

TOM PURSGLOVE MP
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

12th May 2018

John Constable
RE: FOOD LABELLING MATTERS.

Thank you for your recent correspondence in respect of labelling food with details of the farming system used to produce it (EDM 1095).

As a Parliamentary Private Secretary, I am not able to sign Early Day Motions, as doing so would likely be in breach of the Ministerial Code's rules on collective responsibility. However, in any event, I have general concerns about the effectiveness and expense of the EDM system, and I have attached a copy of an excellent article written by my colleague, Chris Heaton-Harris MP, which I feel succinctly sets out those concerns. I hope that this will be of interest to you, and essentially, I think it is much more effective to raise concerns directly with Ministers, both verbally, and in writing, rather than signing EDMs.

However, I fully appreciate the importance of this issue, given the £200 billion UK consumers spend each year on food, drink and catering services. Consumer confidence is more important in this industry than in any other, and is key to the integrity of the supply chain.

The current regulations on food labelling require that any information, including on packaging, advertising or other media, must not mislead consumers as to the characteristics of the food, including its method of manufacture or production. Specifically there needs to be provided, on prepacked food, the name of the food, its ingredients, any ingredients potentially causing allergy or intolerance, the quantity of specific ingredients where this is important to consumers, the net quantity of the product, the use-by or best before date, any special storage conditions, the name and address of the producer, the country of origin for a number of types of food, including fresh and frozen meat, instructions for use where required, alcoholic strength and a nutrition declaration.

There may be a case for looking at expanding the range of production method descriptions covered by such regulations in the future, but this additional information must improve consumer understanding.

Leaving the EU creates opportunities to introduce clearer labelling. I do think it is important for there to be continuity at first, which is why the EU Withdrawal Bill will put all our existing regulations on food labelling and all other aspects on a legal footing in UK law. However, there will then be opportunities to revisit them over



time. I welcome the Environment Secretary's commitment to developing a new 'gold standard' food labelling system after we leave.

In the meantime, there are some very good voluntary schemes that relate to methods of production, such as the RSPCA Assured scheme recognising high standards of animal welfare, British Lion eggs, and the Red Tractor scheme. I know that my ministerial colleagues are keen to encourage those further.

Once again, thank you for having taken the time to contact me and if I can ever be of any further assistance to you then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

with best wishes,

Tom

**TOM PURSGLOVE MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**

Chris Heaton-Harris: Why Early Day Motions are politically impotent

Writing exclusively for PoliticsHome, Conservative MP Chris Heaton-Harris describes Early Day Motions as 'politically impotent', and warns he is 'not going to waste time and money on sponsoring or signing EDMs'.

Since being elected last year, a number of my constituents have asked me to sign Early Day Motions (EDMs). I'm afraid I haven't signed any yet and don't plan on changing that in the future as I think they are pretty much politically impotent and too costly in their current form.

I'm not alone either, quite a number of the 2010 intake all independently decided to do the same thing and I would imagine that if the rules around EDMs don't change at the next election, even more MPs will join the "just say no" bandwagon.

Supposedly EDMs cost around £500 a go and we have already had 2423 tabled in this Parliament. Looking through the titles of the EDMs you'll see many a worthy political cause being lauded, people recently passed away remembered and an abundant amount of motherhood and apple pie. Yet even the most benign EDM rarely gets more than 50 signatories; indeed, many barely scrape into double figures.

I really do think that we need to change how EDMs can be sponsored before too many MPs decide to call it a day on them. Surely a sensible solution would be to say that an individual Member should not be allowed to table an EDM? We should at least try to separate the more popular ones by asking that there be at least ten MPs proposing for it to be accepted as being tabled and thus, opened up for others to sign.

Considering there are MPs out there who tend to sign a large number of EDMs (Sir Peter Bottomley and Alan Meale, please take a bow) surely setting an entry point of ten signatures is not an oppressive barrier if you really do care about a subject?

One of the main reasons (if not the main reason) why so few people sign EDMs is that in the last few years they have turned into the tool of the crap lobbyist. Sitting in a meeting room trying to work out how to justify their Client's retainer, many believe that if they can get a few signatures on an EDM he has done his or her job. Even better if you can persuade your client to run a campaign to get more MPs to sign up; more money for you to set up pointless meetings to talk about a pointless campaign to try and get more than a dozen signatures for a pointless motion that will be ignored by Government and just about everyone else too.

If you are a business, charity or NGO and your Public Affairs outfit recommends an EDM - fire them immediately! Few people take any notice of them and so they are really no more than political graffiti.

So, to my Constituents I say if you are writing to me, please don't ask me to sign an EDM. I'll happily raise subjects with Ministers, ask questions in the House or try to have a Westminster Hall debate - in other words, do things that actually count - but I'm not going to waste time and money on sponsoring or signing EDMs.