

It's easy being green

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FOR those beef producers looking to expand into other markets, environmental certification might be just the ticket.

An independent study by two Australian cattle companies identified market opportunities in Europe and Asia for beef sourced from properties with internationally-recognised environmental certification.

The Queensland-based, not-for-profit Australian Land Management Group (ALMG), which helped fund the study in conjunction with Yass-based Wilmot Cattle Company and TVF Pastoral Company in Queensland, has been pushing for a globally recognised national land management certification system for about 10 years.

ALMG chief executive, Tony Gleeson, "Avondale", Legume, said the study highlighted the need for the Australian beef industry, and for agriculture as a whole, to adopt internationally recognised environmental certification systems.

Conducted by Europe-based consultant, Alex Dalley, and Asian trade specialist, Ross Maddock, Mr Gleeson said the study, entitled the Green Beef Project, identified growing demand from environmentally aware consumers who wanted to know the source of foods and fibres and how they were produced.

Mr Dalley, a food product chain consultant in The Hague, said specialist distributors were willing to trial shipments of environmentally-certified beef from Australia.

"It shows beef processors need to find points of differentiation in their products," he said.

"Australia's environmental strength makes a great basis for a brand that will appeal to European consumers in restaurants and gourmet supermarkets."

However, more information was needed about the Australian and overseas markets so eligible producers could take advantage of the opportunity.

Mr Gleeson said if Australian producers were going to compete against anything other than price they had to take advantage of growing markets like this one.

"It is a given now that food has to be safe, so we need to find things that make our wonderful Australian product different," he said.

"This study has demonstrated we can find new markets and people are interested in gaining certification, now we need support from industry organisations to develop the system."



Mr Gleeson said Australia needed to implement an environmental certification system that took into account producers' needs.

While some people might think of those involved in the ALMG as environmentalists, rather they want to manage their land responsibly and sustainably while maximising productivity.

The ALMG Certification System allows producers to deliver improved environmental outcomes in ways that enable them to be recognised and rewarded.

"It is a whole-of-farm, externally-audited environmental management system that complies with the internationally recognised ISO14001 standard," Mr Gleeson said.

"Unless we do this, overseas importers, wholesalers and retailers will impose systems on Australian producers that are designed for European and American systems."

With more than 200 landholders across four States currently implementing the ALMG system, Mr Gleeson said a whole-of-farm approach was needed.

"Industry structures are important, but for the environment we need a broader approach."

To become environmentally certified, landholders need to demonstrate they are continuously improving their environmental outcome and complying with the ISO14001 standards.

"The ALMG system allows producers, with some restrictions, to identify what they think is most important in regards to the environment on their land," Mr Gleeson said.

"This can include maintaining adequate groundcover, or taking it further and becoming organic."

Mr Gleeson said the momentum for this kind of certification was increasing because it came with benefits to producers.

For example, Melbourne-based wool business, **The Merino Company**, has taken a lead and is paying a three per cent premium for wool from properties with ALMG certification.

Although it is not recognised by the government, the ALMG is supported by industry bodies such as Elders, Australian Wool Innovation, East Coast Stockfeeds and Grain, and the Queensland Murray-Darling Committee