

Response to Choice article on organic meat

The Organic Federation of Australia (OFA) – Australia’s Peak body for the organic industry, reads with interest the results of the survey conducted by Choice on organic meat, as reported in The Australian today, 31 July.

A longstanding issue in Australia has been the absence of enforceable organic standards for the Australian consumer. The Australian organic industry has dealt with that in the past by setting up its own standards and certification, so that the consumer can be sure that they can trust products that are certified organic. Seven Australian certifiers are audited by the Australian government, and products with logos of these organizations can be trusted as being genuinely organic.

‘That over one quarter of the butchers surveyed by Choice did not know the answer to who certified the meat, does not necessarily mean that the meat was not organically produced’ says Andre Leu, Chair of the OFA and Deputy President of the International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements. ‘But it does mean’, Andre added ‘that we need better rules about the standards and how to police them. We have a way to go yet to protect the consumer and inform them about what is genuinely organic’.

Under the leadership of the OFA, the organic industry asked Standards Australia to help the industry develop standards for the organic market. These standards are almost ready. ‘Although they are not enforceable, it will be easier for regulatory bodies to use them to police the domestic market, once they are out’, Andre Leu said. ‘But the important point is that the whole of the supply chain, from producers to consumers, is aware how the system works’. The OFA has recently launched its TrustOrganic campaign, which will take place in the first two weeks in October. Details can be found on <http://www.trustorganic.org.au/>.

The retail meat market developed later than the fresh produce market and the ‘audit chain’ of certified producers and handlers does not reach far into the retail sector, and butchers do not have a long history of dealing with organic produce.

Ultimately, the organic industry promotes a certification mark as the only guarantee of genuine organic produce. Butchers have the option to sell packaged and labeled organic meat from a certified cutting room, but if the retail butcher wants to prepare the meat, the chain of custody is broken and the certification label must be removed.

If there is no label, consumers should be suspicious and the retailer should be able to provide a very good account of where the produce comes from.

The OFA invites the Meat Retailers Association to meet with the organic industry to discuss marketing and certification issues for retail butchers.

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