

Detailed guide: Food standards: labelling, durability and composition

Updated: Updated the list of UK recognised natural mineral waters to include Anu Irish Natural Mineral Water and Prince's Gate Source W.

Overview

The information under the bottled water heading was updated in September 2018. The rest of the information on this page is awaiting review.

This guide covers more specific legal requirements for some particular food products. It also explains the requirements for 'best before' and 'use by'.

Food standards legislation sets out specific requirements for the labelling, composition and, in some cases, safety parameters for specific high value foodstuffs which are potentially at risk of being misleadingly substituted with lower quality alternatives:

- bottled water
- bread and flour
- cocoa and chocolate products
- fats and oils
- fish
- fruit juices and nectars
- honey
- jams and preserves
- meat and meat products
- milk and milk products
- soluble coffee
- sugar

Legislation sets requirements for food labels in the UK and aims to ensure food labels are an honest presentation of food. The requirements in place ensure consistency for the industry and for consumers.

Food labelling legislation is harmonised at an EU level. In England, responsibility for food labelling legislation and policy is split across Defra, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and the Department of Health (DH).

For Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland **all** domestic standards legislation is the responsibility of the FSA.

This guide includes Defra's table of mineral waters recognised in the UK and how to notify Defra or the FSA about newly recognised mineral waters or make amendments.

It also covers the Codex international standards that are not legally binding but are generally considered good practice. They ensure fairness in international trade and make sure consumer interests are protected.

Bottled water

Bottled waters are split into 3 categories: natural mineral water, spring water and bottled drinking water. Each has their own rules and requirements on exploitation, sale and how they are labelled.

Natural mineral waters must come from a recognised underground water source. The waters chemical and mineral composition must be stable over time and its original purity must be preserved. They can only be subject to very limited treatments. It is a requirement to label natural mineral water with a statement of analytical composition indicating the characteristic constituents of the water.

Any water labelled 'spring water' must come from an underground source and meet certain exploitation and labelling requirements. Spring water doesn't need to be from an officially recognised source, nor must its composition be stable over time. There is no requirement for spring waters to display a statement of analytical composition indicating the characteristic constituents of the water.

Bottled drinking can come from any water source and has fewer labelling restrictions than the other 2 categories.

- [The Natural Mineral Water, Spring Water and Bottled Drinking Water \(England\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2018](#)
- [Natural Mineral Water, Spring Water and Bottled Drinking Water \(England\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2011](#)
- [The Natural Mineral Water, Spring Water and Bottled Drinking Water \(England\) \(Amendment\) \(No.2\) Regulations 2010](#)
- [The Natural Mineral Water, Spring Water and Bottled Drinking Water \(England\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2010](#)
- [The Natural Mineral Water, Spring Water and Bottled Drinking Water \(England\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2009](#)
- [The Natural Mineral Water, Spring Water and Bottled Drinking Water \(England\) Regulations 2007](#)

Table showing natural mineral waters recognised in the UK

Last updated: 24 September 2018

England

Trade description	Name of source	Place of exploitation
No production at present	Amerston borehole	Amerston Hall Farm, Elwick, County Durham
Aqua Pura	GB1	Low Plains, Armathwaite, Cumbria

Trade description	Name of source	Place of exploitation
Asda Natural Mineral water	GB4	Low Plains, Armathwaite, Cumbria
No production at present	Source 1	Low Plains, Armathwaite, Cumbria
Ashbeck	Ashbeck	Low Plains, Armathwaite, Cumbria
Waitrose essentials	Lockhills	Low Plains, Armathwaite, Cumbria
No production at present	Willow Water	Willow House, Moor Lane, Flookburgh, Cumbria LA11 7LS
Buxton	St Ann's	The Natural Baths, Buxton, Derbyshire
No production at present	Rockhead Spring	Ashwood Dale, Buxton, Derbyshire
Blue Keld Spring	Blue Keld Spring	Throstle nest Farm, Cranswick, East Riding of Yorkshire
Peartree Well	Peartree Well	Paygate Farm, Palehouse Common, Framfield, East Sussex, TN22 5QY
Hildon	Hildon	Broughton, Hampshire
South Down Natural Mineral Water	Windsor House Spring	Windsor House, Southbourne, Emsworth, Hampshire
Celtic Vale Natural Mineral Water	Celtic Vale Spring	Springvale, Longtown, Herefordshire HR20PB
Blenheim Water	Blenheim Park	Blenheim Palace, Woodstock, Oxfordshire
No production at present	4CS	Shrewsbury Road, Church Stretton, Shropshire
Fairbourne Spring	6CS	Shrewsbury Road, Church Stretton, Shropshire
Silverbrook Falls	7CS	Shrewsbury Road, Church Stretton, Shropshire
Bath Natural Mineral Water	Stall Street	Stall Street, Bath, Bath & North East Somerset
Sutton Spring	Sutton Spring	Vine Farm Dairy, Sutton Road, Doncaster, DN6 9LB, South Yorkshire
Elmhurst Spring	Elmhurst Spring, Borehole 1	Elmhurst, Lichfield, Staffordshire
Maple Spring	Maple Spring Borehole 4	Burntwood Staffordshire
Shepley Spring	Shepley Spring No.3	Shepley Spring Ltd, The Knowle, Shepley, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire
Ice Valley	Shepley Spring No. 1	Shepley Spring Ltd., The Knowle, Shepley, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire
No production at present	Pennine Spring No 2	Willow Lane, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire
Haworth Spring	Haworth Spring	Bridgehouse Mills, Bridgehouse Lane, Haworth, West Yorkshire BD22 8PA
Royal Spring Natural Mineral Water	Royal Spring	Goulbourne Street, Keighley, West Yorkshire BD21 1PG

