

Organic chicken and ITV

A call for real organic poultry – produced with ethics, principles and adherence to proper organic standards

Fowl Play: Tonight with Trevor McDonald

“Jonathan Maitland presents troubling evidence that when it comes to improved animal welfare and superior nutritional content, the organic chicken industry may be talking out of the side of its beak.” So ran the TV Highlights preview in the Daily Telegraph of June 11th.

For some time now at The Organic research Centre – Elm Farm we have been aware that the range of “organic” poultry on sale up and down the country in supermarkets and elsewhere does less than credit to the UK organic movement as a whole.

The ITV programme Tonight with Trevor McDonald – Fowl Play broadcast on ITV 1 June 11th 2007 has highlighted the fact to viewers that some parts of the “organic” poultry sector are simply not worthy of the name. It catalogued appalling animal welfare and “intensive” production methods in “organic” units growing birds for Asda.

Set against this travesty of “organic” production, the programme showed how high welfare, quality birds are cared for and reared for direct sale to the public at Providence Farm in Devon – the 18 acre holding of Pammy and Ritchie Riggs. The eating panel for ITV was unanimous in its support for the Providence Farm table bird on the grounds of eating quality, taste and high animal welfare.

Our director – Lawrence Woodward – played a central analytical and commentary role in the programme. He expressed his horror that parts of the UK organic poultry sector are in such bad shape and merely mimic much of what is so wrong and unsustainable in the conventional, industrial sector.

High stocking density, the lack of fully organic feed, the lack of organic chicks, poor welfare management, lack of access to field range and stale, damp bedding are all elements of the betrayal of “proper” organic standards.

There are though organic poultry producers doing the job properly – the Riggs and Sheepdrove Organic Farm are but two examples. But with rotten apples in the barrel now exposed by ITV, the dangerous question that’s obviously raised in viewer’s minds is what confidence can we, as consumers, have in any organic poultry?

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