go hand in hand, and methods of assessing this aspect of mince were usually identical to those described above for fat.

3.4 Quality of meat

As noted, few respondents were under any illusions about the quality of the meat used to make mince: they saw all mince as a cheap meal. But many believed that, within this, the quality of meat used to make different types of mince varied.

A few who used a butcher regularly had seen mince being ground from meat that they would happily have bought 'whole'; unsurprisingly, they believed that quality of meat in each case was the same. But, as with fat content, most respondents buying packaged mince based their judgements about the quality of the meat on the label and the price. Better quality meat was generally thought to be described as 'steak', 'prime/premium', or (for some respondents, but not all – see below) 'organic', and to be relatively more expensive. Many also drew a link between fat content and meat quality in a more confused but still influential sense, believing that better meat meant lower levels of fat; therefore, 'lean' or 'extra lean' also signified better meat to many.

3.5 Choosing mince

On this basis, most respondents would choose mince which is described as 'lean', and often 'steak', which is at the middle or towards the top of the price range (still cheap, compared with other types of meat), and which looks dark and finely ground. Conversely, few could understand why anyone would buy the cheapest types of mince: they expected this to be fatty, to contain undesirable things, and to be made from meat that they would otherwise think twice about eating; and

the difference in price was thought marginal – just over £1 per 500g in many cases.

Packaged beef mince in the supermarket was usually chosen quickly, and on the basis of habit. Many respondents had already decided which type of beef mince they liked most, and picked this up every time without thinking too hard about it or studying the packaging.

“Once you buy a packet and you like it you just go back and get that one.”

G3, 25-34, female, C2DE, Scotland

Moreover, supermarket stocks were said to be fairly consistent, and most had a store they visited regularly, so most said they could find their ‘usual’ mince whenever they wanted it. The only thing that might alter this regular purchase was lack of stock or a special offer; in this case, the replacement would need to meet similar labelling and appearance criteria for most respondents, but some did seem to relax their requirements in the face of money off a different type of mince – an indication that they were not overly concerned about its contents.

Beef mince bought from the butcher was often purchased ‘on trust’: there was little information about it; and often there was no choice, or the only choice was between ‘lean’ and ‘standard’. Lamb, pork and turkey mince usually came in one variety only at the supermarket. Most knew and accepted that lamb mince is fattier than most beef mince. Few were concerned about this or thought any further about it, however, largely because they bought it occasionally and wanted it for a specific purpose; it was not seen as a staple in the way that beef mince is, so most simply picked up whatever was available.

Pork mince was unknown to most; the few who bought it knew that it is lower in fat than most beef mince, and were happy to take whatever the supermarket sold, and to feed it to their children. Some who did not buy it assumed that pork mince is higher in fat than most beef mince – apparently because of the thought of pork chops with thick rinds of fat.

Turkey meat in general was believed by almost all to be low in fat; minced turkey was expected to be no exception, and those who bought

it were happy to take whatever the supermarket offered without reading the label too hard.

*"You know lamb mince's fat content is higher than beef."
"Surely red meat is higher than the white meat anyway - and chicken and turkey."*

G5, 35-49, female, C2DE, South

4. Understanding of descriptors

4.1 Lean and extra lean

The terms 'lean' and, to a lesser extent, 'extra lean' were the first items that most respondents looked for when choosing packaged mince. Both were taken to mean 'lower in fat' than standard mince: some initially equated them with 'low fat' in general, but abandoned this notion when they thought about it, and most appreciated that even lean mince contains a fair amount of fat.

There was no wide preference for 'extra lean' over 'lean'. Almost all respondents habitually chose 'lean' and would not necessarily have chosen 'extra lean' even if it were available; indeed, some who had tried 'extra lean' had found it too meaty for their taste, and not fatty enough.

"Lean – good for you, healthier."

D6, 25-34, male, BC1, Scotland

"I always think that the 'extra-lean' must be quite bland, you need some fat for flavour."

D1, 18-24, female, C2DE, North

Few respondents had considered how much fat there might be in lean or extra lean mince – all they had thought was that there is less than in standard mince. When asked, most guessed at between 10 and 15% for lean, and between 5 and 10% for extra lean, although some imagined that levels would be higher or lower. These guesses were what respondents both hoped and expected these types of mince would contain, and, as noted, they were under no illusions that mince of any type is 'low fat'.

"I'd look at one word, like organic or lean, or even taste the difference, and that would make me buy it. It could be more fat, but the wording makes such a big impact."

D5, 25-34, female, C2DE, South

For some, 'lean' also suggested that the meat was of good quality, largely because they assumed that better quality meat is lower in fat to begin with. When pressed, however, most acknowledged that 10-15% fat is high by comparison with many food products; this was exactly why they had not wanted to think too hard about the content of mince in the first place.

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN THE NUTRITION WHEELS, DO YOU LOOK AT THOSE?

"I know that mince has got a bit of fat in it so I tend not to read it so much I think."

G5, 35-49, female, C2DE, South

4.2 Steak

Of all the descriptors, 'steak' was the one taken most literally, and respondents often spontaneously suggested this term as something to look for. Most assumed that 'steak' mince is in fact minced steak, as opposed to beef.

"Steak [mince] must be better [than mince] because it's a steak that has been minced."

"It's just a better bit of meat that had been minced, as simple as that."

