



PRESS RELEASE

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Organic sausages: trustworthy and ethical

Australian Organic reminds retailers and consumers that a product can't be labeled certified organic just because it's made from organic ingredients.

To be sold as certified organic the final product also needs to be audited and pass certification, verifying its integrity and claims.

A Choice survey found a single batch of sausages, labeled organic by one butcher, had higher than expected levels of the preservative sulphur dioxide - a product not permitted as an additive under organic standards for meat products.

The owner of the company has since admitted to making a labeling mistake.

Not for profit organic industry association Australian Organic owns the logo that appears on the majority of organic certified products on our shelves, Australian Certified Organic, recognised by the Bud logo.

Chair of Australian Organic Dr Andrew Monk says, "Our organisation has extremely high expectations for organic products, underpinned by annual and unannounced audits, and product testing.

"Being a government accredited certifier; products wearing the Bud logo are also protected under consumer law.

"Any companies that wrongly label a product as certified face significant penalties as has occurred on prior occasions, supported by actions by the ACCC.

"Certification starts with the raw ingredients and follows the process through manufacturing to retail. If the end product satisfies organic standards only then can it be called certified organic."

In this case it appears the butcher (not certified with ACO) didn't understand that the end product also had to be certified organic.

To avoid misrepresentation consumers are reminded to check for a trusted organic certification logo like the Australian Certified Organic Bud logo on product labels (which regularly and randomly audits for compliance), buy from a certified organic butcher or ask retailers for certification paperwork as proof of their claims.

Jenelle Povey is the owner and operator of certified organic butchers, The Meat-ing Place, which has two certified organic outlets in Brisbane.

She says it's very difficult to get away with adding any prohibited ingredients in a certified organic product.

"We stick to an approved recipe. When the auditor comes I have to give him everything to prove the ingredients we are using.

"He might pick a day in the last 12 months and want to see receipts and invoices of everything that went into a particular batch on that day. Our record keeping is meticulous; it has to be to satisfy organic certification audits.

Jenelle says, "This is my livelihood. It is in my heart and soul to know what organic is.

"We'd be letting everyone down; us, farmers and customers, if we didn't stick to the standards. There is no way I would mess with that trust, it's our bread and butter."

Large retailers like Coles and Woolworths actively support the Australian Certified Organic certification mark and nationally agreed standards. In addition to the certifiers' checks and balances they also have their own strict auditing trail.

The Arcadian Organic and Natural Meat Company is the largest supplier of certified organic sausages on the east coast supplying the Cleavers brand into supermarkets.

The Company's joint CEO Alister Ferguson says, "We have a certificate of analysis for each consignment of certified organic sausage meals delivered to our plant to insure that the meals we use from our supplier are made to specifications and meet the organic standard.

"Our organic logo certification number is listed on all of our retail packs which is your guarantee of integrity."

In addition to prohibiting additives like sulphur dioxide, certified organic products are a much more ethical and healthier choice.

Raising organic meat is far more than just making sure animals are free ranging and grass fed, it's equally about producing cattle without synthetic growth hormones or antibiotics, breeding using natural methods, stress free weaning that allows for the ethological needs of mothers and young, access at all times to unfiltered sunlight and not using electric prodders as a routine management method.

For a meat product to be certified organic it must also have been processed at a certified organic abattoirs which keeps cattle in their social groups, provides comfortable holding pens with feed, water and bedding, don't kill animals in the line of sight of other animals and render animals unconscious before they're killed. Live export is also not permitted under organic standards.

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