

Australian Meat Industry Council position on using the term: Ultra-Processed Meat Products

The Australian Meat Industry Council (AMIC) is the peak body representing retailers, processors, and smallgoods manufacturers across the country. We are committed to ensuring the safety and quality of our products and to meeting the expectations and preferences of our consumers.

Ultra-Processed Meat Products

AMIC, strongly disagrees with the use of the term “ultra-processed meat products” to describe smallgoods products. This term is misleading, inaccurate, and is unfair characterisation of how smallgoods products are produced.

According to the NOVA food classification system, which is recognised by global health agencies, ultra-processed foods are foods that have been altered to include fats, starches, sugars, salts, and hydrogenated oils extracted from other foods. They also contain ingredients that are never or rarely used in kitchens, such as high-fructose corn syrup, hydrolysed proteins, and artificial flavours, colours and sweeteners¹.

Smallgoods products, on the other hand, are not ultra-processed foods. They are meat products that undergo cooking, cooling, curing, fermenting or drying processes². They are meat-based products and comply with the FSANZ Food Standards Code.

Smallgoods products are part of the Australian culinary tradition and culture, and they are enjoyed by many consumers who appreciate their taste, quality, and convenience. They are also a source of protein, iron, zinc, and vitamin B12, which are essential for human health. Smallgoods products can be consumed as part of a balanced and varied diet, along with plenty of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and water.

AMIC would like to emphasize the following key points regarding the use of the term “Ultra Processed Meat” to describe smallgoods products:

1. The Australian smallgoods industry is a proud tradition that offers a variety of high-quality and safe meat products that reflect the diversity of the Australian population.
2. Smallgoods products are not ultra-processed foods, but rather meat products that undergo different processes to enhance flavour and increase shelf life, in compliance with the Australian Food Standards Code.
3. The term ultra-processed is misleading and confusing for consumers, who may not understand the difference between processed and ultra-processed foods or may wrongly assume that smallgoods products are unhealthy or harmful, when in fact they can provide essential nutrients as part of a balanced and varied diet.

The NOVA classification is a system that categorises foods according to the extent and purpose of food processing, rather than in terms of nutrients. According to this classification, ultra-processed food products are those that have been heavily modified with additives, preservatives, artificial colours and flavours, and other substances that may have negative health effects. However, this classification does not consider the quality, safety, and nutritional value of the ingredients and limited processing used to make these products.

It also does not consider the diversity and innovation of the food industry, especially the smallgoods sector, which produces a variety of products that cater to different tastes, preferences, and dietary needs.

Moreover, the NOVA classification is based on a limited number of studies, mostly observational, that have not established a causal link between the consumption of ultra-processed food products and the risk of chronic diseases.

AMIC believes that:

1. The NOVA definition of ultra-processed food products, which include products like sausages, burgers, hot dogs, and other reconstituted meat products, requires further science and evidence to justify this statement³.
2. The NOVA system is a food classification system that categorises foods based on the extent and purpose of their industrial processing³. While the system has been adopted by several countries and international organisations to inform food and nutrition policies, it has also been criticised for its limitations.
3. The system provides guidance for optimal food choices that benefit health and sustainability³. “It only points out foods that need to be avoided instead of providing guidance on portions or frequencies that aids in obesity. The nutrient contents of food are not discussed by NOVA⁶.”
4. A survey conducted by French food and nutrition specialists found that the consistency among evaluators was low, even when ingredient information was available⁶. This suggests that the current NOVA criteria do not allow for robust and functional food assignments. “Additionally, some research has suggested that the definitions used in the NOVA system are difficult for people to use reliably⁴.”

It is important to consider these limitations of the system and use it in conjunction with other tools and resources to make informed decisions about food choices.

Therefore, AMIC believes that the NOVA food group definition of ultra-processed food products is too simplistic and misleading, and that more rigorous and comprehensive research and science is needed to evaluate the health impacts of different types of food processing.

Industry is dedicated to working with the relevant authorities, stakeholders, and consumers in ensuring the safety and quality of our products and to meeting the expectations and preferences of our consumers.

End.

References:

1. **FSANZ Food Labelling** - <https://www.foodstandards.gov.au/industry/labelling/Pages/default.aspx>
2. **PrimeSafe** - <https://www.primesafe.vic.gov.au/standards-and-guidelines/primenotes/smallgoods-meat-products/>
3. **Ultra-processed foods: what they are and how to identify them** | Public Health Nutrition | Cambridge Core - <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/public-health-nutrition/article/ultraprocessed-foods-what-they-are-and-how-to-identify-them/E6D744D714B1FF09D5BCA3E74D53A185>
4. **NOVA System:** <https://www.novasystems.com/au>
5. **The NOVA classification: classification of foods according to processing:** <https://nutrition.bmj.com/content/bmjnph/early/2021/07/06/bmjnph-2021-000303/DC1/embed/inline-supplementary-material-1.pdf?download=true>
6. **NOVA System Food Guidance** - <https://www.news-medical.net/news/20230421/NOVA-systems-food-guidance-Valid-concerns-or-oversimplification-of-health-and-diet.aspx>