

Free Range Pork Farmers Association Inc.
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15th April, 2008

The Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Subject: Inquiry into Meat Marketing

To whom it may concern,

This is a submission from Lee McCosker on behalf of the **Free Range Pork Farmers Association** to the Senate Committee's inquiry into meat marketing.

Background

The Free Range Pork Farmers Association (FRPFA) represents smaller producers farming free range pigs under the FRPFA Standard. This Standard demands that pigs are genuine free range and all pigs must be grown out on pasture without the systematic use of antibiotics and growth promoters with strict adherence to animal welfare requirements. The FRPFA has shown its commitment to this standard by obtaining a Certification Trademark for our Quality Assurance program.

<http://www.freerangeporkfarmers.com.au/FreeRangePorkFarmersAssociationStandards.pdf>

As the demand for free range pork grows, so too does the temptation for the unprincipled operators to market their product with misleading labelling in an attempt to exploit this demand. At present, the lack of an enforceable standard is allowing this very thing to go unchecked.

Issues

The closest we have to a guideline for free range pork production is this description from the peak industry body, Australian Pork Limited:



**Good healthy food
will only be grown if we demand it.**

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Free Range Pork – What is it?

A descriptor of free range pork is pork derived from animals raised in Australia with adherence to humane animal practices as prescribed by the Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals (Pigs). Throughout their lives the pigs are provided continuous free access to the outdoors and shelter from the elements furnished with bedding. This term may only be used when both the growing pigs and the sows from which they have been bred have been kept under these conditions.

<http://www.australianpork.com.au/index.cfm?menuid=3C083573-9027-E533-1F7B6354FC1EB3E5>

While Australian Pork Limited actively promote tighter Country of Origin labelling, they have shown no support for overall truth in labelling of pork products and have refused to put this description into practice.

Country of origin labelling is certainly important and very necessary, but so too are the production systems used to produce meat. Consumers are demanding to know the true origin of their food, not just the country in which it was produced, but also how the animal was treated.

Ethical eating is a growing trend and conscientious consumers seeking meat that has been grown under free range conditions and without certain drugs, can only trust that the product label is not misleading and that it truly does reflect the production method used to produce that meat. This increasingly important group of consumers are influencing what we eat and how it is produced and delivered to market.

We are now witnessing many cases when labelling of free range pork products is not only misleading, it is just deceitful and taking advantage of consumers that seek a certain product. A prime example of this occurred during Christmas trading of 2007 when the meat and department of a David Jones Food Hall claimed that the all their pork on offer was Australian free range when in fact the pork was produced from pigs raised under an intensive indoor system. **David Jones** were confronted with this misrepresentation and in their response they claimed they had been misled by their supplier and acknowledged that they had inappropriately advertised, and sold, the pork products.

Terms used to knowingly take advantage of areas of production that consumers have little technical knowledge of, need also to be policed. The term “**hormone growth promotant free**” is one that is commonly used now and would lead the consumer to



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believe that the meat they are about to purchase does not contain growth promotants. This label description is saying that the hormonal growth stimulants were not used, but **does not** state that non hormonal growth promoters were not used. The industry has moved away from the use of hormones but growth promoters of a non hormonal variety are common practice. The most popular drug for this purpose is ractopamine and is banned in many countries.

Terms, like the one mentioned above, only serve to deceive Australian consumers and lead them to believe that their meat is free of such medication.

Another area of concern is meat that has been injected or “infused” with other substances to increase flavour and moisture but is not labelled as such. In the case of **moisture infused pork**, it is often sold in butcher shops without labelling to reflect that this product is only 90% pork and that it also contains other elements that the customer may prefer not to consume. Without correct labelling the consumer is unable to make an informed choice.

Truth in labelling of meat products is the right of the Australian consumer and stricter controls and standards are needed to ensure that these consumers can make informed purchases and have faith in the product that they do buy.

Demand for free range pork is solid not only in the domestic market, but with strong enquiry for export. Without a standard in place for the production of free range meat it will make the shift into this market not only extremely difficult, but open to the same misrepresentations that we are now experiencing here. Ethical eating is a trend that is even more advanced in some of our key **export markets**.

Conclusion

We need national meat labelling standards in place that encompass the true origin of the product that would also include the production system employed to grow that meat and what animal welfare standards were adhered to.

We need sound labelling standards backed by a robust industry code.

Without standards in place we cannot protect our industry or the rights of Australian consumers.

Lee McCosker
President - FRFPA



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