

(45/03) December 2003

SURVEY TO INVESTIGATE THE VARIETAL LABELLING OF POTATOES – Part 2

This survey was conducted as part of the Agency's food authenticity programme, which aims to gather information about the description of food in the UK.

Summary

- The Food Standards Agency carried out a survey to investigate whether potatoes on sale in the UK are accompanied with an indication of their variety as required by the Food Labelling Regulations 1996, and whether this indication is accurate.
- In order to obtain a representative picture of the seasonal potato market, sampling took place during February, April and June 2003. The results for samples collected in February and April were published in October in FSIS 44/03. This information sheet reports results for those samples collected during the final sampling period in June, along with a summary of the results for all the samples collected in the course of this survey.
- A total of 154 samples were collected during June from a range of retail outlets, and wholesale and catering suppliers. 34 (22%) of the potatoes collected in June were labelled incorrectly, of which 17 (11%) were not labelled with sufficient varietal information as required by law, while the remaining 17 (11%) were not found to be the variety they were labelled as.

- Some improvements in practices have therefore been seen since the February and April sampling periods (Part I of the survey) where 33% of potatoes sampled were incorrectly labelled, compared with 22% in June. Notably, in the June sampling period none of the 23 Jersey Royal samples were found to be mislabelled, an area where potential problems were thought to exist.
- Of the 448 samples collected over the course of the full survey, 129 (29%) were not appropriately labelled. 63 potatoes (14%) were not labelled with sufficient varietal information, while 66 (15%) were labelled with the wrong varietal name.
- The major problem encountered during the survey has been at wholesale markets where the variety Ambo was mislabelled and sold as King Edward. Of the 17 potato samples collected in June that were labelled 'King Edward', 6 (35%) were found to be a variety other than King Edward and of these 5 were Ambo. Of the 6 mislabelled King Edwards, 4 were collected from wholesalers or market stalls.
- During the full survey, 54 potatoes labelled as King Edward were collected. Of these potatoes, 22 (40%) samples were wrongly labelled and were found to be varieties other than King Edward, 17 (31%) were found to be the variety Ambo.
- The results show that potatoes are at times sold without an indication of their variety, and in some cases where a varietal declaration has been made, this has proved to be inaccurate. All results have been passed on to local authorities who are currently following up the results with sample owners.

Background

The Agency carried out a two-part survey to investigate whether potatoes on sale in the UK are accompanied with an indication of their variety as required by the Food Labelling Regulations 1996, and whether this indication was accurate. The first part of this survey covering samples collected during February and April was published recently (FSIS 44/03)¹, and highlighted poor compliance with the requirements of the Food Labelling Regulations in some sectors. A particular problem was noted in wholesale markets where a significant number of potatoes on sale labelled as King Edwards, were found to be other varieties, particularly the variety Ambo.

The results of the final sampling exercise carried out in June have served as a useful indicator to see if labelling problems had improved and also whether any of the summer potato crop were prone to misdescription problems.

Legislation

In the UK, giving misleading information about food to consumers and selling food that is not of the nature, substance or quality demanded by the consumer is an offence under the general provisions of the *Food Safety Act 1990*². More specific legislation covering the labelling of food is required by the *Food Labelling Regulations 1996 (as amended)*³ Regulation no. 6 (2) and Schedule 1, which state that: The name used for potatoes sold as such must include or be accompanied by an indication of their variety.

Methodology

(a) Sampling

Thirty Local Authorities and DEFRA's Horticultural Marketing Inspectorate participated in the collection of samples for this survey. A list of participating local authorities is included in Annex A. Sampling was carried out during the first weeks of February, April and June. Collecting officers were provided with a written sampling protocol, and sample plan detailing the type of samples to be collected, and the product information to be recorded. Samples were collected across the UK from a range of retail outlets including fruit and vegetable shops, supermarkets, independent retailers and wholesale markets (Figure 1). A total of 448 samples were collected across the three periods, comprising 163 samples from February, 131 from April and a further 154 from June.

