

Anti-Biotech Supporters May Hurt Consumer Confidence

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used to stimulate milk production in dairy cows.

The campaign message is to be included on a leaflet Howard said his group will distribute to patrons at one-third of the MacDonald's Restaurants in the United States and Canada on April 17.

In their literature, the organization tells consumers to be aware of BGH in milk and meat and to eat dairy products and meat coming only from organizations that go on record as supporting a ban on BST.

The leaflet also informs consumers that if they want to know which companies offers BGH-free dairy food (there is no such thing, since it is in all milk and meat) that consumers should call Pure Food Campaign's special 1-900 telephone number to listen to a several-minute recorded message at a cost of 99 cents per minute.

Any funds raised through the 900 number are to go to offset costs of the campaign, Howard said. He estimated a budget for this year of about \$1 million.

The Pure Food Campaign literature is very misleading in that it fails to make a clear distinction between milk and meat coming from cows treated with supplemental BST, and milk and meat which comes from untreated cows.

The Pure Food Campaign literature calls for consumers to be concerned and seek a ban on all BGH-milk and meat — however, by definition, that includes all cattle milk and meat.

Also, despite Howard's claim that his group is educational, he and the group's literature fail to mention at all that milk and meat contains about the same, varying amounts of BST, no matter if it comes from a cow given supplemental BST, or if it comes from a cow producing its own levels.

Howard said while that is true, that distinction is not important to him.

And, though Howard said he understood that BST derived from biotechnology is identical to natural BST and poses no harm to humans in and off itself, that wasn't the point. He said the real goal is to get mankind to stop the use of any product resulting from the use of biotechnology, especially recombinant DNA technology. "It (BST) does appear naturally in milk . . . but that is not an argument" for thinking that it is safe to inject supplemental BST into dairy cattle, he said.

Instead, Howard said he is concerned about the possibility of antibiotics getting into the food supply.

That concern was addressed last week, when it was reviewed by the FDA's Veterinary Medicine Advisory Committee. The committee's verdict was that the possibility of antibiotics getting into the milk and meat supply would not change at all because of the use of supplemental BST.

The conclusion was that with all the safeguards in place by the industry and support industries, the milk supply is safe and will not be threatened by the use of injectable BST used to stimulate milk production.

That position is supported by all respected organizations which reviewed the product.

Further, Howard said that while he does recognize that family dairy farmers — the same ones his organization claims to want to protect — may well suffer losses in income from his campaign on MacDonald's, he said that it would be the farmers' fault because they

are not joining him in calling for a ban on BST.

"I think what dairy farmers should be doing is hold the line and keep milk BGH-free," Howard said.

Pure Food Campaign is small in manpower, but makes unsupported claims of having great influence and thousands of volunteers and members.

Howard said that, in addition to him, the staff is comprised of "two and a half people." He explained that meant two full-time and one part-time person — Howard in Washington D.C., a part-time organizer in Wisconsin and another full-time organizer in California.

He said the strength of the organization is its "thousands of volunteers" ready to distribute 9-inch by 4-inch leaflets at 3,000 MacDonald's Restaurants across the country.

The restaurant chain didn't return calls Thursday for comment. However, as of Thursday, the company managing local MacDonald's was unaware of an intention for a demonstration or intent of any protest group to disseminate leaflets.

Nevertheless, Howard said the campaign has been seeking to get large retail and producer organizations, whose livelihoods are staked in public perceptions about quality of product, to go along with a ban on accepting any milk or meat derived from cattle that have been injected with BST.

Those organizations which agree to support Rifkin's proposal are put on a list that he plans to advertise as places for consumers to patronize because they have, "BGH-free milk and meat."

MacDonald's is not on that list.

However, according to Howard, MacDonald's Restaurants were selected "for a couple reasons."

"They're one of the largest food corporations that uses a tremendous amount of dairy food related products — huge amounts of milk, cheese, butter . . . So, we

felt that, in terms of a consumer education campaign, they serve about 25 million people a day and it would be a good way to reach those customers."

