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GREATER TRANSPARENCY OF FOOD LABELLING NEEDED: BFA

Labelling for imported products, processing aids, GM foods and food colouring are just some of the main concerns highlighted by the Biological Farmers of Australia Ltd (BFA) in its submission to Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ).

In the submission made to the Department of Health and Ageing as part of the Food Labelling Review, the BFA has recently called for greater transparency in labelling and more choice for consumers.

Standards Convenor Dr Andrew Monk said the BFA believes that the current arrangement for imported products remains lax and confusing for consumers. "Particularly when it comes to clear and simple choice for consumers, a front of label 'Imported Product' or 'Imported Ingredients' label is required," said BFA Dr Monk.

"We also note the lack of transparency in relation to processing aids which may be present as breakdown products in packaged items that have undergone sanitizing washes using products such as hypochlorite - a commonly used pool cleaner," he said.

Dr Monk went on to say that clear labelling of the use of such agents would bring far greater clarity for the consumer in relation to not only what they are consuming in terms of macro-ingredients but also other minor additives, processing aids and their derivative breakdown products.

"Many processing aids remain unknown and untested in any combinatorial impacts manner, meaning there are untested and unknown cocktails people are unwittingly consuming," he said.

Genetically modified (GM) foods were also listed as a key concern when it came to food labelling.

"BFA is a firm believer in consumer choice, however this choice remains a charade while there is no provision and requirement for the labelling of all GM and GM derived products or ingredients on labelling," said Dr Monk.

"Misleading claims in regards to food colours and notions of 'natural' are not in the spirit of labelling regulations as they stand and are a serious potential breach of consumer trust.

"We call for a further addition of known and therefore prescribed carcinogenic food colours in foods, to be noted as such on labelling information. We would also note that currently the provision of three categories of additives: natural, nature identical and synthetic is seeing an abuse of the system with marketing claims such as "no synthetic colours evident on labels" when such colours do not have to in fact be truly natural, Dr Monk said.

Dr Monk went on to say that although organic food labelling standards are "more than adequate as they stand", and provide a transparent choice for consumers via the Bud logo certification programs, food labelling in general needs further regulation and enforcement to protect consumers against unscrupulous traders.

"We believe the theme of informing consumers and preventing misleading or deceptive marketing claims is not yet adequately addressed by current Food Labelling arrangements and regulations," he said.

The results of the Food Labelling Review will be published on the website www.foodlabellingreview.gov.au in early 2011. Updates and further information will be placed at www.bfa.com.au

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For more information

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