

Organic meat

Opportunities 'endless'

The Organic Meat Company, a recently established subsidiary of major meat exporter Sanger Australia, is among those rapidly taking the lead in the organic beef export market and helping to close some gaps in the supply chain.

The Organic Meat Company was an idea hatched by two friends, Alister Ferguson and Peter Gall, after working together on properties outside the western Queensland town of Blackall.

Peter already had a long association with the organic meat industry; the family property, Eastwood, has been certified organic since 1995. Alister had always been interested in the organic meat industry; after a number of years in the meat industry, he realised the opportunities were endless for marketing a consistently reliable quality organic product, something the market lacked.

A common misconception in the domestic and export markets was that organic meat was of a lower standard than conventional. This perception arose because of quality issues on both domestic and export markets at the time.

Having a good understanding of the cattle industry, Alister knew this did not have to be the case. The lack of continuity in supply was another common complaint. Alister knew that by addressing both quality and supply issues it was possible to expand the market and help it realise its true potential.

After five years' market research the company came into being in January 2005. It now has a group of organic cattle producers able to supply a consistently good-quality product.

After many months' research and discussions with potential organic meat customers, Alister and Peter came to the simple conclusion that if they bought a superior animal and stringently graded out any inferior meat, they were well on the way to securing new markets and growing existing ones.

Sanger Australia recognises there is great potential for Australia to supply organic beef to world markets and now is the time to set the foundations essential to realising these goals.

Before the company's inception, many organic cattle were being lost to the conventional market. The organic beef industry was fragmented due to lack of export-level certified organic plants near organic farmers.

Sanger has addressed this by organising plants run by long-term trading partners to become organically certified in all three states along Australia's mainland east coast. This has enabled it to access quality cattle 12 months of the year from western Queensland down to Gippsland, Victoria.

It has also organically certified further processing plants in Queensland and NSW, enabling it to control all aspects of production from cattle procurement to processing to further processing. The result is greater quality control and a more direct line of communication, with feedback flowing freely from customers back to the producer.

One of Sanger's trade partners is Bindaree Beef, Australia's fifth-largest meat processor. Bindaree owns and operates three beef processing plants: Bindaree Beef, Inverell, NSW; Bindaree Beef, Orange, NSW; and South Burnett Beef, Queensland.

South Burnett Beef is capable of processing 800 cattle a day and is a fully certified organic processing plant. Organic certification was recently obtained for the Inverell plant. Moe Meat Packers, Victoria, has been certified organic for processing.

At The Organic Meat Company, most of the farmers, suppliers and processors are certified by Australian Certified Organic (ACO). The ACO registered logo is the mark of integrity on all its products.

The company is committed to creating new markets for current and future organic cattle suppliers so the industry can have sustainable growth in years to come.

In Australia, its meats can be found in David Jones, Prime Quality Meats, Sam the Butcher and selected IGA supermarkets. In February it launched a range of certified organic chicken and lamb and begin distributing certified organic product in Queensland and Victoria. ■

CONTACTS: Graziers wanting more information should contact Peter Gall, phone (07) 4659 8898 or 0427 574 941; email <plgall@bigpond.com>. Customers interested in buying organic beef should contact Alister Ferguson, phone (02) 9258 8333 or 0427 825 101; email <sales@theorganicmeatcompany.com.au>; website <www.theorganicmeatcompany.com.au>.



LEFT: Will Jefferies and Alister Ferguson. RIGHT: Peter and Louise Gall