

# new adjunct professor brings creative recipe for food law

An interesting newcomer to the Deakin University School of Law is Adjunct Professor Joseph Lederman. Eschewing excessive formality (his usual attire includes rolled up sleeves and a baseball cap) and preferring to be called simply Joe, he is the Deakin University expert in Food Law.



Joe Lederman

Professor Lederman is a pioneer in food law both in Australia and internationally. He is Australia's first law professor specialising in Food Law and he recently gave an online audio visual presentation as one of the founders of an international network of food lawyers gathering for their inaugural conference in Cologne. The topic for the 40 minute presentation was an explanation of the Australian legal framework for making health and nutritional claims in relation to food and how to overcome a range of legal restrictions.

Joe's route to joining Deakin University has been different from most. For more than 20 years, he was a successful commercial lawyer specialising in business law and tax law. His legal career began in 1977 with Articles under the late Arnold Bloch and three more years as his assistant. By the 1980s, Joe Lederman had become well regarded as a commercial practitioner with special expertise in private client structuring, tax and stamp duty law, business succession and estate planning, and superannuation planning.

When the Law Institute of Victoria introduced its specialist accreditation scheme in the mid-1990s, Joe was awarded dual specialist accreditation in business law and tax law. So it is enlightening to discover how he came to the area of food law.

Joe relates how in 1997, while advising in succession planning and tax structuring for some private businesses in the north-west of Tasmania (Devonport and Burnie and surrounding towns), he gained a greater appreciation of laws affecting food businesses spanning dairy, fish, meat, fruit and vegetables, bottled water and a range of processed food industries. He then subscribed to numerous industry publications and began researching relevant legislation so he could monitor, on behalf of clients, new government policy developments throughout Australia. This was at a time when development of a new Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code was in its infancy.

Subsequently, a work-experience school student, who had been her school's webmaster, offered to help Joe create the first version of a website now called 'Australian Food News' ([www.ausfoodnews.com.au](http://www.ausfoodnews.com.au).) In due course, the website became one of the most popular Food Industry websites on the internet. With high rankings by Google and other search-engines, the website is being redeveloped and transformed into a fully-fledged commercial website. In-house software programming has also created the website's own unique search-engine called 'Research Wizard', which has become an invaluable tool for research by anyone wanting information on food laws or other food industry news or information.

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The website has been developed with its own powerful editorial platform capable of filtering many information sources into specialist news streams and agreements have been made by Joe's firm with various news agencies.

In 2000, Joe was commissioned to write the Halsbury's Laws of Australia chapter on food law and he has twice updated it as the contributing editor (for publisher Lexis Nexis). Joe is now a regular speaker at food industry conferences and seminars and his multi-disciplinary law firm FoodLegal ([www.foodlegal.com.au](http://www.foodlegal.com.au)) is retained by some of Australia's most well-known food brands. The legal work includes resolving food product development legal issues, overseeing proposals for various brand marketing campaigns, handling contractual disputes and overseeing food recall protocols. The firm is expanding in the litigation and food prosecution areas.

Joe's part-time role at Deakin University involves not only collaboration with the School of Law but also with other areas of the University in related specialist fields such as food nutrition policy and food supply logistics issues. Earlier this year, Joe was a speaker at a food industry forum together with other Deakin University experts on obesity and government policy.

In May this year, FoodLegal was commissioned to advise the commonwealth government on an important issue concerning food supply logistics. For this project Joe was able to bring on to his FoodLegal team Deakin's Associate Professor Caroline Chan of the School of Information Systems together with one of her e-commerce Masters graduates. More recently, Joe's FoodLegal team has tendered for a state government project in joint venture with Deakin University's commercial arm, DeakinPrime.

Adjunct Professor Joe Lederman's team at FoodLegal and his associated legal compliance technology company, Lawmedia Pty Ltd, are pioneering into new areas where lawyers have not traditionally been before. It would seem that the concept of combining the legal skills and experience of an industry specialist with the additional resources and links and research capabilities offered by Deakin University in related fields, is a new model that could encourage more cooperative innovation. Joe believes that the focus on finding innovative approaches for food law policy solutions is likely to have positive spin-offs for Deakin University and for the broader community throughout Australia and beyond.