

Consumer 'preyed upon' says marketing board spokesman

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Mr. Roth was invited to attend the University of Minnesota to discuss his organic production methods.

Mr. Maxwell agrees organic poultry may have a different taste but said the difference "should not be related to quality and safety of farm production." He added that organic poultry has not been proven any safer than non-organic poultry.

Consumers shouldn't believe they are buying second best if they don't buy organic poultry, said Mr. Maxwell. Anti-biotics fed to non-organic chicken does not leave any residue in the meat, he added. Mr. Maxwell did say Miracle Mart has come as close as possible to offering what is said to be organic poultry.

"To the best of our knowledge Rex Roth's chicken is truly organic but I wish they would leave it at that instead of clouding the issue with so many other claims," Mr. Maxwell said.

Ben Koldyk, in charge of meat and fish merchandising for Miracle Mart, said the grocery chain is simply following consumer demand as "organic is a huge part of the future."

Mr. Koldyk said the organic feed must be grown on a farm that has been completely free of chemicals for three years. He said although the Organic Crop Improvement Association is now self-governing, the federal government will soon be recognizing organic products.

The marketing board is also concerned that Loblaw's is promoting their Natural Choice Green chicken as certified, but the consumer is not told by whom.

The chicken is certified by Bill Stevenson, a former professor of Animal and Poultry Science at the University of Guelph who has extensive background in genetics and veterinary sciences. "So what, the public won't immediately know that and will assume the chicken is something special," said Mr. Maxwell.

FEDERALLY INSPECTED

All poultry, including Loblaw's Natural Choice Green chicken is federally inspected. However, consumers may interpret the certification as higher quality produce when no approval of the certification is even required, Mr. Maxwell said.

Georgetown Loblaw's manager, Ron McEachern, said the Roth Family natural green chicken may cost more but people seem willing to pay the premium. He said consumers are moving toward the natural product market because they believe that non-additive pro-

ducts are safer. Despite the board's claims, he said customers are educated enough to know what they're buying.

Manager of Georgetown Miracle Mart, Chris Bootland insists there is a specific market for the organic chicken. He also emphasized that people buy the chicken for what it doesn't contain, assuming it is safer.

Loblaw's vice-president of meat operations, Deane Collinson, said consumers are looking for safer products made without additives and the grocery chain is simply catering to this clientele.

Poultry Farms raises, processes and packages the Loblaw's chicken

separately, according to the protocol designed by Bill Stevenson so the entire process can be closely monitored, said Mr. Collinson.

The chickens are raised differently on all-vegetable feed with no meat by-products to contaminate chicken meat, he said. According to Mr. Collinson, the entire process is unique in that feathers are burned off at lower temperatures to retain flavor below the skin and the chicken is air-cooled therefore the consumer is not paying for added water.

NEW PROCESS

Other processors are allowed to pick up a maximum of 12 per cent water in the cooling process,

however, the new air-cooling process, which takes about 12 hours, won't add water weight and will even tenderize the meat, he said.

Loblaw's Green natural chicken is also packaged by hand, removing excess skin and fat, Mr. Collinson said. The price difference relates to different housekeeping and sanitation methods, he added. The consumer is being charged premium prices for the natural poultry because it costs more to raise chicken under the new expectations. He insists no more profit is made from the natural chicken than on regular chicken.

Mac Traas, director of the Ontario Chicken Producers

Marketing Board, who also has a chicken farm in Campbellville, said consumers are being confused by the different labels and could be getting cheated.

If consumers want to pay extra for what some say is a better-tasting meat, then that opportunity should be there, he said. But they may not realize the chicken they buy is not government approved as organic, not raised in cages or fed hormones, Mr. Traas said.

The uninformed consumer is being preyed upon by selling the idea that one can eat chicken meat with a clear conscience, he said. "I eat what I produce and what others produce without any qualms."

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Farms receive tax rebate

TORONTO — The Ontario government will provide \$151 million in farm tax rebates for the 1990/91 Farm Tax Rebate Program, Agriculture and Food Minister David Ramsay announced.

Owners of farm property in agricultural production will receive a rebate equal to 75 per cent of taxes levied on eligible farmland and outbuildings.

"The Farm Tax Rebate Program demonstrates this government's continuing commitment to financial stability for Ontario farmers," Ramsay said.

The two-year program reflects the principle that all owners of farm property in agricultural production should be treated equally. The program's focus is on land in agricultural production.

To be eligible for the first year's rebate, farm property must be used as part of a farming operation with a gross production value of at least \$7,000 in 1990.

Ramsay's announcement follows an extensive evaluation of the program by a committee composed of representatives of the farming community and officials of Ontario's Ministry of Agriculture and Food.

Applications and brochures will be mailed to owners of farm property in mid-September, 1990.