Northern Ireland

Trade description	Name of source	Place of exploitation
Anu Irish Natural Mineral Water	Anu Irish Water	Coolkeeran Road, Armoy, Co. Antrim, Northern Ireland
Classic	Classic	Edward Street, Lurgan, Craigavon, Co. Armagh
Rocwell Spring	Rocwell	Limehill Road, Pomeroy, Co. Tyrone

Scotland

Trade description	Name of source	Place of exploitation
Deeside Natural Mineral Water	Deeside, Lower Spring	Pannanich Wells, Ballater
No production at present	Garclaugh Spring	Meikle Garcleugh Farm, New Cumnock
No production at present	High Linn Spring	Meikle Garcleugh Farm, New Cumnock
No production at present	Maol Dubh	Laggan Estate, Isle of Islay
No production at present	Flodigarry Boreholes 1 & 2	Flodigarry Staffin Isle of Skye
Kingshill	Kingshill	Kingshill Plantation, Newmains
Purely Scottish	Purely Scottish Spring	Oldhamstocks, East Lothian
Royal Deeside Natural Mineral Water	Upper East Spring	Pannanich Wells Ballater
Speyside Glenlivet Natural Mineral Water	Slochd Spring	Braes of Glenlivet, Ballindalloch Banffshire
No production at present	St Ronan's	Innerleithen, Tweeddale

Wales

Trade description	Name of source	Place of exploitation
Calypso Natural Mineral Water	Calypso Springs	Calypso Soft Drinks, Wrexham
Belu	Source B	Llwyndewi Isaf, Trap, Llandeilo, Wales
Fairbourne Springs	FS2	Churchstoke Montgomery, Powys
Brecon Carreg	Brecon Carreg	Llwyndewi Isaf, Trap, Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire
Castle Spring	Castle	Lon Parcwr, Ruthin
Celtic Spring	CS1	Churchstoke, Powys
Celtic Spring	Silverbrook Falls	Churchstoke, Montgomery, Powys
Cerist	Cerist	Llawr Cae, Dinas Mawddwy, Machynlleth, Powys
Crystal Falls	Crystal Falls	Blaen Twyni Farm, Glyntawe, Penycae, Powys
CS17	CS17	Churchstoke, Powys
Decantae	Decantae	Trofarth Farm, Trofarth, Conwy

Trade description	Name of source	Place of exploitation
Gower Spring	Gower	Staffal Haegr Farm, Llanrhidian, Swansea
iii	Priory Falls Spring	Churchstoke, Powys
Montgomery Spring	Montgomery Spring	Churchstoke, Powys
Prince's Gate Source W	W	New House Farm, Narberth, Pembrokeshire, SA67 8JD
Prysg	Prysg spring	Prysg, Maesycrugiau, Pencader, Carmarthenshire
Radnor Hills	Radnor Hills	Heartsease, Knighton, Powys
Ty Nant	Ty Nant Water	Bethania Llanon
Waitrose Welsh Spring	Waitrose Welsh	Llwyndewi Isaf, Trap, Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire
Springbourne	Springbourne	Churchstoke Montgomery, Powys

Notify Defra of new mineral waters or amend details

The list is compiled with the help of local authorities and the Food Standards Agency (FSA). The aim of the list is to let local enforcement officers know which producers can advertise their product as a natural mineral water and to prevent producers from duplicating names. Defra updates the list whenever it is notified of newly recognised natural mineral waters, withdrawals of recognition or changes to the trade description or the name of the spring.

