

# Nitrates

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products in their present form.

Nitrite enhances the flavor of meat by retarding the oxidation which would otherwise cause an undesirable taste.

At the present, nitrite is the only substance that is known to do all three of these things. No substitute has been found.

The fuss about nitrites came about because several years ago it became known that nitrite can combine with secondary amines to form compounds which are called nitrosamines.

When rats were fed these nitrosamines in very large doses, sometimes certain types of tumors resulted. But the rats tested were fed up to the equivalent of eating 40,000 pounds of bacon per day of their lives. The meat industry was concerned because sometimes these secondary amines can be seen in very small quantities in cured meats.

Extensive tests have shown that almost all cured meat products are free of nitrosamines, but there have been minute traces of a nitrosamine called nitrosopyrrolidine in bacon that has been severely fried. If it is found, the quantities are less than ten parts per billion.

According to the American Association of Meat Processors, there has been no well-documented cases of nitrosamines being found in other cured meats, nor even in bacon as it is purchased at the market.

Several alternatives have been proposed to the use of nitrites. One such method proposed involves bombarding meat with radiation until it becomes shelf-safe. Krut explained that the Army has been working on this form of curing meat for 25 years and still hasn't been able to develop one product acceptable for approval and sale.



Stephen F. Krut

Another solution involves the use of refrigeration. If the bacon is to be constantly refrigerated, it can be cured without nitrite. However, Krut stated, there is the problem of the consumer getting the meat from the store to the home without refrigeration. Potential abuses of the meat without refrigeration could mean the onset of botulism would be possible.

An "Expert Panel" made of meat and food scientists, consumerists, nutritionists, and government officials was formed in 1973 to check on the safety of the continued use of nitrates and nitrites in meats. As a result, the use of nitrate has been stopped in some cured meats today and reduced in others.

However, because of the threat of botulism, the panel favored the continued use of nitrite in some cured products. This panel was disbanded by the USDA last September. However, in a preliminary report it issued to the USDA before being dismissed, the panel favored the use of up to 120 parts per million of nitrite in curing bacon.

Nitrite levels are also found in many substances eaten by man, the bulk of them being vegetables.

## Trade acts supported

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The American Farm Bureau Federation recently asked Congress to take prompt action on legislation to enhance the U.S.'s agricultural export position and to support multilateral negotiations aimed at liberalizing restrictive trade barriers.

Elton R. Smith, president of Michigan Farm Bureau and member of the AFBF board of directors, threw the full support of the organization's 2.8 million member-families behind the Agricultural Trade Act of 1978 (H.R. 10434) and the Agricultural Trade Expansion Act of 1977 (H.R. 10377).

He testified before a House Agriculture subcommittee.

Smith pointed out that American farm exports totaled \$24 billion last year, which equals about 25 per cent of all cash receipts from farm marketings.

Saying that each dollar earned by the farmer through exports generates another \$1.33 for the U.S. economy, Smith estimated the total impact on American business activity last year at \$50 billion.

Smith said he has very little doubt that exports will continue to expand if competitive prices are maintained and aggressive efforts are made to remove impediments to trade.

Cabbage nitrite levels are rated at 200 to 352 parts per million and lettuce is listed at 600 to 1700 parts per million.

The use of nitrites in curing meats is not a recent development. Since around 900 B.C., salts containing nitrates were used to preserve meats. It was not until the early 1900's though, that the effect of nitrites was clearly understood.

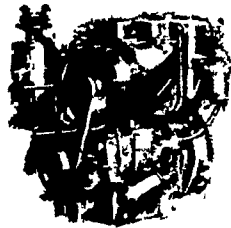
Today, though, the American Association of Meat Processors is concerned about the USDA's attitude towards nitrites. The non-profit group represents 1400 small meat plants across the nation, many which are based in rural areas and do custom butchering.

"The USDA is using scare tactics," Krut related. "They have scared people about the treat of cancer and have made their minds up before they have learned the facts."

