

Alasdair MacLeod: Mis-labelling of irradiated Australian tomatoes still of concern.

# Irradiated imposters still major talking point



Mis-labelling of the Australian irradiated tomatoes available on the domestic market is still a “huge area of concern” for tomato growers, TomatoesNZ chairman Alasdair MacLeod said at the group’s annual general meeting in Rotorua last month.

In his chairman’s report to the meeting Alasdair told the 50 growers present more tomatoes were due to arrive from Australia this month and he had little confidence in the Ministry for Primary Industries’ ability to enforce the labelling requirements.

“There is still huge concern about the mis-labelling of irradiated Australian tomatoes and we are struggling to get traction on it with MPI and retailers,” he said.

Since last year’s attempt to get the government agency and its Minister, Nathan Guy, to take the issue more seriously, the group has conducted a survey of customers to gauge their interest in correct irradiation labelling. >

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"The Minister pushed back on us last time, on our lack of evidence and claims of customer concern.

"So we've done a scientific survey with a reputable firm of over 1000 interviews and we know 85% want the labelling.

"At least we will have current New Zealand specific data for the next time we speak to the Minister."

Alasdair said it had been very difficult to get traction on the issue in the media and also to get movement on enforcement by MPI.

"We have provided them with evidence, photos, names and market details and we will continue to do this.

"We will keep pushing on the overwhelming concern of customers to have choice about what they are buying."

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The meeting also discussed the process around TomatoesNZ becoming an incorporation, so that it could belong to the government's 'GIA' (government industry agreements) scheme for biosecurity.

There was discussion about the rules of the new incorporation and there was agreement that the board would discuss the rules with growers throughout the year, take on their feedback and bring a final version back to the AGM next year for approval.

Alasdair stressed that moving TomatoesNZ to an incorporation, away

from the 'umbrella' of Horticulture New Zealand, did not change the working relationship between the two organisations. Both tomatoes and HortNZ levy will still be collected by HortNZ.

He said the process means there is an exceptional amount of paperwork for the board and growers to deal with, and they had "tried very hard" to find a way to join GIA without needing to be incorporated.

Alasdair was appointed chair of the new TomatoesNZ Inc. 



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