English local authorities who wish to notify Defra of any amendments to the list should email bottled.water@defra.gsi.gov.uk. Local authorities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should contact the relevant devolved office with any amendments to the list as they have responsibility for the equivalent regulations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

- [Food Standards Agency contact details \(Wales and Northern Ireland\)](#)
- [Food Standards Scotland \(FSS\) contact details](#)

Third country natural mineral waters recognised by the UK

Trade description	Name of source	Place of exploitation
Minaqua	Fruska Gora Spring	Novi Sad, Serbia Montenegro
Knjaz Miloš	Izvorište Mladost	Arandjelovac, Serbia
Aqua Viva	Aqua Viva Park	Arandjelovac, Serbia

The European Commission published a [list of all the natural mineral waters recognised by member states](#), including third country recognitions.

Bread and flour

The [Bread and Flour Regulations 1998](#) lay down specific labelling and compositional standards for bread and flour and defines terms such as wholemeal and self-raising.

They also continue a long standing national requirement that any UK-milled flour (except wholemeal) must be fortified with iron, niacin, and thiamine and calcium primarily for restoration of nutrients lost in the milling process and additionally ensuring the nutritional value of bread.

Cocoa and chocolate products

Certain cocoa and chocolate products must comply with the reserved descriptions set out in the [Cocoa and Chocolate Products Regulations 2003](#). The rules lay down the composition of chocolate and products including setting minimum ingredient requirements and specific labelling requirements. The amount of cocoa solids and milk solids that must be present are stipulated as well as allowing only certain additional ingredients to be added.

A cocoa solids declaration such as X% minimum is required for most chocolate products covered by the rules and also where appropriate a milk solids declaration is required. This enables consumers to make informed decisions about the type of chocolate they want to purchase. If you use one of the reserved descriptions covered in the regulation then your product must be made according to the defined compositional criteria.

Fats and oils

Legal standards on composition exist for fats and oil exist for labelling them as an ingredient 'vegetable oil/fat'. In addition there are very specific rules on the labelling and composition of spreadable fats, such as butter and margarine. These set out permitted fat ranges for each type of spreadable fat: dairy spreads made with milk fat; fat spreads made with vegetable fats; and blended spreads which contain a mix of both types of fat. The legal names for a particular spread must appear prominently on packaging.

- [The Spreadable Fats \(Marketing Standards\) and the Milk and Milk Products \(Protection of Designations\) \(England\) Regulations 2008](#)

Fish: species names, commercial designations and labelling

Rules are in place to make sure fish is labelled correctly and consistently at the point of sale, so purchasers know exactly what they are buying. The rules require information on:

- the commercial designation of the species (an agreed common name for the species of fish)
- the production method (whether caught at sea, caught in inland waters or farmed)
- the catch area (either the ocean area, or in the case of freshwater fish, the country in which it was caught or farmed)

There are requirements to provide:

- the scientific name
- a declaration on whether the fish was previously frozen

The [Fish Labelling Regulations 2013](#) adds new commercial designations (the names of fish) for species of fish that have recently come onto the market.

- [Guidance for The Fish Labelling Regulations 2013](#)
- [UK Commercial Designation List](#)

Fruit juices and nectars

The [Fruit Juice and Fruit Nectars \(England\) Regulations 2013](#) bring together all rules on fruit juices and fruit nectars by setting minimum compositional standards for fruit juices and nectars.

These rules define terms such as fruit juice, fruit juice from concentrate, concentrated fruit juice, water extracted fruit juice and fruit nectar. They also lay down permitted authorised ingredients and treatments in the manufacture of fruit juices. The rules include an updated approach to enforcement using an Improvement Notice approach.

Honey

Honey composition and labelling is controlled by [The Honey \(England\) Regulations 2015](#). This legislation lays down reserved descriptions that must be used which relate to the source from which the honey is obtained (for example blossom, honeydew), or the processes by which it is extracted (for example drained, extracted) and also the way it is presented (for example comb, chunk honey).

The regulations lay down detailed specification honey must comply to in terms of its composition and also set out some general quality criteria for honey. In addition the regulations contain some specific labelling requirements including a requirement for [country of origin labelling](#) on honey where appropriate. If you use one of the reserved descriptions then your product must be made according to the defined compositional criteria.

Jams and marmalade

Jam and similar products must comply with the reserved descriptions as set out in the [Jam and Similar Products \(England\) Regulations 2003](#). These include compositional requirements such as minimum fruit and sugar requirements and specific labelling requirements such as labelling the amount of fruit and sugar in a jam or marmalade.

Products covered include jam, extra jam, jellies and marmalades. In addition only certain ingredients are allowed to be added. The regulations also provide national rules for mincemeat and fruit curds. If you use one of the reserved descriptions then your product must be made according to the defined compositional criteria.