D7, 35-49, female, C2DE, Northern Ireland

For many, this was a sign of quality: to them, steak meant good meat; most did not consider that there are different types of steak, and that the quality varies. 'Steak' and 'lean' between them therefore denoted higher quality, but despite this crossover respondents did not necessarily take 'steak' as well as 'lean' to mean lower fat.

"Steak has good quality connotations, so steak mince is reassuring."

D5, 25-34, female, C2DE, South

"Steak would imply quality. I'm not sure what it means or where on the animal it's come from."

"I would think it's a better part of meat."

D1, 18-24, female, C2DE, North

4.3 Country of origin

The source of all meat, mince included, was very important to most respondents outside London. Almost all of these brought mince packages to the groups with Welsh, (Northern) Irish or Scottish clearly shown. This was apparently for a mixture of emotional reasons,

including the desire to buy locally (or to feel as though they were), pride in the quality of 'their' meat, fear or concern about recent diseases and problems faced by English meat, and nationalism more generally.

"I like to support local farmers."

"After all that mad cow and foot and mouth, our farmers have had a hard time so I try to buy from them."

D5, 25-34, female, C2DE, South

"Scottish... I know it hasn't travelled far. I never had any trouble with a Scottish farm. Makes me feel comfortable eating it."

"If it is Aberdeen Angus, a Scottish word, you associate these phrases with good farming community."

D6, 25-34, male, BC1, Scotland

"We don't buy British beef over here - Northern Ireland or Scottish."

G8, 50+ female, C2DE, Northern Ireland

But it was also clearly due to the lack of other options: many said that all the meat available to them was 'local'.

Most said that the source would be an influential factor in a choice of mince packages. It is difficult to know how influential this would be, as it seemed that everything in their supermarkets may have been 'local', but many rejected the stimulus examples bought in London because they did not state the source clearly, and most would not have chosen the Argentine example because of its provenance, and the distance it would have had to have travelled.

"I think if it's come from abroad it's probably travelled for longer so I'd probably buy Scottish because I expect it to be fresher."

G3, 25-34, female, C2DE, Scotland

"I prefer it coming from Scotland because if you were getting it from another country then it would be packed, refrigeration, coming over, by the time it got into the supermarket, it isn't going to be fresh."

D9, 35-49, female, C2DE, Scotland

Londoners were far less concerned about the provenance of their mince, and the packaging they brought generally made no prominent mention of the meat's source. They, too, often balked at the idea of buying mince from Argentina, however, largely because of the fact that mince was not seen as special enough to warrant transporting produce over such a great distance.

4.4 Organic

The idea of organic meat was confusing for many respondents, who could understand how crops which are kept free from chemicals could be organic, but not meat.

“Well, there are certain things I like that are organic, like butter and milk, but meat not necessarily.”

D7, 35-49, female, C2DE, Northern Ireland

“Organic means no pesticides used.”

D6, 25-34, male, BC1, Scotland

Reactions to the concept of ‘organic’ varied as well. For some it suggested quality; for others it meant ‘over-priced’; and for still others it referred to an animal’s quality of life, rather than the quality of produce.

“Healthier. They don’t get pumped up with anything.”

“They aren’t in confined spaces.”

“It’s to do with farming practices.”

D5, 25-34, female, C2DE, South

Almost no respondents had seen organic mince in their supermarkets or butchers, and few said would have chosen it even if it had been available, largely because their impression of ‘organic’ as a premium variety did not fit with their ideas of mince as a cheap, flexible product.

4.5 Assured Food Standard (red tractor)

Almost all respondents were unfamiliar with the red tractor: they had not noticed it on packaging, even though it is very widespread. Most made a connection to a farm, which had positive associations in terms of quality and ‘naturalness’, but few appreciated that it carries an assurance or were aware of the body which administers the mark. Once the symbol had been explained, however, almost all felt that it communicated ‘produce of a certain standard’.

“I like that [red tractor] because it shows that they are bothered because it will obviously cost them to get that mark.”

D1, 18-24, female, C2DE, North

4.6 Numerical expressions of fat content

All but a few respondents relied on verbal descriptors such as 'lean' to choose their mince, largely because the packaging they bought did not have a prominent figure on it. On paying further attention to the stimulus packages, some of which provided a prominent figure, some respondents felt that having a numerical expression would be more accurate and helpful, especially for those looking to monitor their diet.

"The pressure with your kids and everything, not to give them all this fatty food and whatnot: I think it's a big plus for them if it does say 'only 10% fat' or 'less than 10% fat.'"

D4, 25-34, female, BC1, North

But for many, putting a figure on fat content, and making that figure a reason to choose a certain type of mince, seemed wrong. This was for two main reasons. First, respondents were not used to seeing such a figure, and were accustomed to thinking about the fat content of mince in relative rather than absolute terms. Second, as noted above, many did not really want to be told how much fat there is in mince: they wanted to keep their relative measures and allow themselves to feel they were doing the right thing by buying 'lean'.

4.6.1 *Typically less than x% fat*

This was perhaps the most widely preferred of the suggested numerical descriptors. It was a widely familiar way of describing fat content directly, and many thought it more appropriate for mince than trying to 'disguise' the content with the term 'x% fat free'. The qualification 'typically' often created uncertainty or was felt to be obvious and superfluous, but this did not seem to hamper the communication of the descriptor, and some presumed it is a legal or practical requirement.

