

Meat products beat nitrosamine charges

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Hot dogs, corned beef, ham and most other nitrite-cured meat products do not form nitrosamines when cooked, according to studies released by Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Carol Tucker Foreman.

Nitrosamines, which have been shown to cause cancer in laboratory animals, can form when the heat of cooking makes the nitrite in cured products combine with naturally occurring amines in meat. Nitrite is used in curing to prevent the formation of botulism toxin, which causes a deadly food poisoning.

Most cured products tested did not contain confirmable nitrosamines, Foreman said, when fried, broiled, boiled, baked or microwaved. Nevertheless, USDA said it will continue to gather information on those products, she said, and if unexpected problems are found, appropriate action will be taken.

The nitrosamine studies were done in response to an October 1977 USDA request for information on whether nitrite cures cause nitrosamines to form during processing or cooking. Six categories of cured products were tested. Some products were cooked before testing

but those usually eaten without further preparation—such as bologna—were not cooked.

However, surveys on immersion cured bacon indicate that a nitrosamine problem may exist, Foreman said. Additional samples of this product—made by soaking pork bellies in cures until the solution is absorbed—are being studied. Further action will depend on the results, she said.

In a related action, USDA's Food Safety and Quality Service today issued a proposal to extend its nitrosamine monitoring program to include dry cured bacon—made by applying dry salt and nitrite to pork bellies. The program now monitors only the most common type of bacon—made by injecting liquid cures into the bellies.

"Information collected by the agency shows a significant proportion of dry cured bacon appears to be adulterated with confirmable levels of nitrosamines," Foreman said.

"The Federal Meat Inspection Act requires that USDA prevent the marketing of adulterated meat. Therefore, we are issuing this proposal even though the product accounts for less than one percent of the bacon marketed."

"The monitoring program for pumped bacon, underway since December 1978, is designed to assure consumers that the product does not contain confirmable nitrosamines, Foreman said. "Extending the program would offer those who eat dry cured bacon the same assurance."

The proposal on dry cured bacon would also require such bacon be sufficiently dry and salted to prevent growth of bacteria that cause food poisoning, especially botulism.

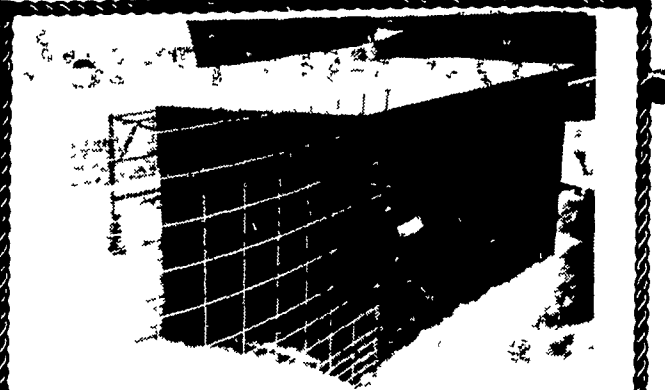
This requirement is needed because manufacturers may decrease the amount of nitrite and thereby lose anti-botulism protection in their effort to avoid nitrosamine formation, according to Foreman.

"To help industry meet the proposed requirements for dry cured bacon," said Foreman, "USDA would provide technical consultation to firms requesting it, as was done when we began checking pumped bacon."

"The actions we are taking today are related only to nitrosamines and not to the safety of nitrite," Foreman said. "That issue is being evaluated separately."

The proposal and the nitrosamine findings were both published in the June 27 Federal Register, available at local libraries. Comments are encouraged on the proposal to expand the nitrosamine monitoring program.

Comments should be submitted by August 26, 1980, to the Executive Secretariat, FSQS, USDA, room 2641-S, Washington, D.C. 20250.



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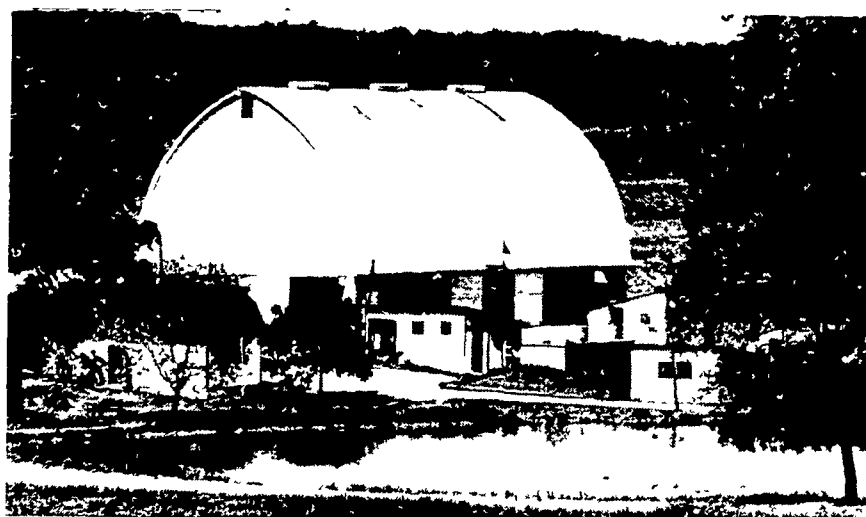
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