

SMA *InfoMeat*

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Mexicans Accuse U.S. of Dumping Substandard Beef

According to a news report by Mexico City newspaper, *El Financiero*, Mexican meat industry representatives are claiming that beef imports are entering the country "without complying with adequate health safety standards" and are charging negligence on the part of Mexico's Ministry of Agriculture. Local meat importers are claiming that the government has failed to verify the freshness of beef imports, implying that the U.S. is dumping meat in the Mexican market that Japanese and European customers would refuse. They are asking the Agricultural Ministry to implement a new scheme of health safety standards for meat imports that would include records of place of origin, date of slaughter, lot number, and date of entry to Mexico. In May, *Reforma*, another Mexico City newspaper, reported that U.S. beef exporters were asking Mexican authorities for more time in order to obtain certificates from the USDA verifying that their products are less than thirty days old in order to export to Mexico without duties. At that time, there were previous Mexican government rulings that put into place various duties on U.S. meat imports deemed to be low in quality. Possible explanations for the current beef contention could stem from Mexico's recent experience with domestic pork supply and demand issues. Last April, Mexican pork producers requested a reduction in pork imports, hoping to increase their production by 3-5% in response to a projected increase in consumption. However, U.S. exporters exceeded quotas under the North American Free Trade Agreement, causing a 20% duty to be imposed on U.S. pork carcasses and half-carcasses.

Experimental *E. coli* Drug Treats Milwaukee Patients

Following an *E. coli* incident at a Sizzler restaurant in Milwaukee that claimed the life of one child and has sickened 56 others, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has authorized Synsorb Biotech of Calgary, Canada to provide emergency doses of an experimental drug to treat infected children. Synsorb Pk, currently under Phase III investigation, is designed to reduce the progression to hemolytic uremic syndrome in patients suffering from the verotoxigenic form of *E. coli* (VTEC). The "compassionate use" shipments were authorized by the FDA under emergency investigative New Drug provisions and the drug has been granted Fast Track Product designation, which is only given to those products that are designed to treat serious, life-threatening conditions for which there is no satisfactory treatment. Synsorb has shipped five treatments to the Children's Hospital of Wisconsin to be administered under the care of Dr. Kelly Henrickson, a pediatric infectious disease specialist. On August 1, Milwaukee health officials blamed tainted watermelon served on the Sizzler salad bar for the *E. coli* outbreak. Although the watermelon may not be the only culprit responsible, those who ate it were eight times more likely to become ill, according to a mathematical model devised by health department officials. However, since that finding, a second Sizzler restaurant in the Milwaukee area has closed after two people there became infected with the bacteria. Boysa Management Company voluntarily closed its Wauwatosa location late last Wednesday while health officials gathered samples from the restaurant. "I really don't want to draw any conclusions at this point," said Milwaukee Health Commissioner Seth Foldy. "We have to consider if there was a connection between the two sites, either a food product or a food server." So far, seven lawsuits have been filed against Sizzler in connection with the *E. coli* outbreak, the first of which may be certified by a judge as a class-action lawsuit.

Industry Requests Hold on New School Lunch Specs

The Southwest Meat Association and seven other trade organizations have co-written a letter to the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) Administrator, Kathleen Merrigan, expressing industry concerns about the new school lunch specifications. Merrigan recently said that the USDA will continue to use the new specifications and stated, "We recognize that end item testing of ground meat and ground poultry may not fully ensure that all product is free of pathogenic bacteria. However, it can provide greater assurance of product quality on an interim basis for the current purchase program while we complete the development of a supplier certification and audit program for the purchase program beginning in July 2001." The joint letter requests that AMS reconsider the changes and arrange for another Vendor Conference, similar to the one held last spring, to discuss how the specifications might be modified. Many industry groups believe that the new specifications are preventing beef from being purchased, which could cause a glut in the beef market in the near future. The letter states, "Very large supplies of beef are coming to market and the agency's purchases to date under the commodity program have been minimal and bought at very high prices. Thus, it is imperative that this issue be resolved in the interests of maintaining the market structure for beef and to provide the beef that the schools need." The same end product testing standards that USDA is imposing on its ground beef purchases may soon be imposed on ground poultry as well.