"The word typically is worrying, isn't it?"

D5, 25-34, female, C2DE, South

"I wouldn't want 'typically'. I would want the amount of fat that's on it."

G8, 50+ female, C2DE, Northern Ireland

4.6.2 *x% fat free*

This was also a familiar way of describing products in supermarkets, and respondents understood that it focuses on the 'good' side of the equation and allows manufacturers to print a high number. But, as noted, since respondents knew and accepted that mince does contain fat, it was often thought unnatural and even disingenuous to describe it in this way.

4.6.3 *Typically 90% lean*

Many found this descriptor confusing, as they were accustomed to thinking of 'lean' as a relative expression of fat content which indicates that mince is lower in fat than other varieties without giving an absolute level. It also seemed counter-intuitive, in the case of mince, to include a statement on the amount of fat that was absent.

WHAT ABOUT TYPICALLY 90% LEAN?

"It makes me think I've got to work it out. It makes me think, 'Hold on...'"

"You're so used to seeing '10% less fat', '12% less fat', and whatnot. When you see it like the 90% you know it's good but it does make you think about it."

D4, 25-34, female, BC1, North

WHAT ABOUT TYPICALLY 90% LEAN?

"It's either lean or not. The percentages I just don't get."

"It says it's lean anyway, what is the rest of it?"

D1, 18-24, female, C2DE, North

4.7 Fresh

All respondents made the distinction between 'frozen' and 'fresh' mince, and for most the two were very different products (see above). But 'freshness' itself was usually assessed by looking at the colour of the meat and/or the use-by date; although respondents reacted positively to the idea of it appearing on the label, as they wanted 'fresh' produce, this descriptor did not seem to tell them anything useful.

"Yes I like fresh - that puts you in a good mind about the mince."

D2, 18-24, male, BC1, South

"It's always what you'd expect."

"Would you put 'rancid' on the packet? I mean it's a redundancy. Of course you'd expect it to be fresh."

G7, 50+, male, BC1, Scotland

4.8 Healthy

In general, 'healthy' products were thought to be low in fat, sugar and salt, and to be aimed at those on a diet.

"Healthy can be loads of things, it can be less sugar, salt, less fat."

D7, 35-49, female, C2DE, Northern Ireland

But this descriptor also suggested to some that the product in question contained additives (such as sweetener) which replace these 'unhealthy' ingredients.

'Healthy' mince therefore tended to be regarded as lower in fat than 'lean' mince, and some of those who were particularly weight conscious were attracted by this idea and by the term 'healthy' itself. But a number of respondents were put off by this descriptor, either because they felt that the reduction in fat would make the mince less tasty, or because they were made to think that other ingredients had been added (as noted, one of the 'advantages' of mince was that it was natural in this sense).

*"I always think 'healthy living' will be very tasteless."
"Low fat, low salt, low sugar."*

G6, 35-49, female, BC1, Northern Ireland

'Lean' mince tended to be regarded as a standard and acceptable purchase for someone on an average diet.

4.9 Value and economy

Almost all respondents avoided mince described in this way because it was assumed to be poor quality in every way (fat content, other non-meat content, meat quality), and it is only marginally less expensive than more acceptable types of mince.

"That means rubbish to me."

D7, 35-49, female, C2DE, Northern Ireland

"You would see the branding of the value mince and that puts you off right away."

"It screams to me that the cheap cuts and fatty cuts have been used."

D11, 50+, male, C2DE, Northern Ireland

"Not that I know which part of an animal mince comes from, but I assume the ones that aren't 'value' are a little bit more decent."

G3, 25-34, female, C2DE, Scotland

HOW ABOUT 'ECONOMY'?

"It just makes you feel like it's going to give you a nasty taste in your mouth."

D4, 25-34, female, BC1, North

There was little 'snob' value in this: those who regularly bought 'value' or 'economy' versions of other products felt the same about this type of mince as those who chose higher quality brands. The difference was that although mince was not thought to be high quality, the consequences of eating 'value' mince were widely thought more severe than those of eating 'value' tinned tomatoes, for example, so it did have to be of a certain standard.

"I wouldn't [buy economy] for mince. I would for biscuits and things."

G3, 25-34, female, C2DE, Scotland

4.10 Prime, premium, best and traditional

These descriptors were rarely suggested by respondents, and despite implying quality in general terms, they were universally thought to mean little and seen more as marketing terms than useful descriptions.

"If something has been packaged as 'top quality' or 'best quality', it's just a marketing thing."

G7, 50+, male, BC1, Scotland

"'Prime' makes you feel it's come from a good stock."

G6, 35-49, female, BC1, Northern Ireland

5. **Summary – why do people buy lean mince?**

Basically, lean beef mince is chosen because it is thought to be 'better quality' than standard mince, but is only marginally more expensive. This 'quality' is measured in three ways: fat content, other ingredients, and the quality of the original meat. All three measures are relative, however, and few have any illusions about the quality of any mince in absolute terms. But few have many concerns about this, and few want to be told exactly what is in their mince because it is a cheap and very useful food product, and they want to continue to buy it with a 'clear conscience'.

