

## From farm to fork

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

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Reporter: **Karen Barlow**

**Descriptions such as free range, farm fresh and free trade are used to attract consumers eyes and allay animal welfare concerns, but many are stuck on food with little scrutiny.**

### Transcript

TONY JONES, PRESENTER: The saying goes you are what you eat, but do you really know what you're eating?

Descriptions such as "Free Range", "Organic", "Environmental", and "Farm Fresh" are used to attract consumer's eyes and allay concerns about animal welfare.

But many of these labels are stuck on food with little scrutiny, leaving consumers to make decisions based on trust.

There are big profits to be made on labelling lies and until now those engaged in misleading and deceptive conduct have faced absolutely no punishment.

We'll speak to the US author of Eating Animals, Jonathan Safran Foer, shortly, but first Karen Barlow has this report produced with Candice Talberg.

And a warning this story contains disturbing images.

PATTY MARK, ANIMAL LIBERATION VICTORIA: We only hit a quarter of the shed and 51 dead rotting bodies. They were mouldy, they were pussy, they were decomposing ... and there were birds just sitting on them eating them, picking at them.

KAREN BARLOW, REPORTER: These chickens are bred for meat. The farm supplies a range of supermarkets and fast food outlets like KFC.

It is a side of food production that marketers are loathe to talk about, but consumers are beginning to voice concerns about the journey from farm to fork.

PROFESSOR PETER SINGER, ETHICIST: People are buying more free range eggs, for example. They're looking for free range meat.

CLAIRE HUGHES, CHOICE: You see all sorts of claims like "green", "environmentally friendly", "organic", "fair-trade", "free range" - that sort of thing.

KAREN BARLOW: In Australia, only organic foods are certified, leaving "free range", "farm fresh" and "cage free" as terms without legal status.

CLAIRE HUGHES: They don't have a similar degree of scrutiny and standardisation applied to products carrying those terms.

JOHN KAYE, NEW SOUTH WALES GREENS: Consumers are being played for patsies. The labelling laws don't give adequate definitions and there's definite product substitution that is allowing eggs, for example, which are not free range to be labelled as free range.

KAREN BARLOW: These are free ranging chickens. They eat what they like, go where they like and lay only one egg a day.

TONY COOTE, MULLOON CREEK NATURAL FARMS: We feel that they are equal to us so they deserve the respect and we feel that every animal should live its own distinctiveness, and it is not that difficult to do when you love doing it.

KAREN BARLOW: This farm is certified organic.

(Happy clucking)

TONY COOTE: I am not absolutely familiar with all of the free range rules because we go beyond free range and we're certified as organic, which is a lot different from just free range. We are independently certified and inspected and audited on a regular basis and an auditor could come any time.

KAREN BARLOW: Eggs from farms like this are not the norm. The Egg Corporation says 75 per cent of eggs come from caged birds and they're more affordable. But a growing number of people are prepared to pay more for free range. The Greens have crunched the numbers and say one in six eggs claimed to be free range isn't.

JOHN KAYE: We looked at the flock size across Australia using Egg Corporation data and it simply was not possible to produce the number of free range eggs with the number of supposed free range hens that were quoted by the Egg Corporation.

KAREN BARLOW: The Egg Corporation says John Kaye's interpretation of the figures doesn't add up.

JAMES KELLAWAY, EGG CORPORATION: It is very much a growing industry and now represents about 27 per cent of market share at retail and at the moment we do see commercial production of free range increasing at a similar rate.

ANIMAL LIBERATION ACTIVIST: No, there's no cars - go, go, go!

KAREN BARLOW: Animal Liberation Victoria has raided this chicken meat farm twenty times over the past six years.

It's not known how long these dead birds were lying there but it's industry practice that they are removed every 24 hours.

This film was taken by the activists last Friday morning.

(Excerpt from Animal Liberation's film Chicken Run)

PATTY MARK, ANIMAL LIBERATION VICTORIA: We have been made complaints to all the legal authorities, we're totally ignored. And it's a real... We are here for the birds, cause... (chokes up) It was so hard to leave that shed tonight but we are also here for the people who are eating those sick crippled little babies.

KAREN BARLOW: Some of the birds later died or had to be put down.

ANIMAL LIBERATION ACTIVIST 2: She's breathing very heavily.

KAREN BARLOW: Parkhurst Farms is owned by Con Kyriazis, an independent contractor.

When Lateline contacted him, he stood by his farming practices and was upset by the intrusion on his farm.

Mr Kyriazis says the activists have risked spreading disease and he intends to pursue legal action.

The chickens are owned by the largest provider of chicken meat to Australian consumers - the Baiada group.

Baiada inspects Parkhurst Farm every two weeks and it says everything has always been in order.

The birds are sent to a slaughterhouse, which supplies supermarkets and fast food outlets including KFC.

KFC says on its website it works with authorities to ensure humane farming practices:

VOICEOVER (reading from website): All chickens supplied to KFC roam free in large, clean, air-conditioned barns with continuous access to fresh food and clean water.

KAREN BARLOW: And in a separate statement to Lateline, KFC said:

VOICEOVER (reading from statement): We confirm that we source chicken from the Baiada Group, being an industry leader.

Baiada have confirmed that this matter has been thoroughly investigated and their contracted farmer strongly denies these allegations.

KAREN BARLOW: If these chickens were properly labelled, what would you want to see on these chickens?

PATTY MARK: Made with cruelty.

KAREN BARLOW: Many consumers don't want to know how their food is produced, but those who do have to depend on labelling.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) enforces the trade practices act when labelling is deceptive or misleading.

GRAEME SAMUEL, ACCC: We receive complaints. We receive complaints not only from consumers but very often from competitors, that will, for example, say that eggs that are being claimed to have been produced in a free range environment are actually being produced in a caged environment.

KAREN BARLOW: Up until now there has been absolutely no penalty for lying about where food has come from.

GRAEME SAMUEL: The whole area of dealing with misleading and deceptive conduct is frustrating for us because we just find, as is so often said to us in response to court orders that we receive, that you simply rapped those engaged in the misconduct over the back of the hand with a feather, and we have to say, that's probably all that's happened.

KAREN BARLOW: Last week, the Federal Government passed a law giving the ACCC something harder to hit with.

Under the new laws, there will be penalties of up to \$1.1 million for companies that engage in false or misleading conduct.

But it's yet to be seen how these new penalties will apply to the area of food, where definitions have traditionally been loose.

GRAEME SAMUEL: Invariably, though, where you don't have a specific, prescribed standard, what you have is even voluntary standards, you're going to have some grey areas.

KAREN BARLOW: The term "free range" falls into one of those grey areas.

In 2007, free range pork farmers took a case to the ACCC which argued some pork farmers were marketing their meat as free range when their animals were free range only in the first few weeks of their lives.

The free range farmers lost their case, again, due to the lack of legally defined terms.

There is a parliamentary review underway at the moment specifically into food labelling standards.

Headed by the former Health Minister Neal Blewett, ethical labelling is one of a number of issues that it will deal with.

JAMES KELLAWAY: The egg industry would welcome a frame work of legislation to assist to ensure consumers are actually getting what they're paying for. So from that perspective, we would be more than welcome on further legislation in this industry as it relates to labelling and product integrity.

PROFESSOR PETER SINGER: If we are going to eat animal products then I think there's a heavy responsibility on us to make sure that the animals didn't suffer. And that might involve a bit of going to local markets, or, at the very least, buying certified organic, given the present system.

And that will definitely be better than the factory farm production. I think those are options. I don't think we should be eating nearly as much meat or animal products as we we're eating anyway.

Karen Barlow, Lateline.

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