

Senate Inquiry

Definitions of meat and other animal products

By Gillian Kidd, cattle producer Qld

I would like to address two issues on the retail marketing and sale of meat to consumers, which will assist health aware customers.

1) Labelling of grass fed or pasture raised meat.

2) Labelling of food additives including preservatives and flavour enhancers.

1) I believe that grass fed or pasture raised meat is more nutritious containing more mega -3 fatty acids and vitamins and minerals because animals are raised to eat naturally. Most Australian beef is bred and grown out on pastures and then finished for the market on grain diets with additives including antibiotics and growth promotants. Situations where there is not enough pasture may require some grain assistance to finish them for market. I will not go into the many other factors that affect these cattle, as they are well documented.

My issue is about empowering customer with knowledge and choice.

I am asking that customers can see at a glance to the label whether the meat is grass fed, pasture raised, free roaming and organic. Butchers should have displayed meat labelled according to the production system.

Pork has better labelling allowing customers to know if it is pasture raised, free roaming. The information on **chickens** is a bit misleading with free roaming not actually meaning continual roaming out in a paddock, but having some access and is more about the density of stocking rates in a shed. Probably **kangaroo** meat is the only true pasture raised and free roaming, although they have been known to consume large quantities of a growing wheat crop!

Not all consumers have an issue with this, but **I believe it is important that consumers know exactly what they are buying and can make the best choice for them and their family.**

2) Some meat processing plants will include additives in the butchering and processing to “maintain or improve its safety, freshness, taste, texture or appearance”- from World Health Organisation. This is for both fresh and processed meats. There are many types of additives, but possibly the worst are Sodium nitrites, sulphites, Monosodium glutamate (MSG). If they are included in processed meats, they must be listed. There are some additives that are still not included – flavour enhancers are not listed as they are not considered as preservatives. MSG is not always included and it comes in many forms that make it very difficult to identify for those who are allergic or reactive to it.

However some butchers will add preservatives to prevent spoilage and give a longer shelf life. Preservatives might be harmful to health and there are many people who believe this. Just because it has not been proven, does not mean they *are* good for us. I believe we should have the right to choose for ourselves. **We can only choose if given the correct information on the label.**

MSG occurs in over 40 different forms. It is simply the addition of one (mono) sodium molecule to the amino acid glutamic acid, which is found naturally in many foods. Although most people can break it down in the liver, some can be harder to flush out of the body. It will cause nerves to fire excessively and cause a form of neurotoxicity giving headaches, numbness and sleeplessness. Known in the past as “Chinese Restaurant Syndrome”. Used as a flavour enhancer, it stimulates the taste buds and makes food taste fantastic. There should be no need to add this to fresh meat – it should have enough of its own flavour.

Pork in particular, is “infused” with water and salts and sometimes MSG. Pork no longer has the flavour of the past as it has been bred to grow fat quickly.

Chicken has also lost flavour with the breeding of meat chickens. Younger people are probably not aware of just how a chicken used to taste! Chickens are also plumped with water and MSG and also bleached to make them white.

Now not all processors adopt these practices. How can the customer tell the difference? It is not on the labels. Even organic meat may have added MSG.

I would really like to know as I am one who suffers from the symptoms and I can only establish this retrospectively when I feel the symptoms affecting me.

It takes a long time to shop, reading labels, but if I could know for sure there was no added MSG or could choose to avoid the meat with preservatives, I would be a lot happier shopper and feel I was protecting my health. A butcher once told me to look for mince that was brown on the outside, as it had not colouring added to it. Most supermarket meat stays an unnatural bright red.

More children are becoming reactive to these additives. Many have behavioural problems triggered by foods and parents want to remove as many chemicals as possible from their diets. **Parents who are aware of this really struggle to understand and know what to look for to manage their children.** I believe we should make their job easier by **being very specific on the ingredients on labels and fresh meat sold in all retail formats, including online sales.**

This Senate Inquiry is an excellent opportunity to achieve a better standard of knowledge, and I thank you for this.

I am happy to continue this discussion or reply to any comments.