

**Free Range Pork Farmers Association Inc.**  
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[www.freerangepork.com.au](http://www.freerangepork.com.au)

Phone: 02 67232889



4<sup>th</sup> March, 2009

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 supplementary submission from Lee McCosker on behalf of the **Free Range Pork Farmers Association** to the Senate Committee's inquiry into meat marketing and the use of labels 'organic' and 'free range' across all meat products.

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, once posted on the Australian Pork Limited website, but since has been removed:



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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 promotes tighter Country of Origin labelling, they have shown no support for overall truth in labelling of pork products preferring instead to leave it up to the consumer to “do their homework”.

## **Defining Free Range Pork**

I can confidently say that when people see the description free range on a product, that they believe the term to mean free to range.

In an ongoing survey [www.pigout.net.au](http://www.pigout.net.au) 88% of participants so far believe that free range pork means meat from pigs that have been allowed to roam in large, fenced paddocks.

Here are some more definitions of the term free range from the web:

of livestock and domestic poultry; permitted to graze or forage rather than being confined to a feedlot

[wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn](http://wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn)

Free range is a method of farming husbandry where the animals are allowed to roam freely instead of being contained in any manner. ...

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free\\_range](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_range)

Of, pertaining to, or produced by animals that are allowed to roam freely, rather than being confined indoors

[en.wiktionary.org/wiki/free-range](http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/free-range)



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Free range (or free roaming) implies that a meat or poultry product comes from an animal that was raised out of confinement or was free to roam. Its use on beef is



unregulated and there is no standard definition of this term. ...

[www.cuesa.org/sustainable\\_ag/glossary.php](http://www.cuesa.org/sustainable_ag/glossary.php)

System of (mainly) poultry keeping in which hens are allowed to range over a relatively large area

[www.ecifm.rdg.ac.uk/glossary.htm](http://www.ecifm.rdg.ac.uk/glossary.htm)

Often used to describe poultry and sometimes pork, "free-range" usually means that the animals have room to run around outside. ...

[www.localsustainability.net/](http://www.localsustainability.net/)

Animals that are not caged, but rather free to move about and feed at will. This term is often used to describe livestock that has been raised ...

[www.islandwood.org/kids/impact/wade/glossary.php](http://www.islandwood.org/kids/impact/wade/glossary.php)

### **What consumers are expecting when they purchase free range pork**

The majority of consumers that purchase free range pork do so because of animal welfare concerns. They want to ensure that the pork they eat is not reared with the use of sow stalls, farrowing crates or other forms of confinement. They prefer that the animal has led a more natural, outdoor life. It is their right to make this choice and be able to do so based on truthful product labelling.

Another contributing factor that influences their purchase is pork meat quality. Pork from pigs that are able to exercise naturally and are able to forage on the land has perceived health benefits and better eating quality.

Pigs raised under free range conditions are not subject to the heavy disease burden of intensively housed pigs and therefore do not require the systematic use of antibiotics. A pig that is able to exercise freely will develop muscle naturally and does not require the aid of hormones and growth promoters. Many consumers are seeking meat that is raised without the use of drugs.

Simply, consumers are expecting to be able to trust the label on the product and at present they are unable to do so. Their trust is being abused.

### **The Free Range Producer**

Commonly, the free range producer is a small family affair earning a living from the land. They fill a niche market, one that is now sadly open to exploitation by some within the pork industry ready to take advantage of the lack of truth in labeling laws and no recognized definition for free range.



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These family farms are now finding that they are in competition with under priced, deceptively labelled pork that has the potential to put them out of business. These currently viable free range operations are at the mercy of unscrupulous operators



marketing their pork as free range when, by accepted understanding of the term, they are not.

Australia is not alone in its lack of a definition for meat produced from higher welfare animal systems such as free range. This topic is being debated internationally. A useful document that discusses these issues and action that needs to be taken is

*The English pig Industry First Report of Session 2008–09*

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmenvfru/96/96.pdf>

**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. This issue is not going away.

We are hopeful that this inquiry will make recommendations on the development of nationally recognised standard for definitions of animal welfare-orientated meat production methods.

Yours sincerely,

Lee McCosker  
President – Free Range Pork Farmers Association



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