

# No beef with labelling rules

SAY something often enough and people will start believing it.

It's a widely understood phenomenon that

applies to the lobby now pushing for radical reforms to the way beef is described and graded in Australia.

Letters to Rural Press publications last week suggest some readers are convinced earlier claims made by Sydney lobbyist, Norman Hunt, and now by NSW MP, Richard Torbay, are true.

Among the "facts" raised by Mr Hunt are that 30 per cent of all table beef sold on the domestic retail market, including "budget" meat sold by Coles and Woolworths is derived from old cow.

It's not hard to find flaws in this claim.

The cattle Woolworths processes at the Ipswich/Brismeat boning operation for its "everyday" beef are mostly milk-tooth, with a few two-tooths.

Meat marketed as "economy" from outside processors like Swift and Teys, has a set of specifications based on dentition, mostly four-tooth, and never more than seven-tooth, depending on the cut and its purpose. A second layer of criteria covers fat and meat colour.

In no way could beef from a seven-tooth female, likely to be no more than 36 to 40 months of age, be described as "old cow", which describes animals killed at the end of their breeding life.

In fact, seven-tooth cow can legitimately be packed in grassfed Jap ox carton, provided weight and other criteria are met.

"The company has never bought eight-tooth cow meat, at least as far back as 2001, if ever," a veteran Woolworths staff member said this week.

Another big independent retailer, Brad Patton, said: "We don't use any manufacturing grades at all. Our lowest line, which we all budget, comes from Swift, mostly closely specified A-cipher product which is expertly processed.

"Budget meat today is far removed from what might have been sold as budget 10 or 15 years ago."

■ Jon Condon is editor of the Australian Lot Feeders Association magazine, *Lotfeeding*.

COMMENT

John Condon