The term 'lean' allows consumers to choose a healthier option without delving too deeply into what is in the mince, to believe that they are doing the right thing with regard to healthier eating, without denying themselves the option of eating mince altogether, and to feel that they are getting a better quality product for only a few pence more than 'standard' mince. For this reason, few respondents were interested in or wanted to know the exact fat content of their mince per se; and because many poured the excess fat off their meat after browning it they did not think it very important (within reason, at least).

"I go for the lean steak mince. I just look for the word lean."

WHY LEAN?

"Because you aren't getting as much fat, you don't need to skim as much off the top."

D7, 35-49, female, C2DE, Northern Ireland

'Extra lean' mince was bought less widely, partly because it was less widely available, but also because it was seen as unnecessarily 'low fat' for most people. 'Standard' mince tended to be bought by those with fewest concerns about diet or quality, or if it was on special offer.

E. LABELLING ISSUES

1. **Current requirements from the packaging label**

1.1 Overall

For most respondents, a typical label could be divided into two broad sections, each showing different kinds of information. At the top of the label, they expected to see basic information and ‘selling points’ in large type, which allow customers to make a quick choice about which *type* of pack to buy. At the bottom of the label comes the ‘small print’ information, some of which allows customers to choose which *pack* to buy and some of which is almost universally ignored. In addition, since the appearance of the meat was an important factor when choosing a package of mince, most said the label should occupy less than half of the packaging.

1.2 Top of the label

Few respondents had any hesitation describing what they wanted to see at the top of the label. Two descriptors were important to almost all: the type of meat (beef, pork, lamb etc); and a relative measure of fat content (lean, extra lean, or the absence of a descriptor).

“I’d put ‘fresh succulent extra lean British beef mince.’ It’s a lot but its giving you everything you need to know about it.”

D4, 25-34, female, BC1, North

The great majority of respondents outside London also wanted to see the provenance of the meat – Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish – at the top of the label; London respondents were much less concerned about this.

“If there was room for detail about the farm.”

“Or even a wee picture of a farm.”

“A Union Jack or a Saltire.”

G7, 50+, male, BC1, Scotland

A large minority, especially more affluent and older respondents, looked for ‘steak’ as a mark of quality, although many others were not too concerned about this.

“Minced beef you tend to associate with more fat in it than steak mince. Steak mince is more appealing.”

G8, 50+ female, C2DE, Northern Ireland

Almost all thought they would be able to choose the type of mince they wanted based on this information alone. Other elements, including descriptors such as ‘fresh’, ‘prime’ and ‘healthy’, images of cows or farming scenes, and the Assured Food Standard logo (red tractor), were thought unnecessary but perhaps understandable from a marketing or design point of view.

1.3 Bottom of the label

When discussing what should be on a label, almost all respondents turned to this section only once the ‘top of label’ descriptors had been decided upon. The only piece of information that was widely thought essential and was widely checked was the use-by or sell-by date. Information about weight and price was thought important in itself, but was rarely checked for individual purchases: most bought standard 250g or 500g packages, and could tell which was which by sight; and the price of a package depended primarily on weight (which was standardised), and was not thought to vary much between shopping trips.

Some felt nutritional information (colour wheels, traffic lights etc) might be important for those on a diet or with a medical condition, but most felt it is largely superfluous for mince (as opposed to processed foods), and/or did not want the level of detail it gave. Few paid much attention to this information where it was displayed. Other details, such as storage and cooking instructions, were almost always suggested by the moderator; they were thought handy at best but usually unnecessary.

*“You could put the fat content and the calories on the label.
I’ve never really thought about it - the traffic lights are quick
and easy to read.”*

D2, 18-24, male, BC1, South

1.4 Making a choice

The typical method for choosing a package of mince therefore involved finding packages described as ‘lean’ mince (top of the label), checking the use-by date (bottom of the label), and checking the appearance of the meat (behind the label). As noted, this was usually done quickly, on the basis of habit and with little thought.

2. Responses to stimulus information

Most of the information provided in the stimulus was accepted at face value, and was unsurprising. Some respondents were interested to learn that any food labelled 'low fat' has to contain less than 3% fat, and that the manufacturer's name and address have to be stated on mince packaging, but they were not surprised by this.

Many were a little surprised that there is no statutory definition of 'lean', although given their assumptions about 'lean' mince they often did not initially see why there should be one. But the great majority were very surprised on being told about the range of fat content found in 'lean' mince. Many felt that this situation, if true and widespread, is unacceptable because it means that 'lean' mince is not necessarily the healthier or higher quality option they thought they were choosing, and since 'lean' mince is slightly more expensive than 'standard' mince, they expected there to be a suitable difference between the products. (Although it must be noted that some were less concerned about this information, feeling that the upper estimate of 20% was not that much higher than what they had assumed for lean mince.)

"Now that you've said the extra lean is between 10 and 20% that is really bothersome."

"People don't know what they're buying."

D7, 35-49, female, C2DE, Northern Ireland

"You may as well say, 'This word means nothing'."

D11, 50+, male, C2DE, Northern Ireland

"I do feel a bit misled."

"Why are they allowed to put extra lean if it is no different, how are they allowed to put that on the packaging?"

D5, 25-34, female, C2DE, South

"The fact that there is such a gap between five and 20, quite surprising."

"If the Food Standards Agency is allowing them to use the word lean they should categorise it themselves, 'You can only use lean if it is between five and 12% or something'."

