Lean Finely Textured Beef

Several news stories are circulating about Lean Finely Textured Beef (LFTB or “Pink Slime”) in ground beef products sold in stores and served in school cafeterias. School food service directors may receive questions from parents about whether LFTB is in the ground beef served in their schools. Manufacturers are not required to list LFTB as an ingredient, so SN Professionals must contact their manufacturer to respond to questions about specific food products served. USDA has indicated in the response below that LFTB is present in some of the ground beef purchased for USDA Foods.

Below are some talking points to assist SN professionals in responding to questions about LFTB:

- Just like any parent buying food at a grocery store or a restaurant, schools rely on the federal government to inspect and certify the safety of the foods they purchase.
- The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), after consultation with the Food and Drug Administration, has determined that the use of ammonium hydroxide in the processing of LFTB is safe. Beef containing LFTB must meet federal food safety requirements and undergo food safety inspections.
- Industry experts have estimated that about 70 percent of the ground beef sold in grocery stores, restaurants and food service establishments contain LFTB; however, manufacturers are not required to label a product as containing LFTB.
- For information on LFTB, please visit: http://www.meatami.com/ht/display/ReleaseDetails/i/76164

USDA RESPONSE
The National School Lunch Program (NSLP), administered by the USDA, purchases approximately 20 percent of the products served in schools across the country. In other words, the majority, approximately 80 percent, is purchased by schools or school districts directly through private vendors and not USDA. In its role as the purchasing agent, to quantify how much of a particular product purchased by USDA is served in specific school districts or specific schools is difficult to measure and depends upon a case by case or even school-by-school basis. Procurement officials for schools may have this information.

Since the early 1990s, Lean Finely Textured Beef (LFTB) has been allowed as a component of the ground beef purchased by USDA for distribution through the NSLP. The maximum allowable percentage of LFTB that may be formulated into single servings of the ground beef purchased for the NSLP is 15 percent, which is similar to the composition found in many commercially available ground beef products. USDA does not purchase LFTB directly. Rather, LFTB may be used as a raw material in USDA-purchased ground beef products after it undergoes stringent testing. Of the ground beef purchased by USDA in 2011 for the NSLP, LFTB comprised approximately 6.5 percent of the total volume.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration as well as the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) considers ammonium hydroxide as “generally recognized as safe.” FSIS reviewed the suitability of Beef Products, Inc.’s (BPI) use of ammonium hydroxide in order to assess its effectiveness in performing the intended technical purpose of use, at the lowest level necessary, and to ensure that the product is not adulterated or misleading to consumers.
All USDA beef purchases for the NSLP and other Federal food and nutrition assistance programs meet very high food safety standards, which include stringent pathogen testing. Beef supplied by BPI as a component of the beef products purchased by USDA for the NSLP is subject to the same strict pathogen testing requirements for beef raw ingredients.

Additional information on this product or product specific inquiries should be directed to BPI at http://www.beefproducts.com/.