



## Focus on truth in food labelling

FOOD labelling is once again in the political spotlight. In response to consumer concerns about food provenance and the power of the big two supermarkets, politicians have joined the debate.

Barnaby Joyce supports a pie chart icon system, Nick Xenophon wants tougher labelling laws to ensure consumers can identify quality and place of origin, and the Federal Government seems to support a traffic light system that it thinks will drive healthy choices.

Even South Australia's new Food Marketing Minister John Rau has indicated he would support a marketing scheme similar to the French appellation system that protects and identifies place of origin.

So what's the difference between these approaches, and do we in fact need any of them or is it just going to be another packaging expense that, in the long run, will be paid for by the consumer?

Let's face it, the reason we need a system is because we have lost trust in our food chain and we have no faith in the food industry approach of self-regulation.

As a result, there is more and more evidence that consumers are suffering from a big dose of food fear.

In February this year, the government's panel charged with conducting an Independent Review of Food Labelling Law and Policy, headed by Dr Neal Blewett, released its draft report after a year of public consultations and hearings. After considering more than 700 submissions from the public and industry, the report entitled Labelling Logic was released, containing 61 recommendations to improve food labelling laws and policy.

A decision whether or not to accept some or all of the recommendations is not expected before the end of the year.

"It became clear that there is much confusion

surrounding the current food labelling laws in Australia. In our recommendations we attempted to balance the demands of government, industry, and consumers to create a set of recommendations that will best encourage healthy food choices," panel member Professor Pettigrew from Western Australia said.

In relation to genetically modified foods, Choice recently reported that in a survey of their members, 84 per cent of the 644 respondents agreed that there should be comprehensive labelling of foods containing ingredients derived from gene technology or genetic modification. Unfortunately it seems that highly refined GM ingredients like canola oil will not be able to be identified under the proposed labelling changes.

With the increase in obesity levels, food allergies and other diseases now clearly linked to diet, more and more consumers are forced to examine labels on processed and prepackaged products before purchase.

Representatives of SA's farmers' markets are meeting to discuss a draft constitution for a South Australian Farmers' Market Association.

One of the aims of the promoters of the proposed Association is to implement a grower authentication system that is transparent, auditable and transferable across markets. Such a system could reduce costs, and assist and complement a 'place of origin' system of labelling, which our Minister of Food Marketing has indicated he would support. It would also provide an extra layer of consumer confidence that produce sold at farmers' markets is in fact grown and produced by SA farmers.

• **Need to know more?**

<http://www.choice.com.au/consumer-action/food-labelling/food-labelling-debate/food-labelling-review-threat-or-opportunity.aspx>  
<http://www.foodlabellingreview.gov.au/intermet/foodlabelling/publishing.nsf>