

Council Calls For Proper Pizza Labeling

SOUTHAMPTON — Is pizza one of your favorite snack foods? If so, do you like it with real cheese or imitation cheese? If you prefer the former, do you realize you are "buying blindfolded" when it comes to the purchase of this product? It's true, says Dairy Council Inc., Southampton, at least when it comes to the labeling of the product.

Many people prefer to have their pizza contain "real cheese." But pizza manufacturers have been legally permitted, since 1980, to use 90 percent imitation cheese and 10 percent real cheese to make up the "cheese" component of pizza with meat topping products regulated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

This definition of cheese was not adopted through a formal rule-making proceeding, but was arbitrarily implemented by the USDA as an agency policy.

When you see a photo of pizza showing a cheese topping on the front panel, you probably assume the product contains real cheese made from milk, just as you

assume the tomato sauce used is manufactured from real tomatoes.

When imitation cheese fabricated from vegetable oil and casein (milk-derived protein) substitutes for 90 percent of the real cheese in pizza, the consumer is being deceived. There is no declaration on the front panel label that such a substitution occurs.

In 1983, USDA proposed to amend the pizza with meat topping regulations by requiring a declaration on the front panel when imitation cheese is used. In April of this year, USDA withdrew the proposal stating that opponents of the labeling were "persuasive." Meanwhile, the consumer is deceived.

How widespread is the deception? It is estimated that at least 75 percent of frozen meat pizzas contain imitation/substitute cheese. The only place the manufacturer has to inform the consumers of this fact is in the ingredient listing. But the consumer still does not know how much imitation/substitute cheese is used. USDA's current policy allows 90 percent imitation to 10 percent real cheese.

Just what is imitation/substitute cheese?

These cheeses are made from vegetable fat instead of milkfat, the majority of which are manufactured from an ingredient called casein. This is a chemically extracted protein of milk, mixed with water, vegetable fat, stabilizers, emulsifiers, vitamins, minerals and other chemical additives.

Is there a cost increase to pizza manufacturers if they increase real cheese content in their product? Under the USDA proposal, a manufacturer who now uses only 10 percent real cheese would incur an additional 3.84 cents for a 16-ounce pizza to meet the 50 percent real cheese minimum.

Proper labeling would alert the consumer when an imitation cheese is being used, says Dairy Council. If you want to help turn around this labeling deception, why not call or write your senators and representatives. In this way you will be sure of getting what you pay for.

Keystone Grange Fair Slated



Old-time demonstrations featuring antique implements such as this Daisy reaper will highlight the 15th annual Keystone Grange Fair scheduled for July 25 at the Colledgeville-Trappe Water Works Municipal Park. The park is located on West First Avenue in Trappe. Other activities include an antique tractor parade, craft exhibits, 4-H livestock shows and musical entertainment. The fair opens at 10 a.m. and rain date is Aug. 2.

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