D6, 25-34, male, BC1, Scotland

In essence, therefore, there were two objections to the situation: health and 'trade description'. Women and older respondents were more concerned about the former; men and younger respondents tended to be more exercised by the latter.

"Basically they are deceiving you almost by having two packets on the same shelf that say the word 'lean' and one could contain 5% and one could contain 20% [fat]."

"I am bothered about the fact they are misleading you into thinking you are doing something better. So, if they can do something to make sure that it's got less fat in it, yes, I think they should do it."

"It doesn't bother me whatsoever [that mince is not particularly healthy] but what bothers me is the fact that they get away with doing that... It's the principle."

G3, 25-34, female, C2DE, Scotland

"It can vary between 5-20% fat and they are saying extra lean - you imagine that to be less fat than the standard beef... That means there is £1 difference in price so you are actually getting ripped off."

D9, 35-49, female, C2DE, Scotland

"I think the public should know what they're buying and know those rules, I don't think you should just leave them not knowing, it does change quite a few things, I didn't realise."

G5, 35-49, female, C2DE, South

"If you're paying more and it's not better in whichever way you want it then that's wrong. If it's the same as the other lot then it should be the same price."

"You're paying more for something you're not getting."

G2, 25-34, male, BC1, South East

In reality, however, as many respondents noted, the lean mince they had been buying (as shown by the packages they brought and the stimulus examples) was almost without exception in the 10-15% fat range – ie, what they had expected or assumed. Despite their feelings about the information given to them, therefore, most felt that it did not actually apply to them or the mince they bought. Equally, most assumed that 'reputable' retailers in general (the large supermarkets and trustworthy butchers) would not be selling very fatty lean mince.

"This one - typically less than 20% fat. No I don't think it is bad."

D9, 35-49, female, C2DE, Scotland

"I thought there would be more fat content than 10% in mince."

G6, 35-49, female, BC1, Northern Ireland

3. Attitudes to labelling in light of information

3.1 What should the label show?

Having been shown the information about the potential range of fat contents of lean mince, many respondents were initially pulled in two directions. Many felt that the fat content should be expressed more exactly and more prominently – in almost all cases as a numerical figure. Equally, however, few thought that the basic ‘top of label’ information described above should change. The possibility of standardising the fat content of lean mince was rarely suggested spontaneously.

“I guess that is the point because one lean meat can be 5% or 20% fat.”

“So what about extra lean that could have more fat in it? You need to look at the fat percentage because the word is nonsense.”

D1, 18-24, female, C2DE, North

This desire for more exact information about fat content is perhaps predictable, in light of what respondents had just heard. They felt that this information would give consumers more ‘power’ and choice, and would solve the issue of uncertainty about fat content; and in general it was thought better to have more information than less. But the fact that few wanted this figure to be as prominent as the ‘top of label’ information also reflects much of what has been discussed above about their views and use of mince, their understanding of ‘lean’, their purchasing habits and the type of information they wanted to see.

“I’d have said that I’m not particularly interested in fat content, but if I was, I would want to know the percentage rather than a discretionary word.”

D1, 18-24, female, C2DE, North

It is worth summarising each of these points. First, mince was seen as a cheap, staple product, and few had many illusions about its absolute ‘quality’. When they thought about it, many expected even lean mince to contain levels of fat which would seem high for other products (typically 10-15%), but quoting fat levels prominently was associated with promoting ‘low fat’ products, and it seemed wrong to do the same for mince at 10-15%. In any case, many were not too concerned about the exact levels of fat in their mince because they poured it off before using it.

*"You dispose of a lot of the fat, well I do."
"I prefer less fat and pour it away."*

D11, 50+, male, C2DE, Northern Ireland

Second, very few respondents thought that 'lean' should be replaced by or even relegated beneath a numerical figure. This was partly because the term is an established part of the vocabulary of mince: it is the first thing that most people look for, and a convenient indicator of fat content. But the term also appeared to have associations with quality and a degree of luxury, although these feelings were hard to articulate and rationalise.

"Lean is just a nice descriptive word isn't it?"

D8, 35-49, female, BC1, South

Third, most respondents bought the same type of mince package again and again; they paid little attention to the detail of the labelling because they recognised what they were looking for in the 'top of label' information. Few wanted to lose this ability to make an automatic, instant choice by having to look at more or different information or being forced to choose between packages with slightly different fat contents.

Fourth, although few respondents articulated this clearly, it was plain that many preferred to remain uninformed about the content of their mince, at least on a conscious level. Mince was valued for the reasons noted above, and respondents did not want to be given reasons for not buying it. In particular, 10-15% fat is fairly high in the grand scheme of things; although they often did not say so directly, most respondents would prefer not to be reminded of this.

"I think you could be telling people too much [by putting % on labels]."

"People just do buy mince, it's making people think too much and it might stop people buying it."

D2, 18-24, male, BC1, South

Not all respondents thought that the label should be changed, however. Some concluded that no alterations were necessary: they did not think 20% fat was an unreasonable maximum for 'lean' mince and expected their favoured brand to fall beneath this figure; they drained the fat off whilst cooking; or they were simply unconcerned about the fat content.

"I drain it. The interesting part would be if they could tell me the difference between drained mince, what difference it made from extra lean etc, because who leaves the fat on it? Who leaves all that liquid?"