(b) Analytical approach

The approach involved microsatellite based DNA profiling of potato varieties. Full details of the analytical methodology used can be found in FSIS 44/03.

Quality Assurance

The genotype of samples was compared both directly and indirectly with the genotype of the stated and control varieties and is described more fully in FSIS 44/03.

Results

The results of the analyses for Part II are shown in Table 1. Of the 154 samples collected in June, 34 (22%) did not have appropriate varietal labelling; 17 samples (11%) were not labelled with a variety, while a further 17 (11%) samples were labelled with an incorrect

variety (Table 3a). Again the major problem encountered during the survey appears to be at wholesale markets where the variety Ambo was found to be mislabelled and being sold as King Edward. Of the 17 potato samples collected in June that were labelled 'King Edward', 6 (35%) were found to be a variety other than King Edward and of these 5 (83%) were Ambo. Of the 6 mislabelled King Edwards 4 (67%) were collected from wholesalers or market stalls.

Results for the full survey are shown in Table 2. Of the 448 samples collected, 129 (29%) were not appropriately labelled (Table 3b). 63 potatoes (14%) were not labelled with sufficient varietal information, while 66 (15%) were labelled with the wrong varietal name. Over the entire survey, a total of 54 samples labelled as King Edwards were collected (Table 2), of which, 22 (41%) samples were wrongly labelled and were found to be varieties other than King Edward (Figure 2). 17 (77%) of the incorrectly labelled samples were of the variety Ambo, and a similar proportion (77%) of the incorrectly labelled samples were collected from wholesale markets.

Interpretation of the full survey results

Over the course of the whole survey (February, April and June sampling periods) it was found that 70% of potatoes sampled were labelled correctly with the appropriate variety as required by the Food Labelling Regulations 1996. However a significant number (129 samples; 29%) of potatoes sampled were either not adequately labelled, or the variety was mis-described.

As discussed in Part 1 of this survey (FSIS 44/03), amongst some smaller retailers there was poor awareness of the Food Labelling Regulations requirement that potatoes on sale must be accompanied by an indication of their variety (Figure 3). Feedback from retailers and enforcement authorities suggests that this survey has very usefully served to raise awareness of this requirement. Indeed, the level of mislabelling (22%) reported in the June sampling was lower than that observed during the earlier part (February and April) of the survey (33%), an early indication that the situation is improving.

The most significant problem noted during the survey was with potatoes sold through wholesale markets, particularly those potatoes labelled as the variety King Edward (Table 4). While 60% of the 54 potatoes labelled as King Edward collected during this survey were correctly identified, 31% were determined to be the variety Ambo. Of the 22 mislabelled King Edward samples collected, 17 were from market stalls or wholesale markets. As discussed in Part 1 (February and April sampling) of this survey (FSIS 44/03),

there is a substantial price difference between King Edward and Ambo potatoes on sale at wholesale and retail outlets. On average King Edward potatoes can sell for £30/40 per tonne more than varieties such as Ambo.

One other potato variety, which was thought to have the potential for mislabelling, was Jersey Royals. Jersey Royals are early potatoes characterised by their long oval shape, yellow skin and firm texture after cooking. They are protected by European Union PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) status, can only be grown in Jersey, and are recognised as being the variety 'International Kidney'. Notably, during the course of the June sampling period, twenty-three samples that were collected and labelled as 'Jersey Royals' or 'Jerseys' were correctly identified as the variety 'International Kidney'.

