



**AUSTRALIAN CHICKEN MEAT
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CHICKEN MYTHS KEEP FATTENING THE AUSTRALIAN CHOOK

Australian Chicken Meat Federation calls for consumers to face the facts

Research released today by the Australian Chicken Meat Federation (ACMF) has revealed that almost 80% of Australians believe that something is added to the Australian chicken to make it grow artificially larger, with a staggering 66% of Australians believing added hormones are a contributing factor making chickens larger – a far cry from the truth.¹

ACMF Executive Director Andreas Dubs said that he was surprised by the extent of the mistaken beliefs.

“Amazingly, 66% of consumers believe added hormones are making the Australian chook larger – yet added hormones/steroids haven’t been used in chicken production in Australia for over 40 years!”

“It’s not antibiotics, hormones or genetic modification making chickens larger – the truth is far less dramatic. It’s decades of careful traditional breeding, choosing to breed from only the best and strongest birds in each generation,” Dr Dubs said.

“Consumers are enjoying a plumper and larger chicken thanks to best practice in traditional breeding and continual improvements in how we raise and care for chickens. It is these contributing factors that have enabled us to provide consumers with a meatier chicken than twenty years ago.

“Our recent research has highlighted some incredible misconceptions about how chickens are raised in this country and it is time the industry addressed these with the facts,” Dr Dubs said.

Reference 1: Commissioned by The Australian Chicken Meat Federation and conducted by Galaxy Research from a national sample of 1,100 respondents aged 16 years and older (Weekend Omnibus 5-7 May and 19-21 May 2006)

MYTH: Chickens are fed hormones to make them grow faster and larger

An overwhelming 66% of Australians believe that added hormones contribute to chickens growing bigger and plumper. Surprisingly, the majority of 16-24 year olds (67%) were just as likely to think that hormones were used to make chickens bigger and plumper – a startling misconception, particularly given that hormones have not been used in their lifetime! 35% of all consumers actually believe that added hormones in chickens represent a health hazard to them.

FACT: No added hormones or steroids have been used in chicken meat production in Australia for over forty years. The use of added hormones in poultry has been banned since the mid 1960s.

“Many of these myths are fuelled by inconsistencies at a grass roots level such as advertising for ‘hormone free’ chicken. In actual fact, such advertising does nothing more than state what all producers do, and relies on consumer’s lack of awareness of the fact that no chicken meat in Australia has added hormones. It is this lack of awareness that the industry is now addressing as part of a broader educational program,” Dr Dubs said.

MYTH: Chickens are fed antibiotics to make them grow faster and larger

36% of Australians believe that antibiotics have contributed to the size of today’s Australian Chook.

FACT: The improvements in growth rates achieved over the years is not due to antibiotics. Antibiotics have an important role to play in ensuring the health of chickens; healthy birds are naturally more likely to grow better and more efficiently than birds that are unwell.

The Australian Chicken Meat Federation recommends the use of antibiotics in two important and responsible ways:

- *therapeutic agents* - used to treat bacterial infection in sick birds
- *preventative agents* - used to prevent disease occurring in healthy animals.

The Federation does not approve of using antibiotics for the purpose of growth promotion.

Only antibiotics approved by Australia’s regulatory authorities and administered in accordance with strict guidelines are used. This ensures that no residue of antibiotics remains in chicken meat offered for sale.

MYTH: Meat chickens are genetically modified

53% of Australians believe that genetic modification of birds has contributed to the change in size.

FACT: Australian chickens are not genetically modified! Improvements in their growth, feed conversion efficiency, tenderness and other characteristics are entirely due to traditional breeding techniques that is, selecting only the fittest, most efficient and strongest birds to produce the next generation.

“Addressing these research findings and giving consumers access to an information line “Chook Infoline”....1300 4 CHOOKS (1300 424 665) is arming them with the facts, raising general knowledge about the chicken meat industry in this country and dispelling myths about what goes into today’s chook,” he concluded.

KEY FINDINGS OF RESEARCH: WHAT CONSUMERS BELIEVE...

- Almost 80% (79%) of Australian consumers believe that something is added to the Australian chicken to make it grow artificially larger.

- Here is what Australian consumers think has contributed to bird size over the last 20 years;
 - 66% mistakenly mention added hormones
 - 56% mistakenly mention added steroids
 - 36% mistakenly mention antibiotics as having contributed to the change in size.
 - 53% mistakenly believe that genetic modification has contributed to larger chickens.
 - 37% correctly identify improvements through selective (traditional) breeding as a contributing factor
 - 34% correctly believe that more nutritious feed has contributed to improved growth
 - 21% correctly list better conditions / better cared for chickens as a factor for improved growth
 - 42% of respondents are of the opinion that only organic chicken is free of added hormones. (This is false as no chicken in Australia has added hormones)
 - Only 4% of Australians correctly believe hormones are **not** added in any chicken production.

- The research shows a widespread lack of understanding of how characteristics of plants and animals are improved by **traditional selective breeding**, whereby those plants or animals with the most desirable characteristics are selected to provide for future generations, thus reinforcing these desirable characteristics.
- Despite the many misconceptions held by consumers, there continues to be a strong demand for chicken meat. A recent survey found that one out of every three people eats chicken at least three times a week and well over 90% of people on average eat chicken at least once a week.²

ENDS

Reference 2: Research conducted by Colmar Brunton (Feb 2006) from a national sample of 1,800 current chicken meat users.

This release was prepared by Reed Weir Communications on behalf of the Australian Chicken Meat Industry.

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