

Australian red meat and sausages part of balanced diet, industry says

Jared Lynch

A World Health Organisation (WHO) report that linked consuming red meat to cancer is a "blanket claim" that doesn't necessarily apply to Australian meat processors, says sausage maker Nick Kerr.

Mr Kerr runs Farm Foods with his brother Richard in Geelong. He supplies all the major supermarkets and produces enough sausages that could loop the world five times each year.

The company prides itself on sourcing fresh Australian ingredients for each of those sausages as well as its hamburgers. It is for this reason that Mr Kerr found the WHO report "personally offensive" and a "silly thing to say".

"In the 20 years that I have been in this business, sausages, bacon and small goods have changed significantly. All the products we make are from fresh meat ... whereas in the past that might not have happened," Mr Kerr said.

"Saying there is an issue with bacon and sausages is a bit of a blanket claim. In Australia our food standards are so high and our food safety is so important that for the health organisation to make a claim like that, doesn't really involve countries like Australia."

A panel of 22 international experts drafted the WHO findings after reviewing decades of research on the link between red meat, processed meats and cancer.

It cited studies suggesting that eating an additional 100 grams of red meat per day raises the risk of colorectal cancer by 17 per cent, and eating an extra 50 grams of processed meat daily raises the risk by 18 per cent.

Agriculture Minister Barnaby Joyce slammed the report as a "farce", saying humans would head back into the cave if they followed all of WHO's advice.

"I don't think that we should get too excited that if you have a sausage you're going to die of bowel cancer because you're not," Mr Joyce said.

But Labor agriculture spokesman Joel Fitzgibbon defended the report,

saying its findings had been skewed.

He said WHO was promoting a balanced diet, not encouraging people to stop eating red meat all together.

"I'll be sticking with bacon and eggs for breakfast on Sunday," Mr Fitzgibbon said.

"The study makes clear that it is intended to be a guide to those making recommendations about how consumers might strike the right balance between the nutritional benefits of processed meat and the possible downside. In other words, about how to best strike a balanced diet."

A spokeswoman for Meat and Livestock Australia – the marketer for Australian sheep, cattle and goat producers – said consuming red meat was part of healthy, balanced diet.

The spokeswoman said Australian Dietary guidelines recommended the average Australian eat 455 grams of cooked red meat a week – the equivalent of about two steaks.

"Red meat such as beef and lamb is a critical, natural source of iron and zinc, vitamin B12 and omega-3 – essential nutrients needed to keep the body and brain functioning well," the spokeswoman said.

"There is no reason to believe that eating beef and lamb as part of a healthy, balanced diet and lifestyle in 100 to 200g portion sizes ... three to four times a week as recommended in the Australian Dietary Guidelines, will increase risk of cancer."

George Weston Foods (GWF), which owns the Don and KR Castlemaine smallgoods brands, also believed their products were safe.

"Don and KR Castlemaine (KRC) supports the position Meat and Livestock Australia ... [has] taken regarding the World Health Organisation report on red and processed meat," GWF said in a statement.

"The company takes the health and safety of its consumers very seriously. Don KRC invests substantially in ensuring all products and manufacturing procedures comply with the stringent safety standards, as determined by the Food Standards Australia New Zealand."

Beef processor Bindaree, which operates an abattoir in northern NSW declined to comment about the WHO report but said there was strong demand for Australian red meat.

The company sealed a partnership with a \$1 billion Chinese pork processor, Shandong Delisi Food Co, on Tuesday.

The Chinese company acquired a 45 per cent stake in Bindaree for \$140 million, which values the business at just under \$400 million.

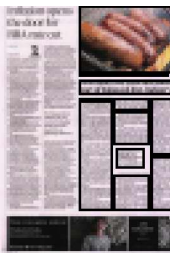
Bindaree chief financial officer James Roger said Shandong Delisi had about 20,000 customers that Bindaree could tap into.

"The plan is to realise that distribution work for our Australian beef," Mr Roger said.

He said the company would spend most of the money on upgrading its factory at Inverell, particularly its boning and chilling operations.

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Barnaby Joyce



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Page 2 of 2



Agriculture Minister Barnaby Joyce slammed the WHO report on red meat as a "farce". PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES