

Public perception

Misleading comparison slanders organics

By SHANE HEATON

On November 29, 2004, in Brisbane's *Courier Mail*, Patrick Watson's article 'It's better for you, isn't it?' contained a misleading comparison between organic and conventional products.

Some of the anti-organic statements included: "organic is not a guarantee of health"; "don't buy it, you're being ripped off"; "this confuses people in terms of what's healthy", and "if you're looking to lose weight, non-organic products may be better for you".

The *Courier Mail* refused to print a correction to their misleading and slanderous comparison of organic and non-organic products, so we'll print one here.

Sadly, despite several phone calls and emails, the *Courier Mail* refused to print any such correction. Now here's where it gets interesting – only a week or two earlier the *Sunday Times* in London had printed a similar piece with a similar erroneous comparison! A low-fat conventional yoghurt was compared

with a full-fat organic one in support of claims that organic food was often less healthy (i.e. contained more fat) than conventional food. When the error was pointed out the *Sunday Times* immediately printed a correction and apologised for the confusion.

STEREOTYPES

The same false comparison made on opposite sides of the world: coincidental cock-up or global conspiracy? A recent survey found that the Australian public rates journalism about the lowest of all professions in terms of honesty and integrity, just above used-car salesmen. But if there's a choice between conspiracy or cock-up, always go with cock-up.

It's a further challenge for the industry how little journalists know (or care) about the subjects they cover, so it's very important that the industry is pro-active in putting positive stories about organics to contacts in the media. ■

Shane Heaton is the BFA spokesperson on nutrition

Correction

Unfortunately the product comparison made in the article, 'It's better for you, isn't it?' by Patrick Watson (November 29, 2004, *Courier Mail*) misrepresented the facts, which then supported a misleading argument on the comparative nutritional quality of organic and non-organic food.

The organic yoghurt compared, Kingland organic soy yoghurt, contained 3.1g total fat, 0.4g saturated fat, and 14.8g total carbohydrates. Paul's natural yoghurt is claimed in the article to contain 0.2 grams of total fat, 0.1g of saturated fat, and 8g total carbohydrates. There were three woeful problems with the comparison:

- One is a soy yoghurt and one is a milk yoghurt. They are completely different products and should never have been compared.
- The organic yoghurt was a fruit yoghurt, while the conventional one was natural. Little wonder there was more total carbohydrates in the organic yoghurt. The author described it as a "whopping 14.8 grams of carbohydrates" – it's called fruit!
- The Paul's yoghurt figures quoted were actually for the low-fat version. Paul's natural yoghurt has 3.3g total fat (6% more than the organic comparison) and 2.2g saturated fat (more than five times the organic comparison).

The paper should have apologised for misleading nature of this comparison and the derogatory comments it supported. Organic products allow a fraction of the food additives routinely used in conventional foods, and many additives like artificial flavours, colours and sweeteners, hydrogenated fats, MSG and aspartame are banned in organic processed foods.



Owner-operated.

Over 15 years experience in wholesale of organic produce in Sydney.

Contracts & growing plans designed to accommodate your needs as well as those of the consumer market.

**Suppliers of quality
CERTIFIED ORGANIC PRODUCE**

**Call Josef on 0428 114 707 or email
backtoeden@bigpond.com**

**Our warehouse is located:
Cnr Park & Bedford Rd's, Homebush
Ph: 02 9746 0070 Fax: 02 9746 0040**