

## Can Logos and Accreditation systems be trusted?

The short answer is **NO**. Egg substitution has been rife for years but probably first came to general notice in Victoria during 2007 with a high profile case when a company was fined for labelling eggs as organic when they were from conventional farms.

In 2012, a NSW barn egg farm was fined for packaging its eggs as free range and a South Australian egg seller was fined for putting cage eggs in free range cartons.

Also in 2012, an egg farm in WA was caught with a massive overstocking rate which breached its planning conditions. This farm was accredited by a national egg quality scheme but despite annual audits which required compliance with planning conditions the farm remained accredited. The accreditation was only withdrawn once the breaches became public and legal proceedings began.

In Victoria in 2012 inspection and audit processes revealed that a farm which sold eggs to a major supermarket was packing and selling non-accredited eggs from dubious sources and that colouring additives were being used in poultry feed – breaching particular standards.

Labels can also be misleading, with pictures of hens frolicking on green pasture, which frequently doesn't resemble conditions on the farm.

A questionable 'organic' accreditation body also exists in Victoria which is not recognised by mainstream organic bodies and which does not have a credible inspection process – but claims that the products which its members sell are certified organic. AQIS, which registers organic certification bodies in Australia, is apparently only involved with export industries – so it has no jurisdiction over domestic 'organic' claims.

Accreditation means different things to different people. Consumers rightly expect it to convey a message of credibility about a particular product, but to many businesses it's simply a marketing tool designed to allow them to make claims which increase their profits.

A logo can be a valuable asset if it is trusted by consumers. But its value is destroyed if it is shown to be meaningless. Any accreditation program is only as good as the willingness of the accreditation body to maintain its standards and defend its logo.

Sadly, it has been shown that accreditation bodies often ignore their own standards just to keep members on their books. **Is it any wonder that consumers don't trust labels – or logos?**

FRE 1 2013