



30 April 2010

Australia buys more time to end mulesing

Australian woolgrowers have bought more time to resolve a standoff over sheep mulesing with export customers and animal welfare groups.

Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) hosted US National Retail Federation (NRF) deputy vice president Erik Autor's visit to Australia this week, where he met woolgrowers, researchers and government representatives.

The top executive of the world's largest retail trade association told AAP he was going home on Friday pleased with Australia's efforts on animal welfare.

The AWI had intended to stop mulesing - the removal of skin from the rear ends of sheep to prevent fly-strike - with an alternative method by the end of 2010 but last year abandoned the plan.

It was a letdown for US retailers that sell Australian wool garments and are allied with animal rights group People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA).

PETA is lobbying to make a ban on mulesing a condition of the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement under negotiation.

It also says the federal government should stop funding AWI if it does not agree to a date to end mulesing, and suggests 2012.

But Mr Autor said he was satisfied with efforts to cease the practice, particularly progress in programs to breed sheep that won't need to have skin cut away.

"I'm much more optimistic about the efforts under way on the genetic side," he told AAP.

"I won't hazard a guess as to how long it could take, as it's not simple, and then you have got to come up with a genetics program that's going to be broadly useful to the industry."

Mr Autor said he would encourage retailers to seek a National Wool Declaration (NWD) telling buyers whether sheep were mulesed and what if any pain relief was used, rather than boycotting Australian wool altogether.

He also said he would advise buyers to seek the advice from animal welfare groups other than PETA, such as the RSPCA, and would not back efforts to cut funding to AWI.

"I would be concerned if another arbitrary deadline were set and the consequences of not meeting it was to turn off the tap for money into research like the genetics program," Mr Autor said.

AWI acting chief Stuart McCullough said the organisation continued to urge woolgrowers to use the NWD system, which should see the demand and price for non-mulesed wool go up.



AWGA - News Update

"We will continue to keep retailers and brands informed of our progress and strengthen relationships," he said.

GABRIELLE DUNLEVY

Related Links

<http://australianwoolgrowers.com.au/>

Source: <http://news.smh.com.au/action/printArticle?id=1397824>