G3, 25-34, female, C2DE, Scotland

3.2 Where should this information be positioned?

Many respondents were aware that fat content is already shown in the 'bottom of the label' information, although a number had never noticed this before, and some felt that this is sufficient to allow those who want to know about the fat content of mince to check it. Most, however, opted for placing the figure in a 'third section' on the label. This would be further towards the top and in larger type than at present, but distinct from, and subordinate to, the 'top of label' information, which should remain unchanged.

For many, the 'top of label' information sat most comfortably at the top left of the label, and this new 'third section' at the top right. They felt that this would allow consumers to check levels easily if they wanted to, but it would not get in the way of the 'top of label' information or give too much detail to those who did not want it.

3.3 What form should this information take?

Almost all respondents expected fat content to be expressed as a percentage. Most preferred to see it as a measure of 'fat' rather than of 'fat free'; both were familiar, but the former seemed more appropriate to mince. 'Fat free' was associated with products which try to promote their health credentials or attempt to disguise levels of fat, whereas 'fat' was seen as purely informational. Mince was known to be fatty, and it seemed odd to try to present it as anything else or to try to disguise this.

Most expected to see a range of percentages, such as 'less than 15% fat' or '10-15% fat', rather than an exact figure. They were not particularly interested in the specific level, and could see that this might be difficult to establish as mince is a natural product. In the same vein, 'typically' often created some uncertainty, but many believed that this qualification may be necessary.

3.4 Standardising 'lean'

The option of standardising the definition of 'lean' occurred to only a few respondents. When this was suggested, it seemed sensible to many, since this would make perceptions of the 'top of label' information more accurate, allowing consumers to make the choice they thought they were making, and everything would take place 'behind the scenes' so that neither the label nor consumers' knowledge about mince would need to change.

On thinking about it, however, others felt that this step would be unnecessary and disproportionate. They argued that there is currently no confusion about lean mince as consumers are unaware of the disparity. In light of this, unless there was a communications campaign or media coverage to inform them of the disparity, and about standardisation, consumers would be none the wiser about the problem or the solution – they would simply carry on as they were. Standardisation was expected to be expensive and complicated (much more so than quoting an already existing figure on packaging), but since the mince most respondents bought had fat levels which they considered acceptable anyway, it would change little as far as they were concerned. More generally, some felt that the fat content of mince was not a sufficiently serious issue to warrant such a step.

In light of the information they had seen, few would object to paying a little more (generally a few pence) for standardised lean mince, which was regarded as a cheap product anyway, and overall it appeared that few would object to 'lean' being standardised.

"I think if it's only going to go up buy a few pence, a lot of people buy it because it's easy to cook, you know, I don't think the price is going to matter that much. I think it's important to get a standard in place."

D1, 18-24, female, C2DE, North

"You wouldn't notice it if it went up like five pence, and to pay that five pence extra to know that you're not getting basically as much bad stuff in your meat, of course I'd pay it. If they start talking about 70 pence extra on a packet I would just drop down to the next one because it's costing a fortune."

D4, 25-34, female, BC1, North

"You don't mind paying a bit for meat as long as you know it's a proper bit and not so much fat in it."

G5, 35-49, female, C2DE, South

“If the price of mince goes up I’ll still pay it... mince is cheap anyway.”

D5, 25-34, female, C2DE, South

But for many respondents, quoting a figure seemed to be a simpler, cheaper, more transparent and more proportionate solution to a problem that consumers did not even know existed.

Appendix

Introduction and warm-up

- name, occupation, household composition, interests

Buying meat

- what types of meat do they buy; do they buy different types for different members of their household
- where do they buy it from; what form does it come in (packaged, loose, frozen etc); why and how often do they buy it like this
- how do they decide which cuts and varieties of meat to buy; do they always buy the same types
- how does minced meat fit into this pattern – do they buy it more or less frequently than other types
- what type of minced meat do they buy – beef, lamb, chicken, turkey, pork, and why do they buy some more often than others

Choosing minced meat

- how do they decide which packs (or types of loose) minced meat to buy; how much thought do they give this decision; does it depend on the packaging *or retailer's description*, or do they look at the mince itself
- do they look at the mince itself; if so, how much attention do they pay to it, how significantly does the appearance influence their choice, and which aspects of the appearance are most important (eg, leanness, colour, size of grind, any other factors)

RESPONDENTS SHOW THEIR PRETASK EXAMPLES OF PACKAGING

- what was it about the packaging/*description* that made them choose that type of mince – words, colours, facts, brands etc
- do they think they would be able to choose the right sort of mince from another shop, based on the packaging/*description* alone

- how confident are they that the packaging/*description* allows them to choose the mince that they think they want; have they ever thought about this before; do they have any concerns in this area

MODERATOR SHOWS ADDITIONAL PACKAGING

- does this packaging give any new information, or suggest anything that they cannot find on the packaging they have brought with them

FROM ALL THE PACKS (PRETASKED AND MODERATOR'S) RESPONDENTS PICK THOSE THAT THEY WOULD BE MOST LIKELY TO BUY

- what is it about the packs they have chosen; how confident are they that these packs will contain the mince they really want; was the choice easy and clear cut, or were there contradictions or confusion
- what role does the source of the mince have in their decision – Britain, Ireland, rest of EU, rest of world; do organic or red tractor standards come into it; why is this

