

Guidance on health and identification marks that apply from 1 January 2024

Guidance on the health and identification marks that must be applied to products of animal origin (POAO), such as meat, egg products, fish, cheese and milk.

The following guidance is for enforcement authorities and UK food businesses that produce POAO in the UK (Great Britain and Northern Ireland). It outlines the health and identification mark requirements that will allow POAO produced by UK businesses to be placed on Great Britain, Northern Ireland, EU and non-EU markets from 1 January 2024.

Important

The 36-month adjustment period in which it has been possible for approved food businesses to use existing stocks of labels, wrapping and packaging bearing the 'UK/EC' identification mark (ID Mark) for products being placed on the GB market, expired on 31 December 2023. After this date, food businesses in Great Britain cannot continue to apply labels containing the 'UK/EC' identification mark to products of animal origin.

The expiry of the adjustment period also applies to products of animal origin produced in Northern Ireland. After 31 December 2023, all identification marks applied by food businesses in Northern Ireland should read 'UK(NI) EC'.

What are health and identification marks?

The health mark is applied directly to POAO, typically meat carcasses, by the Competent Authority (CA) or under its supervision, and shows the product is fit for human consumption.

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) is the CA. Food Standards Scotland (FSS) has similar responsibility in Scotland.

The identification mark is applied to POAO by food businesses to show it has been produced in an establishment approved in accordance with food safety and hygiene regulations, and is typically applied to wrapping, packaging, or labelling which contains, or is attached to, the POAO.

Further down this page you can find:

- A description of the new health and identification marks, depending on whether the food business is based in Northern Ireland or Great Britain. The UK Government recommends use of the full country code 'United Kingdom' where it is practical
- Information setting out the requirements for different markets

Rewrapping or repacking of POAO

Any rewrapping or repacking of POAO must be carried out by an establishment, approved to carry out the required activity. If carried out by an establishment separate to the original manufacturer, the appropriate identification mark must be applied with the establishment's approval number. This is to maintain traceability and ensure food safety is not compromised.

Where product destined for the EU or NI market has left the manufacturing food business and is in a cold store or other storage facilities in Great Britain which is not approved for rewrapping or repackaging, it is important that the product is moved to an establishment which is approved to carry out any rewrapping or repacking activities specifically for that POAO, or returned to the manufacturing food business.

Where over-labelling is appropriate, the food business will need to be satisfied that any over-labelling is secure and does not obscure any other mandatory labelling information. Failure to meet these requirements may result in rejection by enforcement authorities in the country of destination.

Information on the use of existing stock with the 'UK/EC' identification mark

On the Great Britain market

From 1 January 2024, applying labels, wrapping and packaging materials that carry the 'UK/EC' identification mark will be unlawful.

Products that have the UK/EC identification mark applied before 1 January 2024 will be allowed to remain on the market.

On the Northern Ireland market

From 1 January 2024 all identification marks in Northern Ireland should be compliant with EU legislation i.e. 'UK (NI) EC'.

Moving products of animal origin from Great Britain to Northern Ireland

This section of the guidance is being reviewed and will be updated in due course.

Size and dimension of health and identification marks

Health mark

The health mark must be a legible and indelible oval mark at least 6.5cm wide by 4.5cm high. It must contain either the full country name 'UNITED KINGDOM' in capitals or the 'GB' or 'UK' abbreviation for POAO produced in England, Scotland and Wales, followed by the approval number of the establishment. The UK Government recommends use of the full country code 'UNITED KINGDOM' where it is practical.

For POAO produced in Northern Ireland the health mark must contain either the full country name 'UNITED KINGDOM (NORTHERN IRELAND)' in capitals or 'UK(NI)' abbreviation, followed by the approval number of the establishment. It must also contain the letters 'EC' below the approval number.

Letters must be at least 0.8cm high and figures at least 1 cm high. The ink used for the health mark must be authorised in accordance with food law which governs the use of colouring substances in food.

The dimensions and characters of the health mark may be reduced for health marking of lamb, kids, and piglets.

Identification mark

There is no minimum or maximum size for the identification mark. However, it must be legible and indelible oval mark, and the characters easily decipherable.






The identification mark must contain either the full country name 'United Kingdom' or the 'GB' or 'UK' abbreviation for POAO produced in England, Scotland and Wales. The UK Government recommends use of the full country code 'United Kingdom' where it is practical.

For POAO produced in Northern Ireland, the new identification mark must contain either the full country name 'United Kingdom (Northern Ireland)' or the 'UK(NI)' abbreviation followed by the approval number of the establishment. It must also contain the letters 'EC' after the approval number.

Use of health and identification marks on the Great Britain, Northern Ireland, EU and non-EU markets

Health marks


Health marks that must be applied from 1 January 2024 and destination market

Health mark	UK region where mark is applied	Great Britain market	Northern Ireland market	EU 27 market	Non-EU market
	Northern Ireland	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Northern Ireland	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Great Britain	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Great Britain	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Great Britain	Yes	No	No	Yes

Identification marks

Identification marks that must be applied from 1 January 2024 and destination market

Identification mark	UK region where mark is applied	Great Britain market	Northern Ireland	EU 27 market	Non-EU market
	Northern Ireland (FSA approvals)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Northern Ireland (FSA approvals)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Northern Ireland (District Council approvals)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Northern Ireland (District Council approvals)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Great Britain (FSA approvals)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Great Britain (FSA approvals)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Great Britain (FSA approvals)	Yes	No	No	Yes

Identification mark	UK region where mark is applied	Great Britain market	Northern Ireland	EU 27 market	Non-EU market
	Great Britain (local authority approvals)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Great Britain (local authority approvals)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Great Britain (local authority approvals)	Yes	No	No	Yes