"There is no scientific basis for their claims, and they have refused to release the report filed by the expert panel on nitrites," he continued. "We have been writing letters to the USDA asking why this report hasn't been given to the public."

"We have also filed suit against the USDA. On October 18, 1977, they announced that if the meat industry doesn't prove that nitrites are safe, its use will be banned," Krut added.

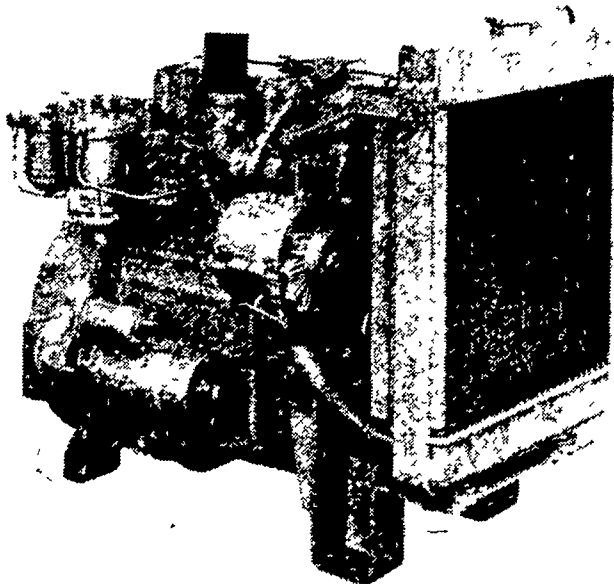
"Farmers should explain to their legislators what is happening," he urged. "The government is increasingly trying to tell Americans what they can eat. And this is a threat to freedom of choice. There is no reason nitrates or nitrites should be banned."



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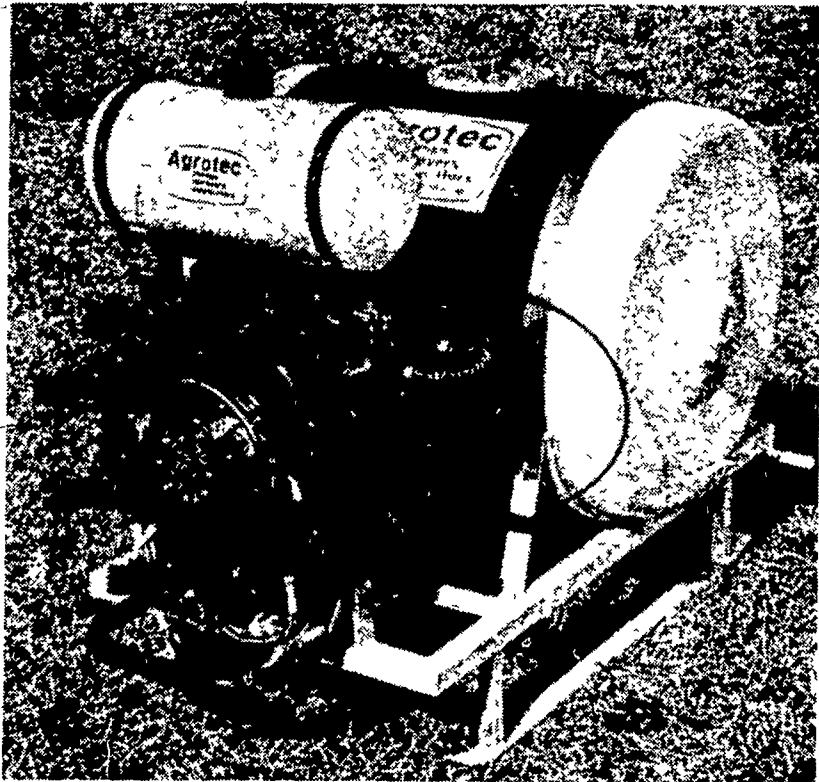
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