

Project overview



Clean Labels – Opportunity identification for value added Australian Red meat innovation

Project code V.RMH.0107

Prepared by Dr Anneline Padayachee
Michael Lee

Date published 16 April 2021

Published by Meat & Livestock Australia Limited
Locked Bag 991
NORTH SYDNEY NSW 2059

In partnership with Laetation Pty Ltd

Meat & Livestock Australia acknowledges the matching funds provided by the Australian Government to support the research and development detailed in this publication.

This publication is published by Meat & Livestock Australia Limited ABN 39 081 678 364 (MLA). Care is taken to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this publication. However, MLA cannot accept responsibility for the accuracy or completeness of the information or opinions contained in the publication. You should make your own enquiries before making decisions concerning your interests. Reproduction in whole or in part of this publication is prohibited without prior written consent of MLA.



Brief summary

Clean label and free from trends have continued to evolve across the food industry. This project reviewed recent advancements in “clean label” food products in order to identify new opportunities for the Australian red meat sector to value add. A series of ‘commercial in confidence’ interviews were undertaken with industry and consumer groups to test key clean food perceptions and attitudes which found that they relate to wider food choices rather than red meat only.

Objectives

This project considered several opportunity spaces / interpretations for clean labelled foods that could be applied to red meat inclusion, with a particular focus on meat snacks, powder drink supplements and baby food. Considered were the notions of what “clean” means to consumers vs the food sector as well as the fundamental drivers for consumer behaviour and purchasing habits. These insights were used in order to gain an understanding of the best opportunity areas the red meat sector might consider in the context of the “clean label” food trend.

Project outcomes

Clean labels are required to build rapport and trust through simplicity and transparency. Although there is no standard definition or regulatory framework that dictates what “clean labels” must contain, it is understood that the following are important from a consumer perspective:

- Ingredient declarations (must be transparent and readable)
- Low in salt, sugar and free from artificial ingredients.
- Sustainable and clear packaging used.
- Must satisfy legislative codes and requirements.
- Identify wellness attributes relating to overall health (e.g. protein, wholefood, strength, weight management, balanced diet)

Previous USA published statistics in 2017 indicated 80% of consumers actively seek out “clean-labelled” products once they decide natural and clean food is a key purchase driver for them/their family. The early adopter traditionally has been millennials switching to organic produce.

It was also determined that “clean” is more than a simple ingredient declaration, but more about product perception. Key messages on the front of pack set the expectations and are essential to gain attention, in order for a consumer to look at the ingredient declaration which substantiates expectations.

The outcomes focused on clear, easy to understand communication that highlights attributes of foods with inclusion of red meat (that is, as an ingredient) in terms of:

- A natural whole food is essential; words like “pure”, “whole”, “wholesome”, “real”, “natural” promote the wholefood nature of meat
- The health and wellbeing properties of the meat with key nutrients that red meat is a source of “protein”, “iron”, “zinc”, “vitamin B12”, the “lean” nature of the red meat used; “satiety”, “muscle building”, “growth” attributes common to lean meat
- Differentiating the unprocessed nature of meat from processed meats (which are usually deli-style meats, salamis, sausage rolls etc.) via “unprocessed”, “real”, “wholefood goodness”, “natural”, “free-from”

- Differentiating traditional meats from environmentally, sustainable, and humanely produced meat with terms relating to “grass-fed”, “pasture-raised”, “RSPCA approved” (if that has been received), “natural environment”, “antibiotic-free” (in applicable).

It was found that consumers pay less attention to ‘clean label’ in indulgent products compared to food staples, with an increasing focus on foods consumed by children addressing this trend.

Overall, the notion of “good for you” was found to be the overarching quality associated with ‘clean eating’. ‘Clean Label’ was found to be all about perception in the mind of the consumer, based on attributes they desire.

It was recommended that a better understanding of how people think, feel, behave and learn about clean labelled meat based products be considered. The preliminary feedback indicating that clean labels build trust via simplicity, transparency and wholesomeness that can address anxiety and fear. However, noting this research was undertaken during COVID-19 pandemic.

Significantly though all terms should only be used in accordance with the regulatory requirements for food labelling.

Benefits to industry

Brand-owners procuring and value adding Australian red meat are well placed to build upon the current ‘clean and green’ Australian red meat credentials. It is proposed that clean labelling and clean technologies will continue to enable provisions for Australian red meat calls out in the value added category.

This project identified four key insights that have been ideated with several meat snack companies who have concurrent MLA Donor company projects. These projects are evaluating novel processing interventions and bundling of ingredients.

Key quotes as they relate to collagen bars and meat snacks included sharing quotes such as:

- Transparency – “sometimes you’ll see that it says ‘High Fibre or Iron’ but it ends up on being 1 gram;
- Simplicity – “the packaging gives you the feeling of minimal ingredients; I need to see on the pack an explanation of how collagen and prebiotics and vitamins have been added and benefit my skin and gut health”
- Clarity – “I love to see the ingredients that I can read, and I understand”
- Familiar – “I have to be able to read and pronounce everything that’s on there, otherwise it’s not helpful”

Further discussions with past MLA Donor company partners developing meat based baby foods are also underway.

The project also created a series of personas describing consumer behaviours whom might resonate with clean label opportunity spaces. MLA has used these to internally workshop and compare against current insights and category drivers to inform plans for traditional red meat positioning.

Finally, outcomes from this project will be collated with industry’s interest in exploring the recent outcomes from :

- MLA project with CSIRO on clean technology platforms – see: <https://www.mla.com.au/research-and-development/reports/2020/review-of-emerging-food-industry-clean-technologies-for-potential-high-value-red-meat-opportunities/>; and
- MLA project with Food Innovation Partners on meat as a quality ingredient – see: <https://www.mla.com.au/research-and-development/reports/2020/v.rmh.0114---review-paper-beyond-meat-to-quality-ingredient-component-strategy/>