

China to assemble vegetarian food body

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A Vegetarian Food Industry Association will be set up in China this year to combat the use of animal material in vegetarian products, according to the China Food Culture Research Organisation.

The Vegetarian Food Industry Association's primary mission will be to push for compilation of standards to regulate the production of vegetarian food in what is seen in Asia as a small but growing industry.

At the moment vegetarian food distributed in China is deemed as substandard in countries and regions that have strict standards on vegetarian product.

According to Huang Ying, of the vegetarian food cultural commission, there are presently no state or industry standards designed to regulate production of vegetarian food or its ingredients in China.

"The lack of standards means that many manufacturers of vegetarian food use animal material, such as eggs and meat, in their products," said Huang.

Vegetarian food strictly refers to stuff made from vegetables. But in China some of the foods, although made from vegetables, also have meat content. Many manufacturers label their products as *'100 percent vegetarian'* or *'contains no meat,'* without any official verification, which can mislead consumers, commission officials said.

Authorities blame lack of standards for difficulties in exporting vegetarian products. *"We cannot conduct market checks of products without a specific standard as a guide,"* said a Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine official.

The association will be set up to ensure the purity of materials used in foods, helping to break down trading restrictions on the growing Asian vegetarian food market.

Asia is already seen as a growth market for the alternative foods industry, where the consumption of dairy products is historically low, up to 75 per cent of people are said to be lactose intolerance - a statistic that is leading increasing numbers of food companies to seek out non-dairy and alternative ingredients. There is potential therefore for the alternative and vegetarian food market to expand and it is important that a food body is put in place to regulate it.

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