

### **About Brookfarm**

Brookfarm is a food manufacturer in Northern NSW. We employ over 45 staff and are one of the largest food manufacturers in Byron Bay. We grow macadamias and value add to them making Macadamia Mueslis, Macadamia Oils, Premium nut mixes and Muesli Bars. We export to over 12 countries and throughout Australia. We supply to Domestic and international airlines and the independent retail sector.

Brookfarm was Telstra Business of the Year in 2007

NAB Agribusiness of the year – 2009

Premiers Award Winner – NSW Sustainable Business of the year 2015

Highly Commended – NSW Export Award Winner 2015

### **Country of Origin**

I have attended all Country Origin workshops that were offered to Industry in our region of Northern NSW

My overall concern is that while the concept of Country of Origin labelling is an excellent initiative and clear Country of Origin labelling is needed, the current proposals discriminate against small and medium Australian businesses.

### **Small Business discrimination**

Food Labelling rules should apply to all products that are covered by food labelling rules under current legislation.

The main area of concern that I have that snack foods (including chips but not nuts), confectionary, soft drinks (but not juice), bottled water and alcohol will be exempt.

I understand this decision has been made on the basis that consumers are *less* interested in the COOL of these products (based on the Colmar Brunton consumer research). The government should apply laws uniformly, not just what one survey shows is a perceived trend at the time.

This makes a mockery of consistent and uniform food labelling and is hard to see as anything other than a cave in to the large food manufacturers.

It is also incredibly inequitable to small and medium businesses as there is a significant cost associated with changing labels.

This has the potential to make healthy fresh foods less competitive against snack products which could only be described as a perverse outcome. It is potentially a disaster from a public health perspective.

### **Seasonal Ingredients**

In the COO presentation this slide specifically addresses what they call “seasonal ingredients” where products that may have to use imported products from time to time can use an “at least” or “average” claim that should allow some variation in country of origin of ingredients without having to change a label.

Brookfarm orders our packaging a minimum of 3-6 months ahead of time- it is impossible to know if there is going to be a drought or catastrophic failure of an Australian nut or fruit crop and what a percentage change may be given that it may not happen at all. This has happened in the past only once in the past 5 years when for example the Australian almond crop failed. I cannot change packaging at a whim for only 3 months, nor is it fair to make us say we use a % of imported almonds when that does not usually happen at all.

Brookfarm currently uses the Australian Made logo on its packaging for export markets but the % bar proposed in this legislation would be confusing in export markets and we would have to develop a different package for export markets. Expected increase in annual costs \$400,000

### **Governance and Inspection**

Brookfarm has had one packaging inspection in 15 years for its food labelling

How is the government planning to implement a far more complex set of rules when it currently doesn't inspect and verify if a product meets the Made in Australia standards in the current food laws.

The Government need to implement inspection of the current Country of Origin rules.

### **Imported goods**

Imported goods do not have to comply with this legislation. Any food labelling legislation should apply to imported and Australian goods. This is the case in every other country that I am aware of- to do other than this is discriminatory to Australian manufacturers.

The Australian Government is very keen to publically distance themselves from any possibility that this initiative is seen as a non-tariff barrier to imports out of fear of the WTO and is framing this solely in terms of providing clarity to consumers and this is making them a little cautious.

### **Practicality of pack sizes**

Currently on all pack labels we have to indicate

- ☐ Nutrition information
- ☐ Ingredients
- ☐ Allergens

The font size of these COO recommendations will be difficult to implement on small packages

### **Brookfarm Recommendations**

The Government develops revised Country of Origin laws that apply to all food currently subject to Australian Food Labelling laws and comply with our WTO obligations - this includes imported food and also relates to current small pack size regulations

The Government implements policing of its existing food labelling guidelines

### **Additional commentary**

The issue is one of food safety, **not** country of origin.

Hepatitis A is generally not tested for when products are coming into the country.

This means we could have the same issue with food product coming from any country, including Australia.

It is the responsibility of the manufacturer of the ingredient, the importer, and the producer of the finished product to ensure that their food chain is safe and clean.

A mandatory test for Hep A on imported food would make more sense, rather than targeting a side issue that has taken the limelight from the actual problem.

The message coming from the Government is that imported food is bad just because it comes from overseas.

We have missed an opportunity to educate producers and consumers on safe food practice. Instead we have a knee jerk reaction that will do nothing to fix the problem if it occurred again.

A scenario example; if there was Hep A in Turkish Apricots, in what way would the consumer be better protected by this legislation?