

Standards, standards

In an attempt to address both sustainability and animal welfare issues, the Soil Association is urgently to investigate the "organicness" of air freight and modern livestock breeds such as Holstein cattle and hybrid broiler chickens. Each issue is to be resolved "within twelve months" said SA officials speaking at the organisation's annual conference in Cardiff (January 26th).

SA director Patrick Holden said - "There is a strong demand, from the public and many of our licensees, to reduce food miles. Although there is very little airfreighting of organic produce, we believe there is an urgent and pressing need to make every contribution to curbing climate change that we can. This is a complex issue, especially for producers in developing countries where it involves equity and ethical trading issues, and that's why we shall actively engage a wide-range of stakeholders to ensure we get it right."

Options available to the SA range from labelling produce and carbon offsetting to an outright ban on airfreighting and are to be brought forward regardless of any parallel actions taken by the British Government or the European Union.

The livestock breeds issue was raised during a conference workshop session on Livestock for the 21st century. The incompatibility of a dairy breed such as the skeletal Holstein for organic farming and the use of intensive hybrid broilers (bred to finish in six weeks) on organic poultry units was questioned. The SA standards board is busy addressing this issue, but the difficulties of bringing forward rules and regulations (when is a Holstein cow not a Holstein cow in cross breeding with other dairy breeds...) were highlighted.

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