

SMA InfoMeat

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2006

December 18, 2006
Volume 28, Issue 11

Email: sma@tca.net
Internet website: southwestmeat.org

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ICE Arrests Swift Workers in ID Theft Investigation

Federal agents investigating identity theft arrested 1,282 undocumented immigrant workers on administrative immigration violations at Swift & Company meatpacking plants in six states last Tuesday. Some 65 were also charged with criminal violations, such as identity theft, re-entry after deportation, and other violations. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) so far has not brought charges against Swift officials. Agents said the raids stem from a nearly year-long worksite enforcement investigation, Operation Wagon Trail, that uncovered a large identify theft scheme providing fraudulent social security numbers to large numbers of unauthorized workers at Swift facilities. ICE chief Julie Myers told the press that illegal immigrants and others had stolen or bought the identities and Social Security numbers of perhaps hundreds of U.S. citizens and lawful residents, and some immigrants even had genuine U.S. birth certificates. Facilities involved included plants in Greeley, CO; Grand Island, NE; Cactus, TX; Hyrum, UT; Marshalltown, IA; and Worthington, MN. Swift & Co., the nation's second-largest meat processing company, has used a government pilot program to check Social Security numbers since 1997. Company officials have said one shortcoming may be the program's inability to detect when two people are using the same number. Swift plants were able to resume production by mid-week at reduced levels. ICE spokesman Marc Raimondi said investigators will decide whether those arrested will face immediate deportation, prosecution or detention pending other legal proceedings. The investigation is ongoing.

MGC Branch Posts Revised Meat Grading Terms

The Meat Grading and Certification (MGC) Branch has posted the final revision of Instruction 107, "Requirements for Grading Terms On Meat Product Labeling" on USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service website. This Instruction sets forth the correct use of grade mark terms on meat items or packaging at all marketing levels between the point of USDA grading and the consumer to ensure the accuracy of grading terms on meat product labeling. Additional changes are in bold italics and implementation of these requirements is scheduled for January 7, 2007. Instruction 107 is posted at: www.ams.usda.gov/lsg/mgc/instructions/100docs/MGC107.htm.



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FSIS Holds Public Meeting on Labeling Term “Natural”

Last week, SMA Executive Director Dr. Joe Harris attended FSIS' public meeting on the labeling term “natural” in Washington D.C. and offered comments on behalf of SMA regarding the agency's process. The purpose of the meeting was to gain public input regarding a recent petition submitted by Hormel Foods to initiate rulemaking to define the term. Oral comments made at the public meeting, as well as written comments submitted by January 11, 2007, will be considered by the agency as it initiates the rulemaking process. A transcript of the meeting will be posted on FSIS' website soon. Hormel's representative was present to clarify their position that FSIS should prohibit use of “unnatural” ingredients in meat or poultry products labeled “natural.” Hormel stated that sodium lactate is not “natural” because it is not minimally processed as chemicals are used in its preparation. Hormel also stated that the agency should not define “minimal processing” in a way that stifles innovation. The majority of processors who commented also agreed on the following points regarding the definition of “natural”: FSIS should harmonize its definition with the Food and Drug Administration; the definition of “natural” should not just focus on the processed product, but should also take into account how the livestock or poultry used in the product was raised or produced; the definition of “natural” should allow dual-purpose ingredients if derived from a natural source, and the agency should encourage the use of antimicrobials that eliminate or control pathogens; and the agency should not change its policy regarding sodium lactates until the rulemaking process is complete. Ingredient suppliers also urged the agency not to reverse its position regarding these ingredients until the rulemaking process is complete. If a company has label approval to use a particular ingredient in a product labeled “natural”, the agency should not rescind that label. For a detailed summary of the meeting by SMA's legal counsel, Olsson, Frank and Weeda. P.C., email Phyllis at sma@tca.net.

Time is Running Out to Sign Up for the 2007 Processed Meats Clinic!

Hosted by the Southwest Meat Association, TAMU's Meat Science Section, and Texas Cooperative Extension, this three-day workshop at Texas A&M University provides hands-on training and demonstrations in meat processing and product development. Slated for January 9-11, 2007, the clinic will focus on the properties and functional characteristics of ingredients, the basics of processed meat product development, and how to formulate and determine the costs of making processed meat products. Registration forms and a tentative agenda are available on the SMA website at www.southwestmeat.org. **The course is limited to 40 participants, so sign up today!**

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Office Holidays

The SMA Office will be closed
Monday & Tuesday, December 25-26,
for the Christmas holidays and **Monday,**
January 1, 2007, for New Year's.

InfoMeat will not be published next week.
Look for our next issue on January 2, 2007.
Happy Holidays!

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Briefly . . .

Horse Slaughter Ban Rejected, for Now: Attempts by Senators John Ensign (R-NV) and Mary Landrieu (D-LA) to present the Horse Slaughter Prevention Act to the fiscal 2007 Agriculture Appropriations bill have failed. The legislation would have banned the processing of horses for human consumption. After the bill passed the House in September, several senators put the bill on hold, preventing action in the Senate. Time constraints, more critical issues, producer opposition, and education on the ban's adverse effects ended the legislation's consideration. However, SMA fully expects this issue to be reintroduced in the next legislative session.

ARS Patents Antimicrobial Feed Additive: USDA's Agricultural Research Service has patented a new chlorate-based compound that, when added in small amounts to cattle feed two days before slaughter, significantly reduces levels of *E. coli* O157:H7 and *Salmonella* in the animals' digestive tracts. In some tests, levels fell dramatically, from 100,000 *E. coli* cells per gram of fecal material to 100 cells/gram. The agency obtained similar results with *Salmonella* in swine, sheep and poultry. The compound must still be submitted to regulatory agencies for approval as a feed.

Summary Available for FSIS Directive 7000.1: Last week we reported that FSIS issued Directive 7000.1 on December 11 to instruct inspection program personnel how to verify that plants comply with regulatory requirements designed to protect consumers in ways other than ensuring food safety. It also cancels many agency documents and issues new Inspection System Procedures (ISP) descriptions for all 04 and 05B procedures, except 04C02, Humane Handling. Effective February 20, 2007, the Directive is available on the FSIS website at www.fsis.usda.gov/OPPDE/rdad/FSISDirectives/7000.1.pdf. For a summary of this Directive by SMA's legal counsel, Olsson, Frank and Weeda, P.C., please email Phyllis at sma@tca.net.

Senators Press for Fair Korean Trade: Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Saxby Chambliss (R-GA) and other Senate Ag Committee members oppose an overall free trade agreement with South Korea unless their trade officials agree to a bone tolerance for future shipments of U.S. beef. Last Wednesday, they sent their demands in a letter to Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns and U.S. Trade Representative Susan Schwab. It was signed by Chambliss and Senators Pat Roberts (R-KS), Norm Coleman (R-MN), Pat Leahy (D-VT), Craig Thomas (R-WY), Kent Conrad (D-ND) and Jim Talent (R-MO). The letter says the U.S. has worked patiently for three years to "resolve disruptions in trade flows of American beef exports," and goes on to say, "The latest rejection of three shipments of U.S. beef to South Korea illustrates the difficulties facing the U.S. beef industry to secure fair and reasonable access to export markets. It also illustrates South Korea's blatant disregard for science based standards."