

Climbdown by Waitrose!

Dear Friends,

Please see my letter to Waitrose in the attachment. Click here to download it (as PDF file.).

Today I got a response and it indicates a clear change of policy on labelling. The Duty Manager, Customer Service (Mrs T. Mole) assures me " Until recently we have sold small amounts of herbs sourced from the West Bank, however the grower has struggled to consistently produce the required quality so we have now amicably stopped supply and are sourcing from elsewhere." The explanation about the quality may be true, but I doubt it. I think this is an excuse because the company statement issued to all outlets, which was quoted to me in Waitrose, Eaton on 15/1/10 ,was full of praise for the supplier.

In the next paragraph she says: "We always keen (sic) to ensure customers can make an informed choice and therefore, were we to continue to sell such products we would follow DEFRA guidelines." I read this to mean that they are not going to sell any more "West Bank" produce unless it is labelled either "Produce of Israeli Settlements" or "Palestinian Produce". I hope that they have got the message at last. But we need to check up on this, so if you can check Waitrose outlets to see if they are keeping their word, please do.

Free Palestine. Sainsbury's next, and don't let the Co-op off the hook either.

Keith Rowley (NPSC Chair)

20 January 2010

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**Mrs T. Moule,
Duty Manager Customer Services,
Waitrose Ltd,
Bracknell
Berkshire RG12 8YA**

Dear Mrs Moule,

Thank you for your letter of 18/1/10 (1-23252125-7) responding to the questions I raised with David Hellier of Waitrose, Eaton, Norwich on 15 January about the use of the label 'West Bank' on a packet of organic mint. However, your response indicates that my comments were not communicated to you accurately.

I essentially wanted to know why Waitrose had not responded more positively to the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' recent document **Technical Advice: labeling of produce grown in the Occupied Palestinian Territories**. I did *not* request that Waitrose stop the sale of 'West Bank' or Israeli goods (although I do believe that that would be a move in keeping with the company's reputation for ethical trading),

but I did ask why Waitrose had not taken into account the following two paragraphs in the DEFRA document:

1. “The Government has received requests from retailers, consumer groups and NGOs for greater clarity about which origin should be stated on food and drink goods that have been produced and packed in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). Their enquiries have focused particularly on the distinction between products from Palestinian producers and products from Israeli settlements in the OPT.” (Paragraph 1, page 1 under *Introduction.*)

and

2. “For produce from the West Bank, labeling currently states country of origin as ‘**Produce of the West Bank**’. Traders and retailers may wish to indicate whether the product originated from an Israeli settlement or from Palestinian producers. This could take the form, for example, of ‘**Produce of the West Bank (Israeli settlement produce)**’ or ‘**Produce of the West Bank (Palestinian produce)**’, as appropriate.” (Paragraph 4, page 2 under *Advice.*)

As a customer of this store (I did buy goods after the conversation and I even returned the product in question to its stand after my enquiry), I was trying to establish why the company had chosen not to give me the information the DEFRA document had suggested. I would have bought the product if I had been sure that it was Palestinian produce. Instead I had to ask to speak to a manager. I read the two paragraphs to Mr Hellier who did not seem to be aware of the existence of the DEFRA document. He read to me a company statement about the West Bank producers that you source saying that the farm was “managed by Israelis” with Palestinian workers. I asked him whether that was another way of referring to an Israeli farm in the OPT and he said that that was a ‘political’ conclusion. I argued that it was simply a request for a clear statement of facts as the existence of Israeli farms in the OPT and our government’s judgment that Israeli settlements in the OPT are illegal under International Law were undeniable facts.

Where Waitrose chooses to source its produce from is for its senior management primarily a commercial consideration. I understand that. My concern as a customer is to avoid assisting in any way the commercial success of an Israeli settler farm profiting from the exploitation of illegally occupied land. I had hoped that Waitrose valued my custom enough to allow me to be sure that I did not become complicit in that illegality. Obviously, from your response I must assume that you are not going to allow me access to the information to allow me to exercise my rights as a customer and a respecter of International Law. Such a policy is disrespectful to customers.

In finishing I would like to make two more points. Firstly, that the overwhelming bulk of Palestinian civic organizations support the boycott of Israeli OPT ‘West Bank’ produce. Indeed, the General Secretary of the Palestinian General Federation of Trades Unions has recently re-affirmed his organization’s support. Secondly, it is highly unlikely that the Apartheid government of South Africa would have agreed to the talks that led to its

demise if the boycott campaign had not been established and received so much public support in Europe.

I look forward to a reply. If you have nothing to add to the statements in your letter, please pass this upwards in the management chain.

Yours sincerely

PS The lack of a proper considered response in your letter is underlined by the repetition of one paragraph in its entirety!