Follow up Action

Trading Standards departments and relevant Home Authorities have been informed of the results of the full survey to enable them to take any follow up action they consider appropriate. To date twenty-seven of the forty-three local authorities and home authorities informed of adverse results have taken follow-up action. Enforcement authorities have followed up cases where varietal information is lacking or is inaccurate, and have reminded retailers that it is their responsibility to follow this up with their suppliers to ensure they have the correct information to display on products on sale. Where subsequent re-visits have demonstrated that improvements have not been made, and retailers are not complying with the Regulations, enforcement officers have issued formal written and verbal cautions. General feedback, however, from officers suggests that many retailers are now complying with the labelling requirements relating to varietal labelling of potatoes. Where appropriate local authorities have also referred cases on to home authorities or where they had access to the information, to the local authority for the potato merchant or packer. A number of local authorities have since moved to incorporate potato sampling into their sampling programme, and will re-visit outlets with adverse results to ensure continued compliance with the regulations.

In the case of King Edward substitution, formal advice has also been issued to some wholesalers. Feedback from Industry and local authorities suggests that the situation has improved, as evidenced by the decreasing price differential between King Edward and Ambo potatoes at wholesale markets, and the appearance of Ambo-labelled bags in the market place.

All the companies with adverse results were given advanced notice of their results and had the opportunity to comment on their results. Comments received from the June collection are reproduced in Annex B, while those from Part I of the survey can be found in FSIS 44/03.

Conclusions

The survey has served to highlight the lack of awareness by many retailers of the need to include a varietal name when selling potatoes. Clearly in many cases where varietal labelling has been omitted there may be no real intent to defraud. Our survey has functioned as a useful reminder to those involved in the potato trade of the need to meet the requirements of the Food Labelling Regulations 1996. A decrease in mislabelling reported in the June sampling highlights a positive move towards improvements in practices by those selling potatoes. In the main the findings have highlighted a problem with substitution of King Edwards with the Ambo variety, although there seems to have been an improvement since the first two sampling rounds. Local authorities have been actively following up results to make sure the legislation is observed and consumers are getting what they expect.

References

1. Food Standards Agency (2003). Survey to investigate the varietal labelling of potatoes – Part 1. *Food Surveillance Information Sheet 44/03*. November 2003.
2. Food Safety Act 1990. [1990] Ch. 16
3. Food Labelling Regulations 1996. SI 1996 No 1499

Further Information

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Table 1. Sample details and results of analyses for samples collected in June.

See excel spreadsheet 1

Table 2. Sample details and results of analyses for all samples collected during the survey.

See excel spreadsheet 2

Table 3a. Summary of results – June 03 sampling

	samples	%
Total samples correctly labelled	118	77%
Total samples with incorrect labelling	34	22%
Not labelled with sufficient varietal information	(17)	(11%)
Potato variety mislabelled	(17)	(11%)
Varietal labelling could not be confirmed*	2	1%
Total samples collected	154	100%

* no appropriate reference material

Table 3b. Complete summary of results of survey (Part I and II)

	samples	%
Total samples correctly labelled	315	70%
Total samples with incorrect labelling	129	29%
Not labelled with sufficient varietal information	(63)	(14%)
Potato variety mislabelled	(66)	(15%)
Varietal labelling could not be confirmed*	4	1%
Total samples collected	448	100%

* no appropriate reference material

Table 4. Breakdown of mislabelled potatoes by variety

Variety labelled	Number of incorrectly labelled potatoes collected	Number of potatoes collected labelled with variety
King Edward	22	54
Maris Peer	6	23
Estima	5	41
Maris Piper	5	37
Wilja	5	18
Charlotte	4	15
Nicola	3	26
Desiree	2	4
Agata	1	2
Alcmaria	-	1
Amadine	1	6
Cara	-	11
Chariot	1	1
Claret	-	1
Cultra	-	1
Diamant	-	1
Dunbar Standard	1	2
Elvira	1	4
Epicure	1	1
Exquisa	-	7
Fianna	-	1
Francellina	-	1
Golden Wonder	-	3
Home Guard	-	1
Jaquelline	1	1
Jersey Royal	1	28
Juliette	-	4
Kerr's Pink	1	10
Lady Crystal	-	3
Marfona	1	11
Maris Bard	1	8
Minerva	1	2
Nadine	-	15
Navan	-	3
Osprey	-	1
Pentland Dell	-	4
Pentland Squire	-	2
Pink Fir Apple	-	1
Premiere	1	2
Rocket	-	3
Romano	1	10
Rooster	-	2
Roseval	-	1
Sante	-	6
Saxon	1	4
Ulster Sceptre	-	1
Vivaldi	-	1

