

The key to taste is fat, naturally

FARMERS markets around the country are packed. Urban fridges and freezers are heaving with great slabs of fresh-from-the-farm meat, and organic sausages fill the shelves at the local supermarket.

They're all signs of the small but significant niche that the "natural" food movement has carved within the Australian market during the last decade. And leading the push has been the organic food industry - now worth \$600 million, according to the industry's peak body, Organic Federation of Australia. A recently published study commissioned by

“PEOPLE ARE VERY CONCERNED TO KNOW WHERE THEIR FOOD COMES FROM. THEY WANT FOOD THAT'S LOCALLY GROWN... MANY OF THEM WANT TO KNOW THE FARMER. TO KNOW IT'S A REAL PLACE”

the British Food Standards Agency, revealed that there is no research to show any nutritional benefits to eating organic foods, but those in the industry say that the enthusiasm here is unlikely to abate.

"The key theme that I hear repeated is that people are very concerned to know where their food comes from," says organic farmer, Richard Graham. "They want food that's locally grown - with low food miles."

"Many of them want to know the farmer. To know it's from a real place."

Graham refers to a survey by grocery chain, Harris Farm, showing that one of the top reasons why people are now buying organic meats in particular, is a perception that organic farming entails more humane treatment of animals.

After a mid-life career change from IT, Graham owns and runs one of the country's steadily growing number of certified organic farms - those that have undergone the rigorous three-year qualification program that ensures the farm's produce is grown without artificial fertilisers, pesticides, herbicides or genetically modified organisms.

Growth promoters, including antibiotics are also prohibited. Landtasia, his 10,500-acre property in the NSW Southern Highlands, produces organic beef, potatoes and apples for nearly 100 customers



in Canberra and Sydney. After many years of organic eating, he says he can now choose which meat is organic in a blind tasting and claims it all comes down to the fat.

"The big differences in meat comes through in the fat," he says. "When you eat a certified organic product, that's the delicious stuff. That's the stuff that

makes meat delicious." For the home cook, it means that even simply cooked organic meats can make a special meal, he says.

At the other end of the spectrum, The Organic Meat Company is Australia's largest supplier of organic meat. It acquires meat from organic producers all over the country to supply butchers, supermarkets and to export to the US, the UK and South East Asia.

"Across the board, the supermarkets probably have some of the best range of organic now," says the company manager, Alister Ferguson. According to him, many people will now buy organic meats for their children even if they don't buy it for themselves, and he anticipates that the market will continue to increase as those children grow up.

But ensuring that people can trust what they're buying when it is labelled organic is a continuing problem. At this stage, there is nothing to prevent anybody labelling anything organic.

Adding to this, a small survey by the consumer organisation Choice recently found that nearly two thirds of butchers were aware of what the "organic" labelling on the meat they were selling meant, and if it had gone through a certification process.


"The current system leaves a big hole, making it pretty open for anyone to cheat," says Ferguson. He recommends that anybody wanting to buy organic, take time to look for proper organic certification and beware of those charging extraordinary premiums.

"There is a premium but it does not have to be as high as some try to charge."

Meanwhile at Landtasia, Graham is responding to his customer's wishes by gearing up to begin offering organic lamb for the first time this spring.

THE YOUNG,
THE OLD
THE BEAUTIFUL

and Celebrate Feasting with Westend Estate Wines

 WESTEND
ESTATE WINES

Entertaining Made Easy *Life at Feast*
Cooking Classes

Learn to effortlessly & affordably entertain in your own home

Relaxed & fun cooking school on the Northern Beaches

Small hands-on classes for maximum participation

Choose from a variety of cooking class themes

Sails

On Lavender Bay

Perched on Sydney's Magnificent Harbour

toast
FOOD

HAVING A PARTY?

1300 8 TOAST

OF COURSE YOU MADE THEM!