Knowledge of composition of minced meat (if not covered above)

- what do they think minced meat contains; why do they think this; how much of the products they buy do they think is muscle tissue, and how much is other things
- how healthy and nutritious do they think mince is; how does it compare with other meat products
- what clues does the packaging/*description* give them about the composition of the mince they buy
- *those who also buy loose mince*: how easy or relevant is it to compare loose and packaged mince in this respect; do they think there are differences; why do they think this
- how does frozen mince compare with fresh; what is the difference

Reactions to terms

- what are the different ways in which mince can be described

WRITE EACH TERM ON THE FLIPCHART WHEN IT IS MENTIONED, AND NOTE COMMENTS ABOUT MEANING, CONNOTATIONS, SALIENCE ETC. WHEN RESPONDENTS CANNOT THINK OF ANY MORE DESCRIPTORS, PROMPT ON THOSE WHICH REMAIN (SEE SEPARATE LIST)

- what does each descriptor refer to and imply – taste, quality, fat content, shelf-life etc
- what does each descriptor tell them about fat content in particular – how much fat do they think is in ‘standard’, ‘lean’ and ‘extra lean’ mince. *Listen for language used; any references to percentages*
- do they think there is a connection between ‘lean’ and ‘low fat’ – if so, what
- how does this compare with descriptions for other products
- which descriptors seem more useful than others; why is this
- would it be more/less/equally useful to have fat content as a percentage; why is this; do they see this already
- *those who also buy loose mince:* how do loose and packaged mince compare in this respect

First outline label

ASK RESPONDENTS WHAT INFORMATION THEY WOULD WANT TO SEE ON A LABEL, AND WHERE; DRAW THIS ONTO THE OUTLINE ON THE FLIPCHART

- what is important about the information they have chosen; why is it best to express it in this way

Inform respondents about current requirements

SHOW RESPONDENTS BOARDS EXPLAINING WHAT DESCRIPTORS MEAN AND WHAT RETAILERS ARE REQUIRED TO DISPLAY ON PRODUCTS

- is any of this surprising or unexpected; how does it make them feel about the minced meat they buy
- how useful do they think the descriptors are – ‘lean’ and ‘extra lean’ in particular; how could these descriptors be made more useful (listen but do not prompt for mention of standardisation)

Second outline label

REPEAT THE EXERCISE, BASED ON WHAT RESPONDENTS NOW KNOW

- what is important about the information they have chosen; why is it best to express it in this way
- what information would they want to see on loose mince; does this differ from packaged mince – if so, how and why

Standardised terms

- what difference would it make if ‘lean’ and ‘extra lean’ were required to refer to standard levels of fat content; would this make them more/less/equally likely to have a place on the label

IF APPROPRIATE, AMEND THE SECOND OUTLINE LABEL TO INCLUDE STANDARDISED DESCRIPTORS

- do they think fat levels in ‘lean’ and ‘extra lean’ mince should be standardised; why do they think this
- if these terms were to be standardised, what level(s) of fat do they think ‘lean’ and ‘extra lean’ minced beef should contain
Note any other levels suggested for other types of mince (e.g. lamb)
- can they think of any drawbacks to standardising the terms; what if standardisation raised the cost of minced meat because products had to be made differently

- if the price of mince were to rise slightly, would they change their purchasing behaviour; if so, how and why

Compare outline labels and packaging

- what do they attribute differences between the three to; if there are similarities, why have these persisted despite the extra knowledge they now have
- which do they think is the best 'real world' label, combining clarity, accuracy, simplicity, immediacy etc (if none of the three, what would have to change)
- which elements of the label are most important and how prominently should they be displayed; how should fat content be displayed – x%, descriptor or both; where on the label should this information be displayed

Summing up

- what do they think of the current labels now that they know what they know – should these be changed, or are they all right as they are
- what effect has the discussion had on their views of minced meat in general, and of the type that they buy
- how important do they think the issue of standardisation and/or greater clarity of fat content is

CONTACT QUESTIONNAIRE

Name:

Address:

.....Tel:

Age: 18-24 () 25-34 () 35-49 () 50+ ()

Sex: Male () Female ()

Marital status: Single () Married/cohabiting ()

Children: No () Yes () *Write in ages.....*
Living at home: Yes () No ()

Living: Independently () With parents () CLOSE

Occupation:(HOH):

Ses: B () C1 () C2 () D () E ()

.....
 GOODMORNING/AFTERNOON, I WORK FOR AN INDEPENDENT MARKET RESEARCH COMPANY CALLED CRAGG ROSS DAWSON. WE ARE CONDUCTING SOME RESEARCH ABOUT LIFESTYLES AND I WOULD LIKE TO ASK YOU A FEW QUICK QUESTIONS.

QA Do you or do any of your close family or friends work in any of the following...

Advertising	() CLOSE
Marketing	() CLOSE
Market Research	() CLOSE
Journalism	() CLOSE
Public Relations	() CLOSE
Preparation, sale or regulation of food	() CLOSE

IF YES TO ANY OF THE ABOVE, THANK AND CLOSE. OTHERWISE TO QB.

QB And have you ever attended a market research group discussion or interview?

Yes	() TO QC
No	() TO Q1

QC When was the last time you attended a market research group or interview?

