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Age, Melbourne

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Page 1 of 2



Sally Willis from Yarra Valley Free Range Pork.
Photo: Jason South

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Darren Gray

The Australian meat industry has defended its product and urged Australians to consume a balanced diet, including meat, in the wake of a World Health Organisation report which concluded that the consumption of red meat was “probably carcinogenic to humans”.

The WHO report – which also found there was sufficient evidence that eating processed meat causes colorectal cancer – sent shockwaves through butcher shops and meat lovers around the world.

Federal Agriculture Minister Barnaby Joyce blasted the report, saying humans would be heading back to the cave if they adopted all advice from the World Health Organisation.

“But if you’re going to avoid everything that has any correlation with cancer whatsoever – don’t walk outside, don’t walk down the streets in Sydney, there’s going to be very little in life that you do in the end,” he said.

Mr Joyce said people should aim for balance.

“What I don’t like about this is

that it creates another fear factor which is not sustainable. I don’t believe for one second that people are going to spend their whole life eating nothing else but sausages and bacon,” Mr Joyce said.

“And even if they did, don’t worry about cancer, worry about a heart attack, that’s probably what is going to kill them.”

Australian meat industry groups responded in a less colourful manner,

saying that they promoted meat consumption as a part of a balanced diet and a healthy lifestyle.

Geelong sausage maker Nick Kerr said the WHO findings do not necessarily apply to Australian meat processors.

“In the 20 years that I have been in this business, sausages, bacon and small goods have changed significantly,” Mr Kerr said.

“All the products we make are from fresh meat . . . whereas in the past that might not have happened.

“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

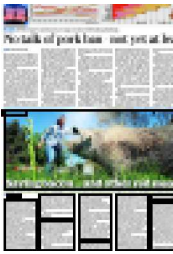
safety is so important that for the health organisation to make a claim like that, doesn’t really involve countries like Australia.”

The industry group Australian Pork Limited urged calm. “We need some perspective on research like this. The causes of cancer are extremely complex and cannot be attributed to just to one single cause,” it said in a statement.

Meat and Livestock Australia, the marketing and research and development body for the red meat industry, said red meat like lamb and beef were “a critical, natural source of iron and zinc, vitamin B12 and omega-3 – essential nutrients needed to keep the body and brain functioning well.”

A spokeswoman for MLA also said: “There is no reason to believe that eating beef and lamb as part of a healthy, balanced diet and lifestyle in 100 to 200-gram portion sizes (raw weight), three to four times a

week as recommended in the Australian Dietary Guidelines, will increase risk of cancer.”



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Page 2 of 2

The latest figures on meat consumption from the Organisation for Economic Development and Co-operation and Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, indicate Australians are the biggest meat eaters in the world. In 2014, Australians devoured 90.21 kilograms of meat per person, 170 grams more per person than Americans.

While Americans have had a decade-long decline in meat consumption, Australia's meat consumption has been creeping upwards over the past two decades.

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