



Mr Paul Frew MLA
Chairperson
Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development
Room 244, Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw, Stormont
Belfast, BT4 3XX

13 March 2013

Dear Mr Frew

Re Horse meat and pork DNA in beef products

Many thanks for your letter dated 28 February 2013 regarding the ongoing issues associated with beef products stocked and sold by some food retailers across the UK. We are pleased to contribute to the Committee's inquiry.

Marks & Spencer has not needed to withdraw any products as part of this incident. We have completed testing on all our processed beef products and the results told us what we already know; our labelling is 100% accurate. However, we are not complacent; we recognise fully the seriousness of the incident and the ongoing criminal investigation, and we are sure that the findings will provide the food industry with greater insight in how to mitigate against such problems in the future. We are working with the FSA and FSAI, as well as our trade associations, to learn from the ongoing incident and ensure our customers can continue to trust the integrity of the M&S brand.

M&S believes that good food starts with good ingredients, and that the best ingredients come from the best farmers - this principle underpins our entire food offer. Our unique business model, with own-brand food, drink and grocery products making up the vast majority of our offer means we have particularly close relationships with our suppliers. All farms and processors supplying meat to M&S are independently audited and, as a result, we can say with confidence that we know and trust our suppliers and can vouch for the quality and traceability of our food. These robust controls also help us maintain our high standards of animal husbandry and welfare. Our specifications are tight, but this reinforces the full traceability we have in place, and we work with our suppliers to help them understand our requirements and integrate them into their businesses. M&S's technical teams also visit suppliers on a frequent basis, which develops long term, constructive relationships. Some of our farmers and processors have worked with M&S for over 50 years. Relationships like this only last when the fundamental basics of trust and quality are in place.

M&S is committed to sourcing as much of its food as possible from the UK and the Republic of Ireland and all our fresh beef, chicken, pork and salmon is from the UK or the ROI. We believe that this approach is not only a key contributor to our excellent traceability systems, but it is also of value to our customers. Where possible we label not only the country of origin of our meat and dairy, but we also provide details of the farm and county where that animal was reared. An example from our exclusive 'Oakham Chicken' range is attached as an annex.

We believe that sharing intelligence, and collaborative working between all stakeholders, will be key to learning from the current incident. We are a member of the FSA's emerging risks and prevention board, and we believe that this group can play an active role in horizon-scanning to mitigate against future problems. This also needs to be replicated at a European level.

The testing that retailers, manufacturers, local authorities and the regulators have undertaken was the right approach to the current incident. The testing M&S undertook (at our cost) was taken forward by IdentiGEN, based in Dublin – the same laboratory as used by the FSAI. Whilst testing clearly has a role, it can only provide a snapshot in time. We believe that greater emphasis going forward should be placed on ensuring robust control systems are in operation throughout the supply chain, ensuring that the integrity of the raw material is maintained throughout.

In your letter you raise important issues relating to the interests of the full supply chain – from farm to fork, and how their interests can be protected. This is something that M&S is particularly passionate about; we believe that to serve the interests of our customers by meeting their demand for high quality food, we have to also understand the needs of our farmers and processors. To this end, as well as the robust systems described above, we also work closely with suppliers to help them prepare for the future, and remain competitive and sustainable. Our *'M&S Farming for the Future'* programme, as part of our eco-ethical initiative *'Plan A'* seeks to help suppliers and the wider farming community adapt to the challenges ahead. This programme aims to deliver improved technical efficiency, reduced environmental impact, high standards of animal health and welfare and commercial security for our customers, suppliers and producers. Many of our Northern Irish suppliers, including those supplying venison, beef, dairy & poultry to our stores are involved in *'Farming for the Future'* and we know this has been of significant benefit to those businesses.

We have full confidence in our systems, processes and relationships and we can vouch for our accurate labelling, robust traceability and high quality food. Going forward, we will continue to play an active role in the ongoing discussions on mitigating against an incident such as this, the learnings for the wider food chain, and how the industry can restore consumers' trust in the food they eat. We are proud our systems have been proven to be not just fit for purpose, but exemplary, and we will continue to work with our partners in our supply base and invest in the effectiveness of our supply chain to maintain these high standards of quality, traceability and trust.

Yours sincerely



Paul Willgoss
Head of Food Technology

Annex – Example of Marks & Spencer Country of Origin Labelling

