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Thursday July 11 2019

Dairy farmers move to reclaim “milk” label

For Immediate Release

AUSTRALIA’S dairy farmers are urging the federal government to change the country’s food standards in a bid to ban plant-based products from using the term “milk” on labels and in marketing.

Peak dairy farmer group Australian Dairy Farmers (ADF) has written to federal agriculture minister Bridget McKenzie and Chair of the Ministerial Food Forum Richard Colbeck, requesting:

- a holistic review of labelling and marketing on non-dairy alternatives, including possible changes to the Food Standards Code; and
- the development of additional regulations to prevent plant-based alternatives from ‘evoking’ the qualities and values of dairy.

ADF President Terry Richardson said the dishonest labelling and marketing strategy gave the misleading impression that plant-based products had a nutritional equivalency with dairy milk.

A 2017 survey by Dairy Australia showed 54 per cent of respondents bought plant-based milk alternatives because they perceived them to be healthier than dairy milk, while market research firm IBISWorld estimates Australia’s plant-based “milk” product industry has grown at an annualised rate of 4.1 per cent over the five years to 2018-19, to \$165.8 million today.

“Over the past decade, a growing number of plant-based products have cropped up, using the name milk, co-opting the look and feel of dairy milk right down to the packaging, and trading on dairy’s reputation to gain a marketing advantage.

"We have seen a growing number of plant-based products on supermarket shelves over the last decade, gaining a marketing advantage by using the name milk and co-opting the look and feel of dairy, while claiming to have nutritional equivalency with dairy milk."

A ban on plant-based products using the “milk” label would bring Australia into line with other countries, after the European Court of Justice in 2017 mandated that dairy terms could not be used on plant-based products, even with clarifying terms.

"We are calling for changes to the food standards so that consumers trying to make a healthy choice at the supermarket have the benefit of transparent and accurate product labelling," Mr Richardson said.

The call comes on the back of the recent Ministerial Forum inquiry into misleading descriptions on meat and dairy alternatives.

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