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Tesco faces legal threat over marketing its food with 'fake farm' names

Major UK supermarkets including Tesco, Aldi, Asda and Lidl are being urged to stop using controversial “fake farm” branding on own-brand meat products, with a food charity claiming they are misleading shoppers.

The Feedback charity is backing¹ the owner of a genuine farm called Woodside Farm – a name Tesco has also used on its value pork range since 2016 – and is threatening legal proceedings if the retail giant does not drop the name Woodside Farm.

“Let’s be clear – supermarkets are selling meat under fake farm names, deliberately encouraging consumers to believe that the meat is sourced from small-scale producers,” said Feedback’s campaign director, Jessica Sinclair Taylor.

In March 2016 Tesco, the UK’s largest retailer, sparked² controversy after launching a budget range of seven own-label “farm” brands – including Woodside Farms and Boswell Farms for fruit and veg as well as meat – based on British-sounding but fictitious names. Some foods were imported from overseas and given British names to make them sound local.

Richard Baugh of Woodside Farm in Nottinghamshire, raises free-range³ pigs for his own pork products sold under his farm name through his farm shop and website. But since Tesco replaced its Tesco Value brand with “Woodside Farms”, he says he has faced confusion from customers.

“We’ve been raising pigs at Woodside Farm for 20 years – this is our livelihood,” Baugh said. “When it first came out customers were asking all the time whether we were supplying Tesco. We don’t, our pork is free-range and we think it’s higher welfare and quality than the pork they’re selling, and we’re proud of that.”

Feedback wrote to Tesco on behalf of Baugh, complaining that its labeling risks confusion with his farm name and reputation, while misleading consumers about the origins of their meat. Tesco said it was aware of the threat of legal action and declined to comment.

(318 mots)

Rebecca Smithers

¹ To back : soutenir

² To spark: déclencher

³ Élevé en plein air