Livestock Notes

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safety: "Even the best production and processing practices do not eliminate these organisms from raw meat."

In the executive summary of its new report, USDA said, "The use of cooking procedures, together with sanitary handling, proper refrigeration or freezing, and strict separation of cooked products form raw products from the time of cooking until the product is packaged for sale provided a high degree of confidence that the product is safe."

Pork Residues Low
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Results of a study supported by the National Live Stock and Meat Board have bolstered earlier evidence that U.S. pork is safe from chemical residues. Researchers sampled ham and pork sausage collected from supermarkets in three geographical regions, and subcutaneous adipose tissue from pork carcasses in slaughter plants representing 16 states. Samples were tested for 29 different chlorinated hydrocarbons, organophosphate pesticides and their metabolites.

Adipose tissue samples from pork carcasses, tested over a six-month period to ensure absence of seasonal variations, showed no pesticide residue greater than the 0.05 ppm detection threshold. None of the ham contained detectable levels of organophosphates (greater than 0.003 ppm) or chlorinated hydrocarbons (greater than 0.02 ppm). Six of the 27 sausage samples contained trace amounts of organophosphates, but these levels of chemical residue were well below tolerances set by the FDA. No samples contained tranquilizer or drug residues at the 1 part per billion detection threshold.

These results agree with test results of the National Residue Program by the Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) of the USDA, which found zero violative levels of either chlorinated hydrocarbons or organophosphates in the 740 market hogs sampled.

Recommended Beef Grading Changes
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TWO MAJOR REVISIONS ARE REQUESTED:

1. Reduce all "B" maturity carcasses with "Slight" and "Small" degrees of marbling to the "Standard" grade.
2. Implement yield-grade changes to separate the Y2 and Y3 grades into two grades each, and combine the Y4 and Y5 grades.

Current Grading
YG1 = 8.6%
Proposed Grading
YG1 = 8.6%
• • • • • • • • •
Current Grading
YG2 = 40.9%
Proposed Grading
YG2A = 16.0%; YG2B = 24.9%
• • • • • • • • •
Current Grading
YG3 = 39.9%
Proposed Grading
YG3A = 24.4%, YG3B = 15.5%
• • • • • • • • •
Current Grading
YG4 = 9.6%, combined with Y G5 = 1.0%
Proposed Grading
YG4+ = 10.6%

The National Cattlemen's Association (NCA) recently passed a resolution to request changes in USDA beef grading standards, as reflected in the table to the left. Changing the quality grading standards will require a rule change by the USDA, including publication of the change in the Federal Register followed by a comment period. The proposed changes could be more through a specification rather than a grade change. This would allow the proposal to be adopted faster and without a hearing and review process.

The maturity grade "B" is the physiological designation for carcasses of cattle from 30 to 42 months of chronological age. Variability in tenderness is the primary problem with inconsistency in all quality grades of beef, and the current grading system does not adequately measure this variability. Research data demonstrate that carcasses of "B" maturity, which are currently eligible for the "Choice" and "Select" grades, are more variable in tenderness than are "A" maturity carcasses of the same grade.

This change will not affect a large number of carcasses in the current supply, but will discourage the industry from marketing older maturity cattle as "Choice" or "Select." Most of the cattle currently in this category are the "heiferettes," or first-calf heifers, which are weaned early and placed on feed, or cattle which have been *backgrounded* on forage.

Packers have begun to question the relevance of the maturity scores to the actual age of the cattle. Some have complained that loads of young cattle are sometimes grading as "C" maturity (over 42 months of age) when it is known they are less than 20 months. One such experience occurred when a purebred heifer that was slaughtered was "C" maturity, yet less than 24 months of age. This raises the question, that there may be nutritional or physiological factors which dramatically accelerate the ossification process.

While such observations may be aberrations, they point out the subjective nature of quality grading. In my travels through beef plants across the country, the most subjective and variable designation is the estimation of maturity. Graders tend to be tougher on maturity in plants here in the East, especially those with a significant cow slaughter. The graders are expecting cows and tend to be less lenient than on similar carcasses at an all-steer plant. I guess we have to accept that as the human factor.

Does that grading change affect one area or type of cattle more than another? I don't think anyone knows the answer to that yet.

The NCA Task Force found yield grading to be an accurate and adequate method of identifying differences in cutability. However, as the industry moves toward closely trimmed boxed beef, and cutability receives greater emphasis for cattle, the current yield grades are viewed as too broad to allow for effective evaluation.

The proposal calls for Y2 to be split into two grades; 2A, from 2.0 to 2.49, and 2B from 2.50 to 2.99. Yield Grade 3 would be similarly split; 3A from 3.0 to 3.49, and 3B from 3.50 to 3.99. Yield Grade 5 would be dropped, and Yield Grade 4 would be open-ended. The current and proposed yield grade distributions are shown in the table to the left.

The NCA Task Force also recommends that very high industry priority be given to the development and application of an instrument grading procedure that rapidly measures tenderness at typical chain speeds in modern packing plants.

Call For Irradiation
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U.S. Senator Slade Gorton (R-WA) sent a letter to Agriculture Secretary Mike Espy calling on USDA to expedite a petition to the Food and Drug Administration for approval of irradiation for beef.

"I believe that irradiation, if approved for beef, will provide an important tool in the reform of our nation's food safety system," Gorton told Espy.

Gorton's letter followed the death last month of a three-year-old boy who contracted hemolytic uremic syndrome after he consumed E. coli O157:H7, presumably from a hamburger he had eaten.

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