

M.C Herd Pty Ltd Submission to Senate Inquiry on Meat Marketing

This submission is being made on behalf of M.C. Herd Pty Ltd in my role as Managing Director of the company. We operate a meat processing and wholesaling operation from our plant based at Corio, Victoria. M.C Herd is privately owned company, has been in existence for over 50 years ,has an annual turnover in excess of \$150M annually and is consistently ranked by Feedback in the top 25 meat processors in Australia. We believe we are well placed to provide expert comment to the Inquiry on the matter of lamb branding.

It is our view that the lamb brand is an outdated legacy system that has previously used the rough guide of dentition to describe lamb and differentiate lamb from sheepmeats sourced from older sheep. Perpetuation of the lamb brand has more to do with industry politics than any reference to lamb quality attributes. It is also our view that regulated branding should not be a government matter but rather it is a commercial matter for companies to brand product as they see fit within the parameters of truth in labelling. In this context the description of lamb sends confusing messages to consumers.

The lamb brand has outlived its use by date and is no longer relevant to the effective marketing of Australian lamb for a number of reasons outlined below:-

- The lamb brand bears no relationship to carcase and meat quality or food safety but merely estimates an age of the lamb. However current meat science has determined that age cannot be accurately predicted by either dentition or ossification. The eruption of permanent incisors can occur over a protracted period of 10-18months of age with an average time from the first sign of partial eruption to fully erupted central incisor teeth of 27.4daysⁱ;
- The Meat and Livestock Australia Sheepmeat Eating Quality programⁱⁱ has further identified a number of key indicators of sheep meat eating quality on farm and in the abattoir that ensure eating quality. Dentition is only one component of sheepmeat eating quality
- Rigorous meat science conducted in Australia has found that there is no difference in consumer eating quality between branded lamb and those from young sheep of similar age with erupted incisors.
- Modern meat marketing has moved quickly away from commodity brands to regional appellations and specialised company brands. This move has been in response to consumers increasing concerns about the wholesomeness and quality of food they eat. Consumers care about food safety, hygiene, traceability, welfare standards and environmental concerns to have the requisite guarantees that the food they eat is safe and acceptable.
- Perpetuation of the lamb brand bears no relationship to sheepmeat wholesomeness or quality, In fact it is the complete reverse. The lamb brand forces meat processors and wholesalers to describe an animal purely on age ignoring the other key consumer quality requirements.

- The ridiculous premise of the lamb brand is highlighted by the fact that if this system is so good why do no other food groups have a similar regulated branding system. No other food group in Australia is forced into regulations in the same way as the lamb brand . These other food groups, including competitor meats or horticultural products or processed foods, have varietal and or quality descriptors or specific brands to guarantee quality . Quality cannot be guaranteed with the lamb brand. Equally, the lamb brand regulation is not uniformly applied across the various State jurisdictions in Australia making a mockery of the perceived need to perpetuate this date and outmoded product descriptor.
- Regulating a product description system is detrimental to competition and the achievement of excellence.. By regulating a product description all you do is narrow the ability to market product on its own terms, ie regulation pushes everything towards the average with no incentive to move beyond an average product. .However , by deregulating the system , people are rewarded for producing an above average product and inferior product is discounted accordingly .As it currently stands, a lamb brand can be put on an inferior product simply on the basis of dentition which makes a mockery of truth in labelling if the lamb brand is purported to be quality mark.

Signed.....

Frank Herd

Managing Director

M.C. Herd Pty Ltd

21 April 2008

ⁱ "Investigating Teeth Eruption and Eating Quality "Dr Sarah Wiese, Dr John Milton, Rob Davidson, Dr Brian McIntyre, Dr David Pethick and Dr John Thompson, Australian Journal of Agriculture

ⁱⁱ Pathway Specifications for Meat Standards Australia Lamb and Sheepmeats, Dr David Pethick, Sheep Updates W.A. Department of Agriculture, 2005