Milk products

For milk products there are legal standards that set out compositional and labelling requirements and also protect the use of dairy terms when marketing foods. Specific legal standards exist on the composition and labelling of ice cream, cream, casein and caseinates, certain UK cheeses and condensed/dried milk. The use of terms such as milk, cheese, cream, yogurt is also protected so they may only be used for the associated dairy products and not misused to describe non-dairy produce.

- [The Condensed and Dried Milk \(England\)\(Amendment\) Regulations 2008](#)
- [The Spreadable Fats \(Marketing Standards\) and the Milk and Milk Products \(Protection of Designations\)\(England\) Regulations 2008](#)
- [The Condensed and Dried Milk \(England\) Regulations 2003](#)
- [The Food Labelling Regulations 1996](#)
- [The Casein and Caseinates \(Amendment\) Regulations 1989](#)
- [The Casein and Caseinates Regulations 1985 \(No. 2026\)](#)

Meat products

For a range of meat products there is legislation setting out specific compositional and labelling requirements. The rules set out minimum meat content requirements for certain meat products sold using reserved descriptions such as sausages, burgers, corned beef, meat pies, pasties. In addition, there are very specific labelling rules for certain meat products that look like a cut, joint, slice, portion or carcass of meat. Where any added water over certain limits as well as any added ingredients of different animal species to the rest of the meat must be mentioned in the name of the food.

- [The Meat Products \(England\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2008](#)
- [The Food Labelling \(Amendment\) \(England\) Regulations 2003](#)
- [The Meat Products \(England\) Regulations 2003](#)

Soluble coffee

Instant coffee is controlled by rules covered in The Coffee Extracts and Chicory Extracts (England) Regulations 2000. These define soluble coffee extracts and chicory extracts in terms of their coffee and chicory content and also provide for rules on their labelling.

- [Cocoa and Chocolate Products Regulations 2003](#)
- [The Coffee Extracts and Chicory Extracts \(England\) Regulations 2000](#)

Sugars

Regulations exist which lay down reserved descriptions for certain types of sugar products sold as such to the final consumer. These rules set out specifications for the sugar products covered and in some cases provide for additional labelling requirements. Products covered by the rules include

white sugars, dextrose, glucose syrups and fructose.

- [Specified Sugar Products Regulations 2003](#)

‘Best before’ and ‘use by’

The ‘best before’ date is appropriate for the vast majority of foods and indicates the period for which a food can reasonably be expected to retain its optimal condition (for example, it will not be stale) and relates to the quality of the food.

The ‘use by’ date is the required form of date mark for those foods which are highly perishable from a microbiological point of view and which are likely after a relatively short period to present a risk of food poisoning, and relates to the safety of the food.

[Guidance on the application of date labels to food](#) gives the latest advice and guidance.

It includes a short guide especially prepared to assist small and medium sized businesses. It aids compliance with the law and assists food businesses which do not have in-house knowledge or expertise to decide which date marks should apply to which foods and if they need to seek further advice for example from their Local Authority or a specialist food consultant. The guidance does not change the use of ‘sell by’ or ‘display until’ dates although it does reiterate existing best practice advice that these dates are confusing to consumers.

The Codex standards (Codex Alimentarius)

The Codex Alimentarius is a series of food standards and related texts. They aim to provide a high level of consumer protection and fair practice in the international trade of food and agricultural products.

Food standards are becoming more important as international trade in food opens up and consumers are more concerned about safety and quality. Standards must provide a high level of consumer protection and not unnecessarily restrict trade. Codex is recognised in the relevant World Trade Organisation (WTO) agreements as the international body able to provide these guarantees. In the event of a trade dispute Codex standards would become accepted reference documents for its settlement.

The organisation charged with the development of the Codex standards and related texts is the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC). This is an intergovernmental body jointly sponsored by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO).

The detailed work of CAC on drafting standards, codes of practice and other guidance is handled by about 30 Committees which fall into three general categories: commodity committees (for example milk and milk products), horizontal committees dealing with issues across a range of commodities (for example labelling, food additives) and regional committees (eg Europe).

Defra acts as the national contact point for the UK in Codex and is responsible for:

- distributing all Codex papers relating to specific committee/s to interested parties and organising consultations on these issues to feed into the UK position on Codex
- responding to Codex on standards and other texts in the step procedure
- representing the UK at relevant Codex committee meetings

Further details on Codex working procedures, committees and forthcoming meetings can be found on the [Codex website](#).

UK Codex contact point – codex@defra.gsi.gov.uk

Food Information Regulation (FIR)

[Food Information Regulation \(FIR\) \(1169/2011\)](#) includes mandatory nutrition labelling on pre-packaged food, country of origin, date marking (including date of first freezing), clarity of food information, alcohol labelling, labelling of non pre-packed foods and allergen labelling.

Find out the [information you must give to customers on food products](#).