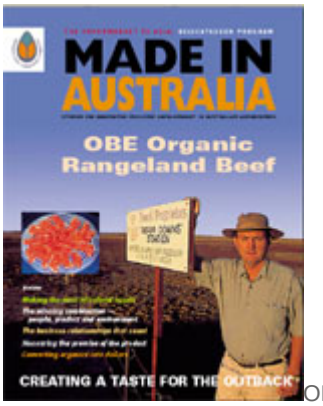
Organic beef exporters eye U.S. market following clone decision

Australia has the largest area of certified organic land in the world

Queensland Country Life
January 25, 2008



OBE Beef is Australia's largest organic beef cooperative

Australian organic meat exporters say their business could be bolstered by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's recent decision to approve the consumption of food from cloned animals and their offspring.

"The decision has reignited a focus on sales of organic beef and dairy products from Australia, which could be boosted as consumers in the United States search for an alternative source of protein and dairy products," said Dalene Brook, business development manager of OBE Beef, Australia's largest organic beef cooperative.

Australia has the largest area of certified organic land in the world (about 29.2 million acres certified to international standards) due to vast areas of rangelands certified for organic cattle and fat land production.

"Australia has some of the highest standards of food safety and traceability in the world, protecting its primary industry environment.

"Australia's clean and green reputation is highly regarded and is a valuable asset for exporters in markets worldwide," Ms Brook said.

In south-west Queensland, OBE runs 70,000 certified organic cattle on seven million certified organic hectares of land, and is well positioned to accommodate overseas markets seeking high-grade beef, produced to organic standards.

They are among a number of successful livestock industry groups.

Certified organic is one of the few regulatory systems already in place to guarantee accountability of source in livestock, amid rising consumer concerns that any cloned meat introduced on market will not be labelled accordingly (meat from cloned animals would be identical to a natural source and impossible to identify).

Spokesperson for Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA), Damon Whittock says that MLA will closely monitor the attitudes of consumers and export markets but that cloned meat was not likely to enter the Australian food chain in the near future.

"Cloned cattle do exist in Australia (there are fewer than 100), but they are incredibly expensive to produce and are used for research purposes.

"They do not enter the food chain.

"Food Safety Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) will make the decisions on the safety of cloned beef… and consumer attitudes will ultimately determine whether it will be accepted and hence made commercially viable," he said.

BFA spokesperson and Standards Committee chair, Andrew Monk said cloned meat concerns were the latest in a series of proposed food modification techniques to which stringent standards for certified organic production offer an alternative.

Reproductive hormones and cloning are prohibited under the Australian Organic Standard.

“In a world of food increasingly tampered with in competition for the greatest slice of the agri-food market, certified organic is becoming a haven for those in search of naturally produced food,” he said.

“With no planned requirement that labels identify cloned animal foods, and with the exemption of labeling of many GM foods, as well as products utilizing nanotechnology, organic logos such as the Australian Certified Organic “Bud” will hold even greater importance for consumers who care about where their food comes from, and how it is produced.”

Dr Monk says BFA does not reject the progressive benefits of technology but takes a precautionary approach in the interests of human health and safety, while being unrepentantly focused on consumer concerns and interests.