Within the last six months	() CLOSE
Longer than six months ago	() TO QD

QD What subject(s) have you ever discussed in a market research interview or discussion?
WRITE IN BELOW.

.....
 CLOSE IF RELATED TO THIS RESEARCH TOPIC. OTHERWISE TO Q1.

Q1 Thinking about what you eat, which of the following statements best describes you?

- | | | |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>I am a vegetarian</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | CLOSE. DO NOT RECRUIT |
| <i>I eat most things, including fish and meat</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | GO TO Q2 |
| <i>I eat most things, including meat, but not fish</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | GO TO Q2 |
| <i>I am a vegan</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | CLOSE. DO NOT RECRUIT |
| <i>I eat fish but not meat</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | CLOSE. DO NOT RECRUIT |

ALL RESPONDENTS MUST EAT MEAT.

Q2 Who in your household is responsible for buying the following products?

	Yourself	Yourself and someone else	Someone else alone
Cleaning products	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Toiletries	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Food (including meat)	<input type="checkbox"/> TO Q3	<input type="checkbox"/> TO Q3	<input type="checkbox"/> CLOSE
Gardening or DIY products	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

ALL RESPONDENTS MUST BE RESPONSIBLE THEMSELVES OR WITH SOMEONE ELSE FOR BUYING FOOD. GO TO Q3.

Q3 Which of the following meat products do you buy nowadays?

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|
| Steak | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Sausages | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Bacon | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ready made burgers | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Minced meat | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Joints | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Chops | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Whole chickens | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Chicken portions | <input type="checkbox"/> |

ALL RESPONDENTS MUST BUY MINCED MEAT. GO TO Q4 IF APPROPRIATE.

Q4 How often do you buy minced meat?

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Every week | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| At least once a fortnight | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| At least once a month | <input type="checkbox"/> |

RESPONDENTS SHOULD BUY MINCED MEAT BETWEEN ONCE A WEEK AND ONCE A MONTH - PLEASE TRY TO RECRUIT A SPREAD OF FREQUENCIES. TO Q5 IF APPROPRIATE.

Q5 And do you eat minced meat yourself, or do you buy it for someone else?

- | | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Eat it myself | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Buy it for someone else | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>please write in who</i> _____ |

GO TO Q6.

Q6 Which of the following types of minced meat do you buy nowadays?

- Beef mince ()
- Lamb mince ()
- Pork mince ()
- Chicken mince ()
- Turkey mince ()
- Other type of mince (e.g. venison) ()

PLEASE INCLUDE REPRESENTATION OF AS MANY AS POSSIBLE OF THE ABOVE IN EACH GROUP. TO Q7.

Q7 And do you buy...

- A. Packaged minced meat ()
- B. Loose minced meat from the butcher ()
- C. Loose minced meat from butcher's counter in supermarkets ()

RESPONDENTS IN **GROUPS 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 AND 8** AND **FRIENDSHIP PAIRED DEPTHS 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10 AND 12** SHOULD BUY PACKAGED MINCE ONLY (A ONLY).

RESPONDENTS IN **GROUPS 5 AND 7** AND **FRIENDSHIP PAIRED DEPTHS 3, 8 AND 11** SHOULD BUY BOTH PACKAGED AND LOOSE BUTCHER'S MINCE (A AND B). TO Q8 IF APPROPRIATE.

Q8 Are you dieting or being particularly careful about what you eat at the moment?

- Yes ()
- No ()

PLEASE INCLUDE A MAXIMUM OF 2 RESPONDENTS WHO ANSWER YES IN EACH GROUP. NO RESPONDENTS IN THE FRIENDSHIP PAIRED DEPTHS SHOULD SAY YES TO THE ABOVE.

Q9 And finally, do you have any special requirements that would need to be met in order for you to participate in this market research if it were to be held in a venue with stairs or without disabled access?

No ()

Yes (please write in) _____ (please contact the office, so that we can make sure the venue is suitable for the respondent.)

RECRUIT AS APPROPRIATE

RECRUITED FOR...

GROUP

FRIENDSHIP PAIR.....

TIME:.....

DATE:.....

Information shown to respondents

Stimulus material

Packaged minced meat must show...

- A name that describes the food and its condition (ie, frozen) accurately and is not misleading
- An indication of durability (ie, a 'use by' date)
- Any special storage conditions or conditions of use
- The name and address of the manufacturer and/or packer
- The place of origin of the food, if it would be misleading not to include this

Information shown to respondents

- Instructions for use, if it would be difficult to use the food without this

Information shown to respondents

Other points...

- Any food labelled 'low fat' must contain no more than 3g of fat per 100g
- Standard beef mince must contain no more than 25% fat
- There is no statutory definition of 'lean' or 'extra lean'; 'lean' has been found to contain between 5 and 20% fat
- Other information, such as nutrition guides ('traffic lights' 'colour wheels', Guideline Daily Amounts), is voluntary

Information shown to respondents

Loose minced meat...

- Is exempt from most of the general labelling requirements
- Must include an appropriate name (as packaged mince)

Information shown to respondents

Terms to discuss

Lean

Extra/super lean

Steak

Best

Typically 90% lean)

Typically less than x% fat

X% less fat

Economy

Healthy

Premium

Traditional

Prime

Value

Organic

Fresh

Assured Food Standard (red tractor)