

Meat industry warned about social media

Malcolm Sutton

SOCIAL media is a beast to be reckoned with and if the meat industry adopts an attitude of complacency it does so at its own peril.

Speakers at the recent Australian Meat Industry Council business conference in Adelaide warned that industry needed to be on the front foot to tackle misinformation before it grabbed hold.

Their cautions followed controversy last year when celebrity chef Jamie Oliver derided processing methods behind Boneless Lean Beef Trimmings on American national television despite it being scientifically sanctioned.

It sparked a social media frenzy that resulted in McDonald's, Burger King and Taco Bell eventually dropping the product and BLBT producers, Beef Products Incorporated, closing three of its four plants in the United States and laying off about 650 workers.

T&R Pastoral sales manager Leith Tilley says the spread of misinformation through social media is a challenge the Australian meat industry has to face.

"Whether it's Jamie Oliver, or the next chef that comes along, I think as an industry we need to act as one, a single voice, and engage stakeholders when these issues come up, whatever they might be," he said.

"It's got to be done based on pure fact and engagement and let's not shy away from it, because it's probably going to happen. It's just a matter of time."

BLBT is made by heating and spinning trimmings of regular meat cuts to separate small portions of beef from the fat, which is then treated with food grade ammonium hydroxide (ammonia and water) to destroy any bacteria that could be present.

The result, which has been determined as safe by the United States Department of Agriculture and the Consumer Federation of America, is typically used in hamburger patties.

Negative community reaction occurred despite CFA Food Policy Institute director Chris Waldrop saying BPI were "industry leaders in food safety", and despite ammonium hydroxide occurring naturally in plant or animal proteins



Australian Meat Council South Australian chairman Trevor Hill.

<http://sl.farmonline.com.au/news/nationalrural/livestock/cattle/meat-industry-warned-about-social-media/2624269.aspx>