Rule May Block Old Equipment Certification Claims

The proposed fee-based equipment certification program, which many believe will fill the void left when the mandatory FSIS certification program was shut down several years ago, may cause some manufacturers concerns regarding certain claims. According to the Agricultural Marketing Service, certain equipment which was certified under the mandatory system will not be grandfathered into the new certification system. Most manufacturers understand, though, that the new system is based on updated sanitary standards. The biggest issue is that manufacturers will not be allowed to make certain claims about equipment that was approved under the old guidelines. Among the terms listed in the proposed rule as unacceptable claims for previously approved equipment are variations of "USDA approved" or "USDA accepted." However, equipment certified under the old system may be labeled as "FSIS accepted." The wording has apparently caused some concern among manufacturers and a number of commenters have asked that portion of the rule be clarified. Since old equipment cannot make claims of USDA approval, manufacturers must decide if they will pay to have it certified under the new system. According to industry groups, many processors will want the new certification, but the final obstacle may be obtaining it. Too many manufacturers applying for certification as soon as it is available is sure to create a major backlog. The comment deadline for the proposed rule is today.

HACCP Information **Online:**

**International
HACCP Alliance:**

*http://www.
haccpalliance.org*

**FSIS HACCP
Implementation
Page:**

*http://www.usda.gov/
fsis/imphaccp.html*

Lost and Found

Did you lose a camera at Convention? We may have found it!
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Saturday evening in the ballroom of the Hyatt Regency Hill
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Welcome New Member!

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WTO Ruling Will Boost S. Korean Exports

A World Trade Organization (WTO) Dispute Settlement Panel found most of South Korea's restrictions on imported U.S. beef to be inconsistent with its WTO obligations. "This ruling will greatly enhance market access for U.S. beef later this year as Korea's beef quota is scheduled to expire on December 31, 2000, said U. S. Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky. The Dispute Panel ruled that South Korea's regulations for imported beef discriminated against U.S. and other foreign suppliers, such as Australia. The panel also concluded that the excessive amounts of subsidies provided to its cattle industry violated its commitments under the 1994 Uruguay Round to reduce domestic farm support. The U.S. began dispute settlement proceedings against S. Korea in February, 1999 after Seoul fell significantly short of meeting its commitment to import at least 187,000 tons of beef in 1998. Australia initiated its own complaint against the country in April 1999, and the WTO combined the two cases. The quota shortfall occurred in the midst of the Asian financial crisis, highlighting regulations that discouraged consumption of imported beef. These included a requirement that imported beef be sold in separate stores, effectively excluding it from about 90 percent of the retail outlets, and limits on import authority to a small number of government and commercial entities. With an improved economy, S. Korea has pledged to eliminate quota restrictions on imported beef beginning in 2001.

Hurry! Time is Running Out!

Register now for "Developing and Implementing HACCP Plans for the Meat Industry" to be held at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas, August 22-24, 2000 hosted by SMA and the Texas A&M Department of Animal Science. Registration forms are available on our website or through the SMA office. Deadline for hotel reservations at the Hampton Inn is August 10, 2000.

Briefly.....

USDA, DOT Launch Logistics Website: A new government website could help move agricultural products by aiding in transportation and logistics planning. Jointly created by USDA and the Department of Transportation, it provides over 600 links to agricultural and rural transportation resources. Access it at www.bts.gov/ntl/ruraltransport/.

Study Verifies Prion Responsibility in BSE: A new study for the University of California at San Francisco proves that pure prions can cause normal proteins to change shape, become infectious, and cause disease. The UCSF study introduced a pure prion into an uninfected organism, and the organism became infected, verifying what scientists have believed for some time. The study shows researchers in prion studies are heading in the right direction to discover ways to stop Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) and Creutzfeldt Jakob disease (CJD).

Judge Rules Kosher Laws Unconstitutional: A federal judge has struck down state statutes which set standards for kosher food, saying they violate church and state separation. The decision was part of a ruling in favor of two New York butchers who allege that their businesses were subjected to "irregular, arbitrary and capricious inspections" by the state's Kosher Law Enforcement Division.

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