



'Eco-meat' proves a clean winner

By BRIAN CLANCY

RENDINA'S is not your normal Melbourne suburban butcher shop.

It specialises in organic and bio-dynamic meats and, more recently, Enviromeat supplied by Gippsland beef producers committed to environmental management.

Ralph Rendina's shop in well-heeled North Balwyn is a small, but busy, shop employing three butchers.

In fact, it looks more like a delicatessen, with an array of organic eggs, cheeses, small goods and condiments.

A big poster advertises Otway free range pork.

But there are also posters talking about the suppliers of the lamb and beef, including the Gippsland suppliers of Enviromeat.

Ralph, who began working in butcher shops at the age of 14, opted to invest in his own shop 10 years ago.

"I wanted to be different and I saw an opportunity in organic and bio-dynamic in a suburb when customers were conscious of chemicals and the environment," he said.

Ralph makes no apologies for charging 20-30 per cent above the supermarket's prices for conventional meat.

"We can offer better customer service and a more specialised product," he said.

Rendina's also provides home deliveries.

Ralph estimates 80 per cent of his customers are conventional shoppers, while 20 per cent are quite particular about the organic or chemical-free product they want.

"They are very health-conscious," he said.

He predicts that this is a growing market, which was why he had no hesitation in taking on the Enviromeat product when co-ordinator Jenny O'Sullivan knocked on his door in September.



Healthy interest: North Balwyn butcher Ralph Rendina was keen to have Enviromeat in his range.

The Enviromeat label guarantees the meat is free of growth promotants, is free range, environmentally certified and guaranteed tender under a Meat Standards Australia grading.

Under an arrangement with Enviromeat, Rendina's can tap into the beef supplies from one of

25 Gippsland farmers who have an EMS certification.

Jenny said Rendina's buys direct from the farmer, paying a premium of 30 cents to ruling over-the-hooks prices.

Rendina's has a weekly throughput of three to five sides of beef.

Ralph said his preference was for a 15 to 18-month-old steer dressing at 230kg.

All steers are processed at Radfords in Warragul, where they are also MSA-graded.

Jenny said Enviromeat was expanding its outlets in Gippsland and was hopeful soon of announcing new outlets in Melbourne.

She said annual membership of the Enviromeat marketing group was \$500, a price which helps

offset the costs of auditing and maintaining the certification among the membership.

Members of the group completed their EMS program as part of a pilot program sponsored by Meat and Livestock Australia.

Jenny said the membership included both small and medium-sized beef producers.

She estimated the total breeding herd of the group was at least 2000 head.

Jenny believes her group has been at the forefront in linking beef marketing to an EMS certification.

She said she would like to emulate the Queensland marketing of the Eco-banana.

These bananas, with their distinctive waxed red tips, are supplied by producers who have the ultimate ISO 14001 accreditation for environmental management.

