

# AUTHORITY, POWER AND VALUE IN CONTEMPORARY INDUSTRIAL FOOD SYSTEMS

Jane Dixon

*National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, The Australian National University*

## INTRODUCTION

Currently, three explanations compete in rural sociology and agro-food studies more broadly to explain the restructuring of national food systems. The first concerns processes of globalisation and specifically the role of transnational corporations and multilateral governance mechanisms. At the heart of globalisation lies an openness to trade in commodities, technologies and knowledge, which leads national governments to pressure commodity complexes to reorganise so that they comply with rules set in international bodies like the World Trade Organisation (McMichael 1994; Burch, Goss and Lawrence 1999). The second explanation implicates reflexive consumers: those who use their knowledge, buying power and organising capacity to demand certain attributes (nutritional benefits, safety, convenience) of the market (Gabriel and Lang 1995). The third explanation is a belated recognition of the activities of actors engaged in the distribution and exchange of goods and services. Retail capital is portrayed as highly available, mobile and flexible, unlike the capital of primary and secondary producers which is more contingent upon the sunk costs of labour and location (Wrigley and Lowe 1996). The unique features of retail capital are argued to coincide with, and to contribute to, the increasing concentration in food retailing sectors worldwide, thus providing a foundation from which giant retailers can contest the power of producer groups and even the power of multinational processing firms (Hendrickson et al. 2001).

Despite the growing influence of the sociology of consumption on agro-food studies, the generation and use of cultural power by producer groups, transnational corporations retailers and governments is seldom addressed. Researchers continue to emphasise the economic power of major institutional actors, and when they do mention culture, it is in relation to consumers.

This article uses a case study of the Australian chicken meat commodity complex to explore the cultural power of food retail chains. The study supports the proposition about the growing influence of retailers, but not for the widely accepted reasons of the specific nature, and concentration, of retail capital. Instead it points to the ways in which retailers mobilise ‘intangible assets’, including corporate reputations, so as to operate free from regulatory constraints. In order to be self-regulating, a most important reputation to acquire is that of an authority figure, an entity whose influence is taken-for-granted. For this reason, I return to the sociology classics and more recent social theory to delineate the concept of ‘authority’ and to describe how authoritative processes play out in market economies that are founded on constant innovation. Based on the case study and the product category termed Home Meal Replacement, I suggest that market based authorities are beginning to usurp the influence of other long-established authority figures. It is within this context, that an assessment is provided of consumer authority in contemporary industrial food systems.

## REPRODUCING POWER: THE EMERGENCE OF MARKET-BASED AUTHORITIES

In the main, explanations for the power of retailers have been confined to their capacity to act, and specifically in relation to having superior access to finance capital (a notable exception being Humphery 1998). But as sociologists of power point out, capacity to act is but one dimension of the exercise of power; the other precondition is the right to act — to be seen as a legitimate exerciser of power (Hindess 1996; Lukes 1974). A perception that retailer actions are legitimate has an important consequence: it allows food retailers to dominate the terms of the debate by which food systems and food practices become acceptable and, ideally, unchallengeable.

If one of the bases for the legitimate exercise of power lies in having the status of an authority, then it is appropriate to revisit the concept of authority, or what has been termed “the emotional expression of power”. Sennett (1980) argues that authority is an emotional bond between people who are unequal, while Watt notes that “[a]n authority is always a superior of some kind, to be obeyed in some cases, in others to be followed, consulted, attended to, deferred to, or conformed to” (Watt 1982: 7). The definition of authority that makes sense in the context of food systems is of deference to advice or “counsel that ought to be respected” and “unthreatened and un-persuaded compliance” (Watt 1982:15-29).

Richard Sennett lays the groundwork to explore how new authorities come into being when he reminds us that authority “is itself inherently an act of imagination — it is a search for solidity and security in the strength of others” (Sennett 1980:197). Sennett’s historical overview of authority figures confirms the ephemeral nature of authority; for when authority figures are found ethically wanting, they provide lightning

rods for discontent and resistance. Civil society challenges to the injunctions of governments and professionals have created the basis for a new authority figure, the consumer (see discussion in Keat, Whiteley and Abercrombie 1994). The authoritative consumer exercises influence, it is argued, through being reflexive. By making deliberative choices and through questioning the ethics and production practices of market-based providers, consumers generate signals that suppliers ignore at their peril.

However, the authoritative consumer occupies an ambiguous space. The corporate creation of confusion around diets (Nestle 2002), coupled with a mass media barrage of nutrition science, leads consumers to search for guidance in the act of food consumption (Fischler 1993; Falk 1994).