Figure 1. Range of outlets visited during full survey

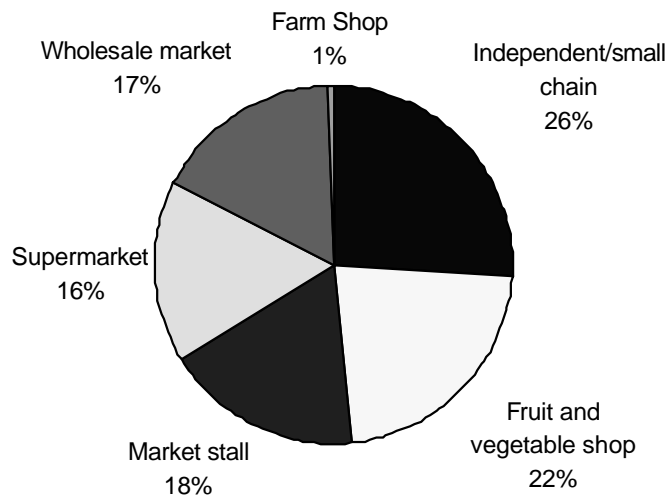


Figure 2. Determination of variety of potatoes labelled as King Edward collected throughout the full survey

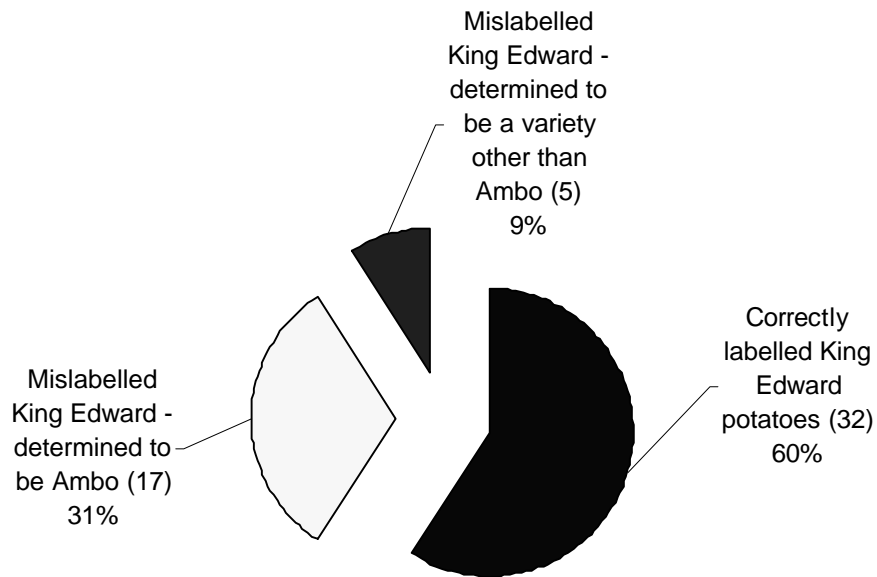
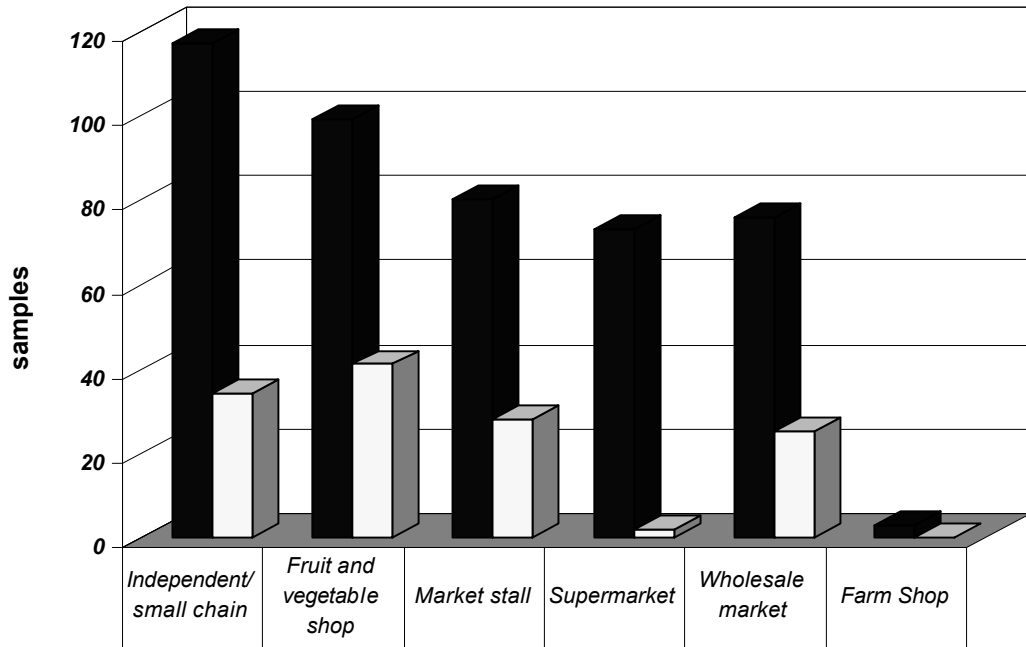


