

Food Service Update on “Pink Slime” Beef Products in the News

There have been a variety of news media stories circulating in the last week and a half about Lean Finely Textured Beef (LFTB or “Pink Slim”) in ground beef products sold in stores and served in school cafeterias.

- Just like any parent buying food at a grocery store or a restaurant, schools rely on the federal government to inspect and certify the safety of the foods they purchase.
- The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), after consultation with the Food and Drug Administration, has determined that the use of ammonium hydroxide in the processing of LFTB is safe. Beef containing LFTB must meet federal food safety requirements and undergo food safety inspections.
- Industry experts have estimated that about 70 percent of the ground beef sold in grocery stores, restaurants and food service establishments contain LFTB; however, manufacturers are not required to label a product as containing LFTB.
- For information on LFTB, please visit:
<http://www.meatami.com/ht/display/ReleaseDetails/i/76164>

Since the early 1990s, Lean Finely Textured Beef (LFTB) has been allowed as a component of the ground beef purchased by USDA for distribution through the NSLP. The maximum allowable percentage of LFTB that may be formulated into single servings of the ground beef purchased for the NSLP is 15 percent, which is similar to the composition found in many commercially available ground beef products. USDA does not purchase LFTB directly. Rather, LFTB may be used as a raw material in USDA-purchased ground beef products after it undergoes stringent testing. Of the ground beef purchased by USDA in 2011 for the NSLP, LFTB comprised approximately 6.5 percent of the total volume.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration as well as the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) consider ammonium hydroxide as “generally recognized as safe.” FSIS reviewed the suitability of Beef Products, Inc.’s (BPI) use of ammonium hydroxide in order to assess its effectiveness in performing the intended technical purpose of use, at the lowest level necessary, and to ensure that the product is not adulterated or misleading to consumers.

All USDA beef purchases for the NSLP and other Federal food and nutrition assistance programs meet very high food safety standards, which include stringent pathogen testing. Beef supplied by BPI as a component of the beef products purchased by USDA for the NSLP is subject to the same strict pathogen testing requirements for beef raw ingredients. Additional information on this product or product specific inquiries should be directed to BPI at <http://www.beefproducts.com/>

Westford’s Food Service Department put a hold on all in-house USDA ground beef and hamburger product immediately when news stories came out on “pink slime”. Menu changes were made at that time. All other beef products that are utilized in

the Food Service Program from other distributors (meatballs, hamburgers, ground beef) do not use LFTB or ammonium hydroxide in their processing.

Although all current reports from many sources state that LFTB and the use of ammonium hydroxide are considered safe practices, Westford Food Services has determined at this time that we will not use any USDA ground beef and hamburgers through the rest of this school year.

USDA has stated that for next school year 2012-2013, due to customer demand, the department will be adjusting procurement specifications so that schools can have options in procuring ground beef products. USDA will provide schools with a choice to order product either with or without Lean Finely Textured Beef. USDA continues to affirm the safety of Lean Finely Textured Beef product for all consumers and urges customers to consult science based information on the safety and quality of this product.

Food Service Department
March 20, 2012