

Position
Natural Meat Issue
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I have a lifetime experience in the livestock industry and for the last 21 years have served as Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Maverick Ranch Natural Meats which markets six species of natural meats. Fifteen years ago, we founded Guarantek Analytical Laboratories which does nutritional, biological, and residue testing of meats, in addition to research. Included in my work has been over 10,000 supermarket visits. Our company receives from 5 to 30 comments per day. As a result of this experience, I have several observations and comments.

While the USDA has followed a processing term for Natural (i.e. minimally processed, no artificial ingredients), the consumers we have had contact with believe and expect that “Natural” includes livestock production claims or residue testing claims.

Surveys by FMI show that consumer concerns for safety are as follows:

Bacteria: 25% - some risk
58% - serious risk
83% Total

Pesticides: 33% - some risk
47% - serious risk
80% Total

Antibiotics & Hormones: 30% - some risk
29% - serious risk
59% Total

Additives & Preservatives: 33% - some risk
11% - serious risk
44% Concerned

In looking at these numbers, it is easy to see that Bacteria is the Number One concern, closely followed by Pesticides. Significantly less people are concerned about Hormone and Antibiotic issues than Pesticide use. Last are processing features additives and preservatives currently addressed in the Natural definition.

MY POSITION

I believe that there are currently two programs that consumers can choose that address the issue of Pesticides (many of which are estrogenic in nature and are in fact endocrine interruptors that mimic, block, or add to natural hormone production). The National Organic Program addresses pesticides and an AMS process verification program for residue testing of 18 pesticides is the second program. The NOP program also addresses the use of Antibiotics and added hormones. However, the NOP is still in its infancy as far as the number of participants.

This leaves a clear need for a “natural” program that includes the two easiest animal production practices. These are:

- raising livestock without antibiotics and
- raising livestock without added hormones.

The antibiotic resistance issue has some scientific validity to reduce antibiotic consumption by livestock in the hope that antibiotic resistance will be lowered. However, there has never been scientific validity that added hormones leave a detectable residue. In fact, Federal regulations do not permit approval of hormones that have an impact on natural hormones.

Nevertheless, I am opposed to the used of added hormones and believe a “no hormones added” claim should be included in a natural definition. My reasons are economic. There is scientific evidence that the use of added hormones in cattle reduces marbling about one marbling score and also decreases tenderness. These facts were presented by CSU research to the NCBA grading committee at a meeting that I attended. I believe that the net cost to the industry of hormone implants by producing surplus pounds and decreased quality is in the billions of dollars per year.

The United States has been effectively blocked from exporting beef to Europe for about three decades. I believe beef can be exported to Europe if we had a strong USDA program (similar to the NOP program) that has 3rd-party certification with no added hormones allowed. This label would more easily allow U.S. beef producers to participate in the developing global market.

I recently visited Uruguay and found some cuts of Uruguayan grass-fed beef selling at higher prices than similar cuts of U.S. grain-fed beef. This was due to Uruguay passing a national law that banned hormone implants. This law increased Uruguay beef exports (most production is exported) by 13%.

Summary: I believe that a Natural definition should include animal production claims of “no antibiotics and no added hormones were used in the raising of these animals.” In addition, I favor 3rd party inspection with a program similar to the National Organic Program.