

Consumer trends:

Coles commits to certified organics

COLES Supermarkets is strengthening its commitment to certified organic products further in response to demand from consumers for more organic products they can trust. The following article reflects the changes that Coles Supermarkets are making in their organic range.

1. There is a lot of talk about Supermarkets moving into the organic sector - can you explain what Coles' approach is and how it will benefit the sector (producers, processors, wholesalers, consumers)?

We began stocking the product based on overseas trends and growing customer interest in buying organic foods. Coles has progressively been expanding its organic range since the first products appeared on our shelves in 1998. We now carry more than 400 lines in stores across Australia.

In the early days, the small-scale production of much organic produce made it difficult for us to secure enough produce for a nationwide store network. But the increasing popularity of organic produce means production of many lines is increasing, and makes more organic lines feasible for us to carry nationally.

We think the commitment of a large retailer such as ourselves to certified organic produce is putting organic produce in front of millions of our shoppers every week, giving Australia's organic food industry access to a large national market.

2. This sounds as though Coles Supermarkets is making a significant commitment to retailing of certified organic product. What drives this commitment and do you see it continuing?

As with virtually all decisions made in retailing, our commitment is driven by customer demand. Our customers are increasingly looking at organic produce, driven primarily by health and environmental concerns. Coles is committed to providing a wide range of certified organic products at an affordable price to meet this continuing consumer trend.

3. Obviously the commitment to only stocking certified organic product is fantastic for certified producers, processors and wholesalers as well as the consumer. Have you found understanding the certification process difficult?

Consumers are demanding greater access to organic products but they want to be able to know they can trust a product labelled organic. With so many different organic certification bodies in Australia and overseas, customers have been looking for a simple and easy way to know a product is truly organic.

Coles continues to take a firm stance by requiring all of their organic products sold to carry a valid organic certification. Coles has outsourced the validation of certification to Australian Certified Organic (ACO) to ensure certification is valid and maintained. This will benefit the organic sector by ensuring only truly organic products are sold.

4. What is Coles doing to ensure all product is certified? How much will be imported? What about in-conversion product?

Coles Supermarkets has partnered with the ACO to verify all our 'certified' organic suppliers. We are first and foremost committed to Australia to source our products. If we cannot find a sustainable supply that offers the quality and affordability we have promised in Australia, then we will search globally.

Coles also supports producers willing to convert to organic production. By supporting organic in-conversion products, we are supporting organic producers on the path to being fully organic.

5. So Coles is working with ACO to ensure all organic products stocked by Coles are certified. Does this mean only ACO certified products are able to be bought by Coles?

No. Coles recognises all of the certifying bodies that currently certify to the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS), EEC Regulation 2092/91, International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements (IFOAM), the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Japan Agricultural Standard (JAS) and BiogroNZ Standards. The choice of certifying body that suppliers use is their decision. The role of the ACO is to ensure all our suppliers carry current valid certification from a reputable certifier for the lines supplied to Coles.

6. If I am a producer or supplier to Coles, what changes do I have to make?

If you currently use ACO as your chosen certifying body,



you will not need to do anything. ACO will advise Coles of the status of your organic certification and place you onto our register.

If you use a different certifying body, Coles Supermarkets will recently have sent you a letter requesting certification information to be sent to the ACO for validating that you carry current organic certification with a reputable certifier. Once your certification status has been validated, you will be placed onto the Coles Organic Supplier register.

If you are a supplier of You'll Love Coles Organic brand product, your product will require further verification of compliance to ACO's standard. Once verified, you will be placed on the Coles Supplier register and provided with the ACO Bud logo (with Coles retailer number) that should be placed on the front of packaging.

This will serve to build trust with our customers that our products are truly organic and reduces consumer confusion by having consistent labelling and certification across the Coles brand.

7. How will imported products be verified and labelled?

In the case of international proprietary branded products, as long as the product is validated to have current certification with a reputable certifier such as the UK's Soil Association or other respected body, the product may still be stocked by Coles and labelling will not change.

In the case of 'You'll Love Coles Organic' brand products, validated imported products will carry the ACO Bud logo, and under this the words "IMPORTED PRODUCT", to distinguish them from Australian products.

8. As a consumer, what should I look for to assure me that either a Coles Housebrand or Coles ranged proprietary product is certified?

There will no longer be any product stocked by Coles that does not carry a reputable certification logo, meaning you can shop knowing whatever you pick up in any store labelled organic is indeed organic.

Most organic products will carry the Australian Certified Organic logo, but in the case of proprietary brand products, there will always be some products carrying other certification marks, some Australian and some international logos.

9. Will the organic range be in all Coles Supermarkets?

All Coles stores will stock a great range of organic products. Our organic range will con-



The new "You'll love Coles Organic" package design.

tinue to grow to offer a wide range of affordable organic products.

10. Does this initiative mean more opportunities for certified organic producers and suppliers?

Yes, definitely. Coles proudly supports the growing organic industry and is keen to hear from organic suppliers, producers or growers interested in supplying Coles with certified organic products. If you are not an existing supplier, register your interest by emailing: <organics@colesmyer.com.au>.

11. Does it mean more mainstream exposure for the certified organic sector?

The increased availability of organic products through supermarkets increases options for consumers and allows greater exposure for certified organic products on a greater scale.

12. Summing up, what do you see as benefits of the initiative?

We think it will be a big win for consumers as it allows them to buy organic products they can trust – products certified organic. By having a consultant certification process and a single, easily identifiable logo across our own branded products, we will be able to build customer trust in integrity of our organic offer.

And increasing customer trust in organic produce can only be a win for the industry overall. ■