Howard also said that MacDonald's was also selected because it is frequented more typically by families, implying that those who are targeted to receive leaflets is a group of people more reactive to calls for concern about food additives.

He said that if the pressure from the campaign could convince MacDonald's to sign up with his group, "This would be a very, very powerful signal in the industry."

"For us, success or failure is (based on) consumer acceptance, or lowering the opposition (to Pure Food Campaign), which would be a success," he said.

But, according to Howard, MacDonald's is only the beginning of efforts to get consumers to reject patronizing businesses and products resulting from biotechnology. He also mentioned a tomato variety which has been developed and for which the patent is owned by Campbell's, which hasn't announced plans for introducing it on a commercial level.

"The goal of Pure Food Campaign is to turn these two types of products (which are connected to biotechnology), dairy and tomatoes, into the Edsels of the food industry in the 1990s. We're not opposed to natural foods, but those derived from this technology we aim to stop dead in the market."

Should Rifkin and Howard succeed, the amount of BST in milk and meat will not change, but demand for dairy products will decrease.

Success for Rifkin's campaign would also mean more than the \$1 million anticipated budget.

The group's "1-900" telephone number is already in place and charges 99 cents per minute to listen to about 4 minutes of recording of "educational material."

If the group could get a phone call from 10 percent of the 25 million people it intends to "educate"

April 17, they would gross a minimum of \$2.5 million dollars on one minute. They have a several minute message. The overhead cost for the 900 number was not available by presstime.

The estimated U.S. population for 1990 was 248,709,873. Howard said his group represents several thousand people.

However, if one-half of one-percent of all citizens in the United States were to call and listen for one minute, the 900 number would generate more than \$1 million for Pure Food Campaign.

What the caller would get from dialing the 900 Pure Food Campaign number is a recording of the names of businesses objecting to BST in milk or meat.

The businesses that go along with the campaign's desires don't really have anything to lose, since any claims for being BGH-free can't be proven or disproven.

And, if consumers believe they need advice about "What you can do to protect you family against BGH milk and meat," those companies going along with Pure Food Campaign would continue to do perhaps strong business, while other legitimate companies would suffer.

Typically, "900" telephone service is most frequently used as a money making venture by organizations or individuals selling recorded messages or live conversations about sex, adult lifestyles, horoscopes, conversations with music or television soap opera stars, etc.

They are infrequently used by legitimate fund-raising groups, who usually maintain toll-free numbers or at least regular toll-rate telephone numbers.

In fact, of the three carriers — AT&T, MCI, and Sprint — Sprint has stopped selling 900 service lines to any organization that is not strictly a business for business purposes, according to a spokesperson for the company.

According to Robin Pence, spokesperson for Sprint, the rea-

son the company went from being one of the leaders in the 900 business to severely restricting its service is because of the misuses which occurred even when strict guidelines were set.

MCI handles the 900 number for Pure Food Campaign.

Howard said he couldn't guess what kind of caller response he would get from distributing leaflets containing the message of fear and distrust of BST. He denied that it was set up for money making per se.

"We would like this to be a million dollar campaign. Since we only have a couple of staff, we're not putting money into staffing."

"Five thousand people in the food industry have joined. We're sending them materials, stickers, decals . . . we have a drive going on right now at about 600 food outlets, both small conventional stores and natural food stores. Our target is to have well over 100,000 consumers sign pledge forms for a boycott and then mail them out, and if they want to make a voluntary contribution . . ."

But the campaign has more in its reported plans.

According to Howard, if the FDA actually approves Monsanto Company's variety of injectable BST for commercial use, the Pure Food Campaign will immediately start advertising their words of caution about dairy food safety to consumers.

"We haven't finalized that yet," Howard said of the newspaper ad. However he said it would probably be advertised in the New York Times, the L.A. Times, and the Chicago Tribune.

Also he said they plan to make public service announcements about the dangers of BST in milk and meat and try to have them receive free air time.

The proposed newspaper ad also requests money — a minimum of \$2 for handling and mailing a list of "BGH-free companies and stores, so I can protect my family," or a tax deductible donation of any amount.

Experts Give Advice At Northeast Dairy Conference

CORNING, N.Y. — The farms that will survive to the year 2000 "will not only have good farmers but have good managers as well," an ag economics professor said at the Northeast Dairy Conference, held this in Corning, N.Y.

Robert Yonkers, an associate professor at Penn State University, noted that dairy farming in the Northeast had decreased by more than 50 percent over the last ten years while milk production had increased.

And family farms that sold out, he said, did so mainly because farmers preferred to work in the field or milk the cows rather than work on the books. Yonkers equated it to a McDonald franchise owner who would rather flip hamburgers and salt fries, than take care of the books and manage the operation.

"To strive in the dairy industry today and in the future, farmers are going to have to become better managers, implementing better farming strategies to bring production up in the Northeast," he said.

Yonkers went on to say that although New York, Pennsylvania and Vermont are the strongest dairy producing states in the Northeast, they still fall short of states in the western U.S. "However, Northeast productivity is within striking distance of the national leaders."

The tools are here; it's how "we use them" to help the Northeast compete. Yonkers listed several factors that can have a positive impact on northeast farmers: technology - not only the ability but the willingness to see if it fits in the farm operation; marketing to the public; leadership, with a membership supporting and backing the leaders they've chosen. These strategies combined with strong management are what will see Northeast dairy farmers to the year 2000, he said.

AG COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

The dairy industry should not cave in to scare tactics by groups opposing technological advances in agriculture, New York Agriculture and Markets Commissioner Richard McGuire told the 165 farmers and dairy officials at the conference.

McGuire commented on biotechnology and in particular, bovine somatotropin (bST), which is being considered for approval by the Food and Drug Administration.

"The people that scare the public are the same people that are opposed to pesticide use, genetic engineering and technological advances," McGuire said.

Referring to special interest groups with an anti-farm agenda, he asked: "Where do they stop?"

How far will they go? Where do they draw the line?"

He encouraged the dairy leaders to make sound decisions and "not to accommodate their point of view because they scare you into it."

McGuire also noted that "international marketing is the one issue that has universal appeal and universal necessity." With the world population doubling in the next 40 years, food will be a priority, he said, noting: "They will buy food products before technology."

He added, "If the dairy industry takes advantage of international marketing, not only will the pressure be relieved from the government to eliminate surplus products, but the farmers will experience both humanitarian and economical benefits."

McGuire also commented on environmental issues. "In a world of controllable and uncontrollable problems," he said, "every farm situation is different and must be handled differently." He encouraged farmers to be conscientious stewards of the land in order to stem any unnecessary attacks or overreaction by environmentalists.

DAIRY MANUFACTURERS CHANGE TO COMPETE

With domestic consumption of dairy products growing slowly, competitive pressures are driving

manufacturers to use technologies to increase productivity and value, and to look at larger scale production to reduce costs.

Larry Jensen, senior vice president of Denver-based Leprino Foods, discussed the structural changes taking place in the dairy manufacturing sector.

He said, for example, that Leprino, which operates a cheese plant in New York's Southern Tier in Waverly, is looking at things like building plants that can absorb 3 million pounds of milk a day instead of 2 million pounds in order to reduce costs in an increasingly competitive Italian cheese market. Leprino is also using and developing technological advances to improve the manufacturing process and better serve customers like Pizza Hut and other leading restaurants.

Jensen said that adopting an attitude of change was imperative for the industry. The industry needed "to find ways to make decisions and react to issues more promptly," he said, and to change if need be, as it faces shifts in consumer diet trends and new environmental and food safety regulations.

Jensen asked Northeast farmers to remember that they are part of a national market, and that proces-