Figure 3. Adverse samples collected from outlets visited throughout full survey



■ Total samples collected	117	99	80	73	76	3
□ Adverse results reported	34	41	28	2	25	0

Annex A. List of Local Authorities Participating in the Survey

Birmingham City Council
Bath and North East Somerset
Cambridgeshire County Council
Glasgow City Council
Gloucestershire County Council
Horticultural Marketing Inspectorate
Herefordshire Council
London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
Lincolnshire County Council
Luton Borough Council
London Borough of Merton
Nottinghamshire County Council
Northern Ireland - Food Liaison Group
Norfolk County Council
North Yorkshire County Council
Oxfordshire County Council
Plymouth City Council
Neath-Port Talbot Borough County Council
Somerset County Council
Southampton City Council
Shropshire County Council
Stoke on Trent City Council
City and County of Swansea Council
London Borough of Wandsworth
Wokingham Council
West Lothian Council
Worcestershire County Council
Walsall Council
London Borough of Westminster
Wolverhampton City Council
West Yorkshire Trading Standards

Annex B. Written Comments Received From Companies

NB *The comments listed in this Annex were received by the Food Standards Agency in response to notification of their individual results from the companies concerned and reflect their views.*

From: Trevellance Farm, Breage, Helston, Cornwall, TR13 9QF

Sample PL 289 (Labelled Premiere, found to be Lady Crystal)

“The sample taken was labelled and left our premises as Premiere. After testing the sample was determined to be similar to Lady Crystal. I cannot understand how because the sample was grown from certified ‘Premiere’ seed and I have never grown Lady Crystal.”

From: Farm Direct, 1a Central Walk, Hucknall, Nottingham, NG15 8AE

Sample NG 247 (Labelled Minerva, found to be Premiere)

“The potato sample which was taken was labelled by our staff as Minerva, the bag that was given to the inspector (sampling officer) also clearly stated the variety as Minerva and these were bought by myself at market as Minerva.

I wish to strongly point out to you that I feel it would be unfair to place me at fault for this as it is clearly the farmer or packer of these potatoes that have wrongly packed and named them. Personally I have never heard of [the] Premiere variety of potato and I can say I do not believe I have ever purchased this variety of potato knowingly from the wholesalers I deal with.”