The pre-eminence of market-based experts in modern food systems has arisen at a time when both traditional and rational-legal figures, to use Weber's distinctions, are losing their aura of authority (Weber 1947:57-58). As women become subject to the authority of the employer and their paid work activity becomes more important to labour markets and household economies, the mother's traditional food authority diminishes (Goodman and Redclift 1991). Thus, as the actor most central to household food provisioning moves to the periphery of that activity, a greater fluidity is introduced across social arrangements more broadly. As traditional authority in respect of culinary cultures becomes dis-embedded from the moral economy of the household, people look to a range of specialist fields for replacement authorities. While this is happening, the rational-legal authority of governments is under threat. As the numbers of tasks which require regulatory oversight proliferate, government capacity to coordinate popularly received responses on any one front is duly diminished (Offe 1996:63). And although government food authorities continue to regulate aspects of food safety and some limited areas of food quality - primarily in relation to nutrition (exemplified in dietary guidelines) - the decline in numbers of public sector employees, including agricultural extension officers, environmental health personnel and public health nutrition specialists means greater emphasis is laid upon the self-governing corporation and subject (Lawrence and Gray 2000; Tonts 2000).

Building relationships between the two new authorities of the second half of the twentieth century (the reflexive consumer and the corporation) has evolved incrementally, thanks largely to the "intermediary sector of the economy", the term used by Sassen to refer to the numerous experts who engage in "organis[ing] and adjudicat[ing] economic exchange for a fee" (Sassen 1991: 90).

For decades now, large corporations have fostered the growth of a producer services sector – these are the experts and professionals engaged in agricultural extension, financing, marketing boards, legal advice and lobbying. A more recent development is the emergence of a consumer services sector to assist people to consume particular goods and services and not others. Consumer services sector actors, including nutritionists and psychographic researchers, are contracted by corporations to liaise directly with consumers and to provide the companies with cultural insights that are assimilated into marketing and product development (Miller and Rose 1997). The combined producer-consumer services sector makes a living out of providing an interface between producers and consumers and by supplying logistical support for production activities, retail operations and household consumption operations. The sector provides legitimacy for company actions, through their members' identification with traditional and rational-legal institutions: professional bodies, medical science and government standard-making bodies. They legitimise "by giving a normative dignity" to the practical activities of operating in the marketplace (Scott 1995: 46)

These functionaries were described by Bourdieu (1984) as "new professionals" working in a "substitution industry" where words are exchanged rather than goods. Unlike officials who used to occupy bureaucratic positions, the new professionals are mobile and lack any durable allegiance to a particular locale or source of income. Thus they are "as disruptive of hierarchies of authority as [they are] a stabilizing influence" (Giddens 1994: 85). "New professionals" perform this dual function by simultaneously being the primary "evacuators" of traditional or customary content as well as being vehicles for supplying alternative knowledge and ideas. They act "as powerful translation devices between 'authorities' and 'individuals', shaping conduct not through compulsion but through the power of truth, the potency of rationality and the alluring promises of effectivity" (Miller and Rose 1990:19). It is these symbolic analysts, in the employ of commercial firms, who are responsible for Keat's assertion that markets are "the most powerful transgressor of boundaries, the most active dissolver of meanings [and] the most radical challenger of social authority" (Keat 1994: 39). They constitute part of the technical fraction of the transnational capitalist class, described by Sklair (2001) as fuelling globalisation in tandem with corporate executives, bureaucrats and politicians, merchants and the media.

Table 1 depicts this sub-fraction as laying the foundation of an emergent fourth type of authority. Because this class fraction is largely responsible for defining the standards around the qualities that make "food good to think", it tips the authorial balance of power in the direction of the market.

**Table 1 Types of authority**

Type of Authority	Nature of the Command	Administrative Staff
Traditional	Substantive and ethical precepts	Servants, subjects, dependents
Rational-legal	Enacted rules	Officials
Charismatic	Duties	Disciples, followers
Market	Expert defined standards	“New professionals”

The remainder of this paper provides an overview of a study of the Australian chicken meat commodity complex, and reinterprets the findings in terms of the concept of authority. It then teases out how market-based actors, including large food retail chains, are acquiring authority status. Understanding the processes that are leading to the emergence of market-based authorities illuminates the challenges faced by consumers in assuming this status for themselves. The material also amplifies why agro-food researchers should investigate the interpenetration of cultural and economic power if they are to understand the forces behind agro-food restructuring.

### **THE BALANCE OF POWER WITHIN THE CHICKEN MEAT COMMODITY COMPLEX**

In the mid 1990s I embarked upon a study of the popularity of chicken meat in Australia and elsewhere, in order to understand the types of power that shape modern food systems. A commodity systems analysis framework (Friedland 1984; Friedland 2001) was chosen to shed light on the balance of power within the system and a cultural economy approach was adopted to explore the full range of processes responsible for the hierarchical ordering of power relations (Dixon 1999).

Very briefly, because a full account of the study can be found in *The Changing Chicken* (Dixon 2002), the Australian chicken meat industry has grown spectacularly over the last quarter century with approximately six and a half million chickens coming to market each week. Producing this number for a population of nineteen million Australians is a relatively small number of chicken farmers (about 820), processing plants (about 90), employing a modest number of labourers (about 13000) (Fairbrother 2001). State governments regulate farmer pay and conditions, and hence provide a measure of stability for the industry. And under Australian quarantine regulations, chicken meat cannot be imported for human consumption. As a consequence of this protective regulatory regime, contract farmers in Australia have an incentive to invest in the latest technology and processors continue to invest in the best avian stock for Australian conditions. Because of the production-side efficiencies, some claim this to be Australia's most successful agri-food industry (Cain 1990).

Producer efficiency has helped to keep wholesale prices low and, for this reason alone, some observers credit the success of chicken relative to other meats, to its cheapness. However, my focus group research showed that the esteem with which chicken is held by consumers is more complex. Among the explanations provided were: a personal liking of chicken meals; it is healthier than red meat; it is easy to prepare and easy to chew, which was a particularly important attribute with children; and, above all chicken is versatile, which extended to its acceptance by vegetarian family members. It was a particularly 'family friendly' food. Chicken also emerged from the group discussions with several negative features: removing chicken fat was viewed with disgust, and the use of growth hormones and the conditions under which chickens were grown caused anxiety. Despite these misgivings, chicken was purchased because it contributed to easing the pressures on the family cook. This finding makes sense in the context of the general concerns shared by family food providers in an era when women's labour force participation is so pervasive. Social and market research indicates that at the end of a busy day, Australian women are looking for opportunities for casual eating (Mackay 1992), relief from the burden of cooking (Santich 1995), and meal solutions (Steggles 1996).

Given some of the consumer misgivings about this most popular of foods, it seemed imperative to understand how chicken was made 'good to think', and this entailed examining the operations of actors who mediate producer-consumer relations. It was not sufficient to understand the exchange of material goods—money and meals—but the impacts of a trade in cultural goods such as time, quality, rituals and authority, appeared to be equally noteworthy. Subsequent fieldwork was undertaken with the major supermarket chains, KFC and specialist poulterers, and interviews were conducted with nutritionists, psychographic researchers and those responsible for advertising campaigns featuring chicken.

Like others undertaking agro-food studies over the last decade, I emerged with a finding about the significant influence of large food retailers. Supermarkets and fast-food chains currently anchor the supply chains of numerous agricultural commodities through the contracts they enter into with producers (Parsons 1996; Burch and Goss 1999). A rather extreme version of this has been operating within the chicken meat commodity complex in Australia: for over thirty years the largest processor (Inghams) has sold the majority of its produce to the largest food retailing chain (Safeway/Woolworths), while the second largest processor (Steggles) has been the preferred supplier for the second largest chain (Coles). This has had the effect of creating a marked level of concentration on the production side of the industry<sup>1</sup>, with the medium sized firms forced to invest in flexible systems so that they can provide the more innovative lines demanded by retailers as well as filling in the gaps when the major processors are unable to meet orders.

In addition to their ready access to producers, retailers directly engage with consumers. They shape demand for individual commodities through their pricing policies (such as loss-leading practices, especially of rotisserie birds and of the prized chicken fillet) and the ways in which they foster commodity contexts around groupings of products (such as specialist providore sections for poultry). In relation to chicken meat, and unlike the red meat complex where thousands of independent butchers are still prominent, corporate retail traders have almost exclusive control over the producer-consumer interface.

The symbiotic relationship between the supermarkets and chicken meat producers has been to the mutual advantage of each. Supermarkets have provided these particular primary producers with an extremely efficient distribution network and chicken meat has provided supermarkets with a valuable ‘intangible asset’, a food endorsed by health professionals as a ‘good food’.

According to Pritchard (2000: 3), a key facilitator of global agro-food restructuring “has been the capture, management and exploitation of intangible assets – brands and other trademarks, patents and corporate know-how – that expedite the transformation of production capital into mobile financial capital”. The major function of brands and marketing is to communicate not only something about the values of the goods and services to which they are attached, but also to announce the existence and status of the corporation that produces and sells the commodities.

In the case of chicken meat, Australian consumers said that they assumed that chicken meat was healthy because it featured so prominently in nutritional advice, and because it received the National Heart Foundation’s ‘Pick The Tick’ logo, which was widely accepted as a symbol of a healthy food item. For more than a decade, chicken meat products have appeared in supermarket chill cabinets emblazoned with The Tick, while whole chickens and chicken fillets, along with red meat cuts, lie unpackaged and unbranded in butcher shops.

This form of nutritional branding-by-association has been far more effective than the more direct advertising campaigns of the red meat industry body.<sup>2</sup> The chicken meat study revealed that consumers’ generalised confusion about food magnified their cynicism about the self-interested claims made by producers, and thus reproduced a role for the professional expert as an interpreter and judge of market-place offerings. What appears to be happening, at least in the case of supermarkets, is that they are using dietary guidelines and nutritional branding devices to claim *de facto* authority while the *de jure* authority of the family cook and state regulation are on the wane.<sup>3</sup> Given the recent popularity of foods that carried a health claim, it is no surprise that Kentucky Fried Chicken rebadged itself “KFC” in the mid 1990s to lose its “fried food” image (Dixon 2002, Ch 7).

## THE AUTHORITY OF THE RETAIL TRADER

Some years ago Hughes (1996) posed a question that has still not been satisfactorily answered: how do corporate retailers inhabit benign regulatory environments? This question is the more pressing given that both the UK Competition Commission (Flynn et al. 2003) and a Joint Select Committee on the Retailing Sector in Australia (1999) found that despite high levels of supermarket concentration in their respective countries, there was no need to cap market share. Perhaps some explanation for a hands-off approach is provided by Flynn, Marsden and Smith (2003: 42) when describing the power of corporate retailers in the UK: “while continuing to develop their economic power as the main representatives of progress, the corporate retailers are also regarded as the main custodians of quality in the eyes of both consumers and government”. In other words, their cultural role offers some protection from regulatory oversight.

I believe that considerable insight for the cultural and economic power of large food retail traders lies in an examination of the question: how have supermarket chains acquired a status of custodian of quality and pre-eminent food authority? Social histories reveal that retail traders have been incrementally acquiring multi-

dimensional forms of authority (Kingston 1994; Humphery 1998; Seth and Randall 1999). Eighty years ago the large family grocers and retailers located on the high streets - the Sainsburys in the UK, the Waltons in the USA and the Myer family in Australia - exercised authority of a charismatic kind. Their showmanship was built upon the boldness of their vision and the fact that they offered novelties, such as in-store eateries for working class customers and self-service. By all accounts, these firms had their disciples in advertising who helped them to successfully influence ideas about the act of consumption and of household duties: for example, the earliest supermarkets are credited with creating Mrs Housewife. By trading in necessities and through the philanthropic and public good acts of successive family members, the corporations have over time gained the traditional authority of patrician and guardian. In addition, since the Second World War, the largest retail chains have acquired a quasi rational-legal authority to promote the public's health and well-being by administering food safety codes of practice. This development is due to trends in government deregulation of business activities and the gradual shift towards self-regulation, requiring company expenditure on quality assurance systems and experts to replace the officials employed by government to perform these functions. The Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point, or HACCP, is a case in point.

It is within a context of small government and market abundance, that the producer-consumer services sector identified earlier, flourishes. They provide the basis for an administrative system that serves the corporation. In competing with governments and family food providers for authority status, food retailers use their 'administrative staff' to undertake a number of strategies to forge authority relationships.

First, the staff negotiate partnerships with rational-legal authorities to promote new practices and products. In this context, they write submissions to government enquiries, brief corporate executives who sit on government consultative committees, and lobby members of parliament. They also negotiate partnerships between corporations and non-government organisations and charities, such as the National Heart Foundation, and organise the sponsorship of scientific research, publications and events (Nestle 2002; Dixon, Sindall and Banwell 2004). Being associated with scientific respectability, particularly with medical science, is arguably the most valuable expertise of the current era (Scott and Worsley 1994). Market-based actors appear to be allying themselves with health and medical professions and sciences to re-embed trust in a food system that is increasingly comprised of novel items (Dixon et al. 2004). The '7-a-day' fruit and vegetable campaign jointly promoted by Coles supermarkets and the Dietitians Association of Australia, is but one example of Australian supermarkets forming alliances with health professional bodies in order to acquire expert authority (Anonymous 1999).

Through these third party associations, market-based actors brand themselves, and use this branding to become more respectable. Corporation-professional body partnerships are most obvious in the side-by-side positioning of logos on conference programs, lists of sponsors of scientific journals and at the launches of new products. These events and sponsorships are an important plank in mobilising symbolic capital. Like the brand management of products, the brand management of corporations plays a role in establishing consumer loyalty in markets where thousands of new products enter annually (Pritchard 1999).

The second function performed by the administrative staff is to develop a range of communications to continuously renew the charismatic persona of the retailer. Weber argued that charismatic authority differs from rational-legal and traditional forms because it does not assume a routine character. "It is, by definition, a kind of authority which is specifically in conflict with the bases of legitimacy of an established, fully institutionalised order" (Weber 1947: 64). Weber described how charismatic authority is transformed into a more bureaucratic form through the routinisation of novelty, which is a feature of charismatic figures.

The functionaries employed by retailers routinise charisma by manufacturing highly responsive marketing plans that both keep pace with consumer thinking and that encourage new ways of thinking about the marketplace (Humphery 1998). While large retailers have a sound charismatic foundation through offering the excitement of the new, they have to attach serious intent to their efforts. If, as Sennett (1980: 165) alleges, the work of authority is "to convert power into images of strength", then the producer-consumer services sector is required to cultivate this particular 'intangible asset'. Thanks to the efforts of countless advertising and marketing professionals an image of strength is stage managed at every opportunity; at shareholder meetings, in supply contract negotiations, through store routines, nightly television advertising and prominent siting at the heart of suburbs and shopping precincts. The discourse of corporate citizenship is paramount (Probyn 1998). These contemporary cultural economy activities have a long lineage, as Evers and Schrader (1994) note when they describe the centuries-old practice of traders transferring wealth into symbolic capital in order to become respectable as they make money. A vital process in the food system is the symbolic regulation of markets through mobilising reputations.

However, these days a multi-dimensional reputation is required because increasingly markets are coordinated through discourses of convenience, relationships to nature and health. Freidberg (2003: 28), for example, describes how supermarkets in the UK “have joined the country’s Ethical Trading Initiative in order to demonstrate their commitment to social welfare and environmental standards in their supply chains”. In this way, ‘ethically traded’ product lines simultaneously operate as a capital accumulation strategy and as a sophisticated form of organisational marketing, projecting attributes with which the corporation hopes to be identified.<sup>4</sup>

The third function performed by the ‘new professionals’ is to simultaneously dis-embed and re-embed culinary cultures. They communicate that previous culinary orders are *passé* and that there are alternative forms of food provisioning more congruent with contemporary lifestyles. They sell their expertise both up and down stream in order to broker the producer-consumer interface. Notably, the authorities who are most accessible (visible, available, understandable) and least challenging of consumer behaviours are those in the marketplace with food-related expertise.

As foods have taken on values in addition to safety, price and social status, the range of groups with an interest in what is eaten has increased markedly. In addition to the government authorities responsible for food safety and security, the scientists who provide evidence of food’s properties, and the community members who are gatekeepers of the culinary culture, the claimants to some special knowledge and expertise in relation to food has enlarged to include celebrity chefs, animal welfare activists/ethicists, specialist food producers and vegetarian consumers.<sup>5</sup> It is little wonder then that in an era when there are many claimants to authority, the quest to be perceived as legitimate is onerous (Giddens 1991: 194-196), and that consumers are confused.

Corporate mobilisation of intangible assets is apparent not only in the Australian chicken meat commodity complex, but is currently being exposed through the discourse of Home Meal Replacement (HMR). For this particular product portfolio of heat-and-serve meals and ready-to-go meals to be acceptable, traders must renegotiate with family cooks the ideal site for food preparation — they need to shift this aspect of food provisioning from the household kitchen to the so-called community kitchens of fast food outlets and the industrial kitchens supplying supermarkets. HMR is, however, fraught with tensions because it cuts across enduring understandings of female domesticity and the relationship between home-based cooking and nurturance. For this reason, the portrayals of HMR must invoke acceptance by mothers, primarily, that this is an acceptable form of nourishment and nurturance. Through communicating what constitutes a ‘proper’ meal, homelife is being reworked by an untidy rabble of celebrity chefs and government employed dietitians as well as corporate nutrition divisions, corporate sponsored scientists and myriad food outlets.

It remains to be seen how accommodating or resistant consumers will be towards this new way of life. What we do know is that the ‘new professionals’ taking over the inner cities are a significant market for all forms of HMR (Zukin 1991). Greater resistance may come from farm producers because HMR poses a dilemma for them too; will they make more money supplying millions of households which will continue to cook from raw ingredients, or from supplying a few giant food processors and fast-food chains who will prepare household meals? As with consumers, producers are not an homogenous entity. It is possible that fats, oils, sugar and salt producers will look favourably on HMR, while horticultural industries may be more inclined to fight for household food preparation (Carson 1995). A lack of unity between producers has repercussions not only for retailer hegemony but for consumers. According to Abercrombie (1994), authority between producers and consumers is best conceived as a cyclical process in which competition between rival producer groups temporarily empowers consumers. Having said this, he elaborates a counter-trend: “...commodification, the intrusion of market relations, is corrosive of all traditional or existing authority relations” (Abercrombie 1994: 56). In other words, consumer authority can never be more than fleeting. For consumers to consolidate their fledgling authority would involve the acquisition of particular attributes: a limited and clearly defined membership or inherited status and claims to some special characteristics that justify their making and enforcing decisions (Keat et al. 1994: 3). Without an administrative staff dedicated to serving the consumer sector (where there is such an entity), the capacity for consumers to routinely assert the basis of their claim for authority status seems remote.

## CONCLUSION

Whether a food is acceptable to consumers encompasses a wide range of considerations. Numerous sociologists have interpreted this trend as indicating consumer influence over food systems while others have noted an increase in consumer demand for help in making food related decisions. This demand has coincided with a long list of claimants to food knowledge, expertise and responsibility – celebrity chefs, food activists, food producers and retailers.

There is a growing appreciation in agro-food studies that relations of power between producers, retailers and consumers are produced, transformed and reproduced through a series of processes including capital accumulation, consumer manipulation of material practices and the symbolic regulation of markets. In a situation where markets organised around price systems have been displaced by markets based on hierarchies of values (Appadurai 1986), capacity to influence the ordering of values is of strategic importance.

In the Australian context at least, the influence of government food regulatory authorities is diminishing, as is that of the home cook, thereby tipping the authority relation toward market-based players, in particular those who sit at the interface of the culinary culture and the economy. It appears that major retailers are using Weber's three bases of authority to manufacture a fourth type of authority. Market players are increasingly entrusted to coordinate and adjudicate competing claims about the safety, security and quality of the food supply. In this way, they embody the Latin definition of an auctor, or authority, as "he that brings about the existence of any object, or promotes the increase or prosperity of it, whether he first originates it, or by his efforts gives greater permanence or continuance to it" (Watt 1982: 11). While generally not responsible for bringing about the material existence of objects, retailers play a greater role than producers and consumers in promoting an increase in the value of objects. Retail chains produce economic and cultural values by employing an administrative staff to recommodify foods. The staff also reconceptualise values by promoting particular standards or principles of judgement to apply to food decision-making.

As this paper shows, achieving authority status is much more than having acknowledged expertise. It involves creating an aura of strength, forming emotional attachments and having a body of people willing to serve the enterprise. Consumers *en masse* do not have the machinery to manufacture a reputation of solidity beyond the claim, gradually evaporating under the strain of women's labour force participation, that they exercise a moral or traditional authority for food provisioning in the family context.

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<sup>1</sup> In 1996, the top three processors (Inghams, Steggles and Bartter) had control of 76% of the chickens sold on the market. With the sale of Steggles to Bartter in 2000, three quarters of the market is currently controlled by two family owned companies.

<sup>2</sup> My claim is supported by the fact that the recent campaign by the Meat & Livestock Australia, which uses butchers to promote red meat, has been credited with reversing declining beef consumption (Shoebridge 2003). This is not surprising when market research shows that butchers are viewed by consumers as trustworthy and dependable (ASI/ACNielsen 1998).

<sup>3</sup> The former refers to authority by virtue of the existence of rules and traditions, while the latter refers to claims to rightful authority.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Harvey (1998) found that large supermarket chains coupled flexible labour markets with product differentiated retail systems. Such systems are the result of a single chain segmenting into different types of stores which contain distinctive product ranges, determined by consumer incomes and lifestyles: budget, own-brand, super-brand and niche products.

<sup>5</sup> Some of my focus group participants deferred to vegetarians because they were perceived to be especially knowledgeable of